Preparing Writing Studies Graduate Students within Authentic WAC-Contexts: A Research Methods Course and WAC Program Review Crossover Project as a Critical Site of Situated Learning

MICHELLE LAFRANCE AND ALISA RUSSELL

> What is important in the professional worlds we inhabit, and what new directions might curriculum development facilitate to better prepare students?
>
> —Joan Mullen

As we were composing this essay, the conveners of the Writing Across the Curriculum Graduate Organization (WAC-GO) released the results of their spring 2017 survey, which sought to capture the primary experiences, needs, and concerns of their fledgling membership. "What challenges do you face as a graduate student interested in and/or involved in WAC/WID work?" this survey asked. Just over half of the respondents (11 of 20) noted that their graduate program does not offer coursework on WAC/WID scholarship or administration. Additionally, 9 of 20 responded that they did not know "how to find or cultivate mentoring relationships in WAC/WID work" (WAC-GO, 2017). Despite this survey's limited sample size (a reflection of WAC-GO's early-stage membership), we believe these findings highlight a crucial, but little held, conversation in WAC/WID scholarship and research. In what ways are we preparing future writing studies leaders within authentic WAC-related contexts? And how might these authentic WAC-related contexts prepare future writing studies leaders to carry out their varied work?

As WAC professionals, we know the benefits of exposing students across educational levels to the highly situated contexts of writing outside of English. In fact, the field of WAC/WID has itself rested on the foundational assumption that it is difficult to understand the divergent ideals held about writing *writ large* without experiencing those differing (and occasionally competing) values, vocabularies, and practices first hand. Despite several decades of recognition in writing studies research that writing is a highly situated and rhetorical practice that is shaped relationally within communities of practice, graduate-level training in pedagogy, research methods, and the

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rhetorical theories of writing still largely take place within the comfortable confines of programs that are firmly embedded within English departments. And, many of these locations still largely traffic in generalist notions of writing. To introduce PhD students to the actualities of cross-curricular writing contexts—emphasizing an understanding of writers, writing, and writing instruction that characterizes scholarly and programmatic approaches to WAC but is often missing from studies of rhetoric, composition, and writing program administration—Michelle designed a crossover project that coupled a required PhD-level research methods course and an ongoing program review in a long-standing WAC program at George Mason University.[1]

This collaboration between the PhD research methods course and a WAC program found its footing by what television personality Bob Ross would call "a happy accident": under new directorship, the Mason WAC program[2] had undertaken a multi-year process of writing-intensive (WI) course review to examine the ways these courses were carrying out the criteria established by the Faculty Senate's WAC Committee. We named this effort the RE/View Project (RE/V). Here, Michelle faced a dilemma not uncommon to the directors of large, decentralized programs: with 86 WI courses in majors across colleges and no fewer than 125 faculty across ranks, the size and variety of the program posed a challenge for conducting comprehensive research of the WI courses. The PhD research methods course, English 702: Research Methods in Writing and Rhetoric, offered a pragmatic and dynamic opportunity. Inviting the nine PhD students enrolled in the course as full collaborators into the RE/V project meant we could extend the reach of the WAC program staff. The program would have the benefit of fresh energies and insights, as well. To assist with the coordination of the project's multiple pieces, Michelle invited graduate student, co-author Alisa, to support and assist with the design and implementation of this project.[3]

Ultimately, this collaboration revealed the importance of first-hand exposure to WAC research that we believe cannot be replicated by reading WAC scholarship or studying the structures of WAC programs and intitaitves from afar. As we observed, questioned, and interviewed the graduate students in the research methods course, we found that, for most of these students, involvement in the integrated processes of the class resulted in rich, and indeed "real world," learning and professional development experiences. It is one thing to learn from a research article or conversation in a writing studies seminar that writing is a highly situated and flexible response within communities of practice; it is quite another to see first-hand the messiness—and the many slippages between—definitions of writing that occur across faculty interviews, to witness the differences in pedagogical knowledge and application across different institutional and material contexts, to encounter the constraints upon non-English faculty who teach writing, or to observe those faculty surface their otherwise tacit and nuanced expertise as teachers of writing.

In this article, then, we wish to open a conversation about how and why we should support exposure to WAC contexts as a central component of graduate preparation in writing studies. We do so by describing the recursive and overlapping components of our crossover project, analyzing the course projects and reflective writing of students in our PhD seminar, and presenting the results of surveys and interviews with these graduate students. To be sure, our sample size (limited to the 9 students enrolled in the research methods course) and our data-collection activities (geared toward the reflexive learning moments about students' experiences) are too limited for us to be able to claim this crossover course as a definitive model for graduate student learning in WAC. However, the data we uncovered compel us to argue for the benefits of exposure to authentic cross-curricular writing contexts for graduate students in writing studies. We hope our exploration of this crossover project between a research methods course and a WAC program review (as one possible example) will encourage further work by others in the field around WAC-focused research and exposure to authentic contexts for graduate students across writing studies.

Toward the Research Methods Course as a Critical Site of Situated Learning

To open up this conversation, we ground our broad concern for the preparation of graduate students in the work of the research methods course—a location that allows us to situate the possibilities of PhD student training at the interstices of established, if distinct, conversations in the field. Many who teach graduate students in writing studies contexts anecdotally understand the good that comes of integrated (or "real world," if you will) learning. E. Shelley Reid (2004) has argued that our teaching and mentoring strategies for new graduate teaching assistants need to introduce students to the "messiness" of the actual contexts they will encounter; she argues we do this when our TA preparation courses provide a model of "undercoverage," a pedagogy that "emphasizes discoveries that lead to long-term learning over immediate competencies" (p. 16). Reid further argues that exposure to "the various institutional pressures . . . we face [that are] built into the systems in which we teach" (p. 18) provides crucial learning opportunities for those just beginning their professional work. Similarly, Rebecca Rickly (2007) observes that encountering the authentic "messiness" of the research process is particularly important for building resilient research practice. Moreover, for Rickly, producing more savvy researchers in the field requires a bit of a pedagogical sea-change in the required research methods curriculum; we must move away from a rote discussion of methods as "static" or "contained" content, instead turning our pedagogical attentions "to the actual practice of conducting empirical research" in the increasingly complex environment of the twenty-first-century institution (p. 2). Both authors make the case that exposure to authentic—and inherently

disorderly—contexts are central to developing the critical capacities new teachers and researchers in the field rely upon. As we thought through how we might use WAC program review activities as the site of a research methods course, we agreed.

Less developed, though, are the professional and scholarly conversations about preparing graduate students for the multifaceted richness of WAC-program work. Some scholarly attention has focused on preparing graduate students to teach first-year composition courses (see, for instance, Estrem and Reid, 2013; Reid, Estrem, and Belcheir, 2012; Pytlik and Ligget, 2002; and Wilhoit, 2002, among others), while a handful of writing program administrators have also argued that explicit attention be paid to preparing graduate students for administrative roles and projects (see Charlton et al., 2011; Elder, Schoen, & Skinnell, 2015; Thomas, 1991; Stolley, 2015; and White, 2002, as some examples). Others, such as Rose and Weiser (1999), have argued that the research know-how of writing program administrators is a central component of effective administrative and intellectual work within a program.

Meanwhile, WAC scholars have tended to turn their research eye toward support for graduate students as writers within disciplinary and/or professional contexts (Casanave and Li, 2008; and Micciche and Carr, 2011; Mullen, 1999; Swales and Feak, 2004, among others) and/or preparing graduate students in the disciplines to teach writing (see, for instance, Rodrigue, 2012; Rodrigue, 2013; Strenski, 1992; and Winzenried, 2016). These arguments, models, and studies complement the numerous resources available in support of general WAC program development and design. Finally, a very small handful of scholars have discussed the design of the graduate research methods class and preparing graduate students to be effective researchers (Blakeslee and Fleischer, 2007; Nickoson and Sheridan, 2012; Rickly, 2007).

As we have little published research about graduate students encountering WAC-contexts, we turn to one study that does emphasize the impact of this exposure. Cripps, Hall, and Robinson's (2016) findings demonstrate that experience working in a WAC context positions graduate students to "operate in the interstices of the university, where they have an opportunity to observe and to learn what goes on behind the scenes"; the "liminality" of this position offers "a much broader picture, through practical experience, of how academia functions" (para. 6). Significantly, the authors argue, the experience affords these graduate students a stronger understanding of writing as a mode of learning. They write:

> We see from our survey and interviews that one of the primary things that [WAC Fellows] take away from the experience is a commitment to incorporating WAC and writing pedagogies into their teaching. [. . .] Traditional TAships usually remain within the field: a sociology TA teaches sociology, and professional development activities focus directly on teaching sociology. But a [WAC Fellow] whose own field is sociology may work closely with a

> faculty member teaching a writing intensive course in biology and develop materials to help tutors work with students from that course. Our respondents tell us that this experience helps them in their own teaching, but the benefit comes in a broader pedagogical understanding of the relationship between writing and learning, rather than specific approaches to a particular subject matter. (para. 15)

Work as a WAC Fellow, in short, leads to an expanded understanding of the institution, its structures, values, and processes—but also to a more sophisticated understanding of writing and writing instruction.

Cripps, Hall, and Robinson's results, then, provide an initial blueprint for the possibilities of work within WAC contexts, especially as these results emphasize personal experiences in cross-curricular-contexts. Turning toward our own crossover project, we believed the review of WI courses would offer the PhD research methods students plenty of grounded and collaborative practice as a site of learning and reflection, but we also believed it was an opportunity for these graduate students to experience what those who do WAC work already know: that our values, sensibilities, vocabularies, teaching practices, and perceptions of student writers are often far more varied, more unpredictable, than we might suppose. It is often difficult to understand just how varied, how unpredictable, those contexts are until we experience them ourselves via work that carries us across the curricula on our campuses.

The question of how we might approach the pedagogical aspects of the PhD-level methods course was a bit thornier. We turned again to Rickly (2007), one of the few scholars in writing studies who has written about preparing graduate students as researchers, to direct our own efforts at course design. For Rickly, the methods course must offer a sense of (drawing from Law) the complex "entagle[ments]" of the research process and the sites we study, "allowing us to see research not as an ordered, neat, linear procedure, but one that is integrated, messy, and non-hierarchical" (p. 9). She offers six suggestions to guide the development of research methods courses, noting that graduate student researchers benefit from (a) opportunities to use methods already central to the work of the field, (b) coaching/mentoring to critically appraise and read current research, (c) the ability to conduct an actual research project, (d) support for carrying out that research, (e) being asked to critically appraise research sites, and (f) practice rhetorically tailoring chosen research methods to the particular exigencies of a project (p. 21–22). Guided by these suggestions, we approached our Research Methods Course/WAC Program Review crossover project as an opportunity to immerse writing-studies graduate students within an authentic WAC context as a critical site of situated learning.

Integrating a Research Methods Course with a WAC Program Review

Designing this crossover project required, as one might suspect, a great deal of foresight and early planning. Michelle sought to balance the learning opportunities described by Reid and Rickly, particularly the hands-on needs of graduate students as researchers in unfamiliar contexts, with the PhD programs' desire that the course also offer basic familiarity with the broader contexts of research in the field at large. The course design required us to think seriously about how all the moving parts of the collaboration offered a situated introduction to the realities of WAC work, as it subsequently met the needs of the WAC program, its faculty, and administrative audiences. We had to consider what we ourselves wanted to learn, and we also had to ask how the program's exigencies could also become a site of learning for students. The logistics of integrating readings about methodologies with actual *collaborative* research practice required some intentional tradeoffs (discussed below).

The time constraints of the typical semester timeline were rather daunting, as well: often it felt like there was too much to integrate into the class—readings that offered a sense of the larger processes of research project design; specific introductions to different types of methodologies (theoretical/abstract *and* foundational/practical); reading in particular areas of interest (e.g., writing-to-learn, genre across the curriculum, reading across the curriculum, transfer, WAC professional identities, etc.); and setting up a research project—from collecting the data to managing and coding the data to writing up the findings. In anticipation of these time crunches, we began our work on this crossover project a full year before the class rolled out, redeveloping previously established project protocols (including WI faculty surveys and interviews) and recruiting faculty participants. We hoped this early start date would allow us to develop a robust program review process and to anticipate issues that could derail the applied aspects of the PhD research methods course when it began in fall of 2015.[4] Additionally, we asked the PhD-level students to take and complete their CITI training before our first class session together so they could be added to our IRB application beforehand. As the semester began, then, newly certified and ready-to-go as learners and research assistants, each graduate student was invited into the ongoing RE/V Project as a full collaborator. All of these pre-course measures allowed us to recursively engineer the class environment and the RE/V project's protocol to reflect the integrations we sought and to manage the time commitments of effective research.[5]

In light of these points of integration, Michelle designed the syllabus to unfold around four recursive and overlapping frames: Methods and Frameworks (Mixed-Methods Research), Collaborative Data Collection (Qualitative/Quantitative), Comparative WAC/WID Contexts, and Data Analysis/Writing Up Research. Each frame offered introductions to key elements of writing studies research practice, the

nuts and bolts of the project itself, and the messy contexts of WAC/WID work. We treat each of these frames below to demonstrate how we integrated these components toward our vision of offering authentic WAC contexts as a critical site of situated learning.

Methods and Frameworks (Mixed-Methods Research)

Anecdotally, we had gleaned that graduate students who had taken research methods courses often felt "bogged down" with the set-up, IRB approval processes, and recruitment of participants. These conversations revealed that students often did get their own "pilot" projects off the ground, but were frequently stymied with recruiting issues, unanticipated problems in data collection, and difficulties with data management. Pulling off a full project start to finish in a single semester was simply daunting and quite difficult. Because of these conversations, Michelle posited that it was important for graduate students to be simultaneously reading about research methodologies and engaged in hands-on practice. Moreover, it seemed important that graduate students be supported in understanding the practical realities of completing a research project. As such, methods (how to's) began to take precedence over methodologies (the frames for research practice) in the course design.

We knew we needed to ask students to begin data collection as early in the semester as possible. But before beginning work on data collection, students did need to be familiar with the overall process of designing a research project (from initial project proposal to data collection activities) and the writing up of data and findings. We also knew we would be remiss if we did not introduce students to the handful of historical debates characterizing conversations about research in writing studies, from how methodologies reflect key epistemologies and/or paradigms, to what counts as data, to the values that particular types of methodologies/methods accrue. We complemented these more theoretical readings with how-to readings that foregrounded the practicalities of conducting research; these readings touched on the foundational issues of project design, but also highlighted issues of ethics and consent, the practicalities of managing and coding data, and finally, strategies for writing up research findings.[6]

Collaborative Data Collection (Quantitative/Qualitative)

To provide the situated and personal context for their learning, graduate students were asked to conduct and transcribe two interviews with WI faculty. They then observed and took extensive notes on two different WI courses. Once the data-files were cleaned of any identifying information, they were collected and stored on a shared drive so that all graduate students would have equal access to the range of data that had been collected. Survey responses, syllabi, and other course documents that had been collected via the WAC program's efforts were also made anonymous

and posted in the same drive. Quantitative data, such as "Drop, Fail, and Withdrawal Rates," enrollment figures, and other public forms of institutional and assessment data were identified and collated for use by students in the class should they choose. These multiple points of data provided the opportunity for triangulation and accumulative understandings of interview responses and observation notes—offering further context for the broader understandings of writing we hoped graduate students would develop.

Comparative WAC/WID Contexts

As full collaborators in this WAC-program review, graduate students also forayed into the literatures of WAC pedagogy and program administration to develop their own WAC-related research interests and questions by focusing on at least two of the collaboratively collected data sets described above. The diverse lines of inquiry the graduate students chose reveal how WAC-contexts allow for varied interests across writing studies, especially since most students were able to pursue research interests they already had coming into the course. Some of these interests included low stakes writing, the prevalence of teaching for audience, what genres students were being asked to write in, and how technology appeared to be integrated into courses. Once these lines of inquiry were chosen, graduate students were asked to revise one aspect of the program review protocol to better reflect that focus. Some students chose to create a new interview question for the scripts; others revised or reframed an existing question on the protocol; others yet developed new processes of data collection, such as observations and a rubric-like analysis of the WI syllabi. Some students also sought additional forms of institutional data that could be collected from other offices and resources on campus.

Data Analysis and Writing Up Research: The WAC Committee Memo

The research methods course culminated in three writing assignments centered around each graduate students' individual line of inquiry: a literature review, a final essay targeted to one of the field's major journals, and a "memo" to the faculty senate's WAC committee. These writing assignments brought together the full experience of the semester—reading in methods and methodologies, reading the literature of the field, collecting and analyzing data, and thinking like a program stakeholder. Each writing project asked students to share the insights they had gleaned from their analysis of the collaboratively-collected data by framing their findings via ongoing pedagogical and programmatic conversations central to the field of writing studies.

The memo to the faculty senate's WAC committee proved to be one of the more challenging and generative learning opportunities of the semester, suggesting that the processes of drafting these memos may reveal the critical learning that comes of

encounters with authentic WAC contexts. Importantly, the memo assignment asked students to think like WAC-program leaders who drew from their research to advocate for WAC-program policy, making a case for this change in no more than three pages and addressing those changes to the body of faculty who oversee WI courses on Mason's campus. Seasoned program leaders will immediately recognize the daunting nature of these administrative balancing acts: contextualizing research findings in relation to a pedagogical conversation in the field *and* rhetorically framing a "policy request" within the conventions of a persuasive appeal is not an easy writing situation. We dare to assume that very few PhD students write extensively as program leaders, a standpoint that requires we pay close attention to the situated nature of a research context, align our arguments with our institutional knowledge, maintain a professional and non-threatening register, and present the complexities of writing, writing pedagogy, and the needs of student writers in succinct, direct, and compelling ways to an audience with (perhaps) a different relationship to those topics and their complexities.

Indeed, students did initially struggle with this balance and synthesis. The necessary brevity of the memo provided one element of difficulty; the memo needed to summarize the research exigencies of each project, including the research question, the project's data collection methods, and the stakes for writing instructors and students alike. The assignment also required that students include a brief pedagogical background culled from the published literature of the field (particularly best teaching practices), a short description of their project's findings, and a graphical representation of those findings (chart, table, or image). Writing persuasive and rhetorically-savvy policy recommendations proved an additional challenge for many in the class, especially those who were dismayed by their findings or who enthusiastically wanted to encourage attention to pedagogical principles they considered crucial to effective writing instruction.

These challenges in drafting the memos were perhaps one of the more significant learning moments to come of the Research Methods Course/WAC Program Review crossover project, as well as an important detail in our conversation about introducing graduate students to authentic WAC contexts. Many students in the class appeared a bit taken aback by *how little the conversations central to teaching writing in their familiar contexts (composition and/or English studies) had permeated the disciplinary and departmental contexts of the WI courses*. While these realizations were powerful and re-orienting for the graduate students in our class, the memo required that students take on a tone that did not reveal such investments. For example, one student's study that "explored how WI faculty built audience awareness into their classes and assignments," found that, despite the pedagogical gains offered by asking students to write to "wider, public, or disciplinary-specific audience," instructors of the majority of WI

courses served as the primary audience for student writers (Jensen, 2016). Another report on "The Prevalence of Low Stakes Writing and Writing-to-Learn Activities in WI Courses" commented upon the ways in which "WI faculty who did not assign any low stakes writing in class were also the WI faculty who gave the most negative responses to the questions" (Lussos, 2016). Finally, a third author noted that, despite the strong statements of support for teaching and learning writing in digital environments from NCTE and our campus leadership more generally, faculty were often still uncertain about how they might integrate technology into their writing classes; moreover, the availability of up-to-date technologies in campus classrooms was a cause for concern, especially in light of the pervasive need to help students understand writing in digital contexts (McGregor, 2015).

As drafts moved through stages of revision, their authors were required to adapt their thinking, to modify their rhetorical stances, to shift the tone of their language, and to argue from more practically grounded positions. Ultimately, these graduate students had to viscerally confront what should be happening in writing courses: how to be most effective when dealing with other real people who have different ideas about writing and how it should be taught; how to speak as a knowing stakeholder who is invested in creating a sense of shared community; how to advocate for best practices; how to recognize the constraints upon faculty teaching writing in the disciplines. A "short" memo assignment at the end of the semester, then, presented the opportunity to develop crucial and more authentically-grounded rhetorical acumen—a synthesis of what they were learning about working effectively with others in "messy" WAC contexts.

In the end, of the total nine final memos to the WAC committee (and related projects) submitted, four were chosen to be presented to the WAC committee the following fall. Projects were selected based upon the potential of their research findings to be interesting and persuasive to audiences outside of writing studies and for how findings demonstrated elements of the WI course criteria and foundational WAC pedagogy in action. (Topics included: low-stakes writing, the prevalence of teaching for audience, what genres students were being asked to write in, and how technology appeared to be integrated into courses.) The graduate students who composed each memo gave a short presentation of their findings to the WAC committee and answered questions about their research. Following this meeting with the committee, Michelle worked with each author to revise the memos into program white papers and posted the revised drafts to the program's web page (which can be found at http://wac.gmu.edu/past-assessment-and-program-review-resources/). A fifth report on what and how students were asked to read in WI courses became the genesis for a additional study directed by program staff. In all—because of the emphasis on presenting persuasive arguments about core WAC pedagogies, with attention to what

was already happening in WI courses and what was not—these memos and subsequent projects provided a rich and critical site of situated learning for these graduate students.

The Graduate Student Experience within Authentic WAC-Contexts

As with most experiments, we wanted to know what worked well, where our students found value in the collaborations and integrated moves we designed, and where, perhaps, we might have tried to do too much. To understand the graduate student experience in this Research Methods Course/WAC Program Review crossover project, we administered two anonymous surveys and conducted follow-up interviews via email to gain a better understanding of how graduate students saw the course functioning within their own scholarly development as researchers. We were also quite curious: Had the authentic contexts of the course influenced their thinking about work in WAC or other aspects of writing and writing instruction? We conducted the first survey (Survey 1; see Appendix A) as the semester's work in the Research Methods course came to a close, fall 2015. A follow-up survey (Survey 2; see Appendix B), to understand the longer-term impacts of student expereinces, was rolled out at the end of the following semester, spring 2016. A full year later, spring 2017, we conducted email interviews with three of our original nine graduate students.

As noted earlier, our data-gathering on student experiences is limited. After all, only nine students took the Research Methods course (this is typical enrollment for a course in our PhD program) and were thus available to survey and interview (making for a very low "sample" size in traditional qualitative research). Six of the nine graduate students responded to both surveys to share their experiences and thoughts on the course with us. Since our surveys were initially designed as a tool to inform the next iteration of the course, our protocol was not designed to account for those students who would simply choose to ignore our questions, and only three consented to be interviewed a year later. The low response rate was a real surprise for us. We must continue our conversation here with a question mark in place of the answers those students may have provided. Did they dislike working in WAC contexts? Did they dislike the course itself? Were they simply too busy to respond to our questions? Were they—like many of us involved in programs and communities—simply suffering from "survey fatigue?" We offer the absence of their voices as another piece of the puzzle that members of our field must begin to unpack should we want to understand how we may more effectively serve those who will pass through our graduate programs.

Overall, our six respondents did note, with some important caveats, that the authentic contexts of this crossover project enhanced their learning in ways that we feel are significant to share. We especially recognized three main benefits from their survey and interview answers: First, graduate students noted encountering (often for

the first time) instructional values and sensibilities about writing outside of English, values that reflected quite different institutional contexts and cultures of writing than they may have supposed. Second, these encounters encouraged our students to think more broadly about writing studies pedagogies, especially how composition courses might better prepare undergraduate writers to move more freely across the curriculum; this often made a difference to how these graduate students conceived of and taught their own composition classes. Third, our students began to understand the quite specific rhetorical exigencies (local issues, situated audiences, and material concerns) that drive and give shape to effective research projects on sites of writing, especially those in WAC contexts. Overall, we believe these benefits contributed to graduate students' facility with writing research contexts and supported their development as writing studies leaders on many fronts; moreover, we are encouraged by the extent to which even students who were not intending to become WAC scholars identified the WAC contexts as a key element in their learning about research methods in writing studies.

Experiencing Campus Cultures of Writing Outside of English

Survey responses suggested that the graduate students' encounters with faculty and courses outside of English introduced them to previously unfamiliar campus cultures of writing, and these encounters highlighted the differences and complexities of these cultures. As one student wrote, "Loved the glimpses into writing that happens in other disciplines, and perceptions, attitudes." We find this short response significant, as it suggests a new awareness of the disciplinary differences that WAC professionals take for granted. Similarly, another student responded, "[I realized] the challenges a WAC program head faces when working with a variety of faculty (personalities, disciplines, experience, etc)."

Graduate students also commented on the challenges that faculty members outside of English face, a key understanding that we believe comes from the immersive WAC contexts the course offered. For example, in Survey 2, we asked, "Of the following 'learning moments' [concerning WAC] offered in our initial survey, which of the following remain significant examples of your learning in 702?" Table 1 shows the respondents mostly identified "the challenges instructors outside of English face when they include writing in their courses" and "the challenges and opportunities WAC programs face" respectively.

Table 1

Significant "learning moments" about WAC work one semester later

Significant "learning moments" about WAC work one semester later	**Graduate Student Respondents (n=9)**
The challenges instructors outside of English face when they include writing in their courses	6
The challenges and opportunities WAC programs face	5
What it means to have a WAC program on campus	4
Opportunities for and challenges in providing professional development to faculty who teach writing outside of English	4
The perceptions and attitudes of people outside of English	3
What it means to study WAC contexts	3
What it means to design courses to support student writers	3
What it means to direct a WAC program	2
What it means to be a student in writing courses outside of English	2

One respondent summed up their realizations about the situated nature of writing, the challenges of WAC-program contexts, and the institutional realities of campus cultures outside of English, by sharing:

> Writing really does mean different things to different disciplinary instructors. It's tough to characterize WAC other than to say that students engage in writing as a practice and create writing as a product. However, WI faculty almost universally believe that students should focus on writing and that the university should teach their students to write. That's a pretty powerful space for conversations about what writing is and might be in the disciplines and across the university. But, I'm not sure what can come from such conversations without some institutional support from administration. I can see why WAC is such a challenge, even though it seems to be an intuitively good idea to make sure that writing and writing instruction continues throughout undergraduate education.

Graduate student respondents also confided that their learning experiences changed how they interacted with colleagues outside of English; as one student explained, "I've begun to seek opportunities to talk to other disciplines about reading and writing." And, another student replied more specifically, "It's definitely made me want to interrogate [faculty in the disciplines] more about what they mean by 'bad writing,' how much they know about the WAC program, etc." Conducting authentic research in a WAC context made the concept of *pedagogical conversations across disciplines* real for and important to these students. Moreover, many respondents even noted the importance of research in conversations about WAC-program leadership: "Having a robust data set and research story to tell about the current landscape and needs is an important step in advocating for the importance of the program."

Thinking More Broadly About Writing Pedagogies

Survey responses also suggest that the Research Methods Course/WAC Program Review crossover project helped graduate students think more broadly about writing pedagogy and to reflexively shape their own teaching practices. For example, 5 student respondents in Survey 2 noted changing their own composition classes based on exposure to WAC contexts. One respondent shared: "I will be thinking more about how to tie in reading and writing and to ensure that students begin to see both as situated practices." Another noted, "I took the lessons that I learned about low-stakes writing in my own project and lessons about language acquisition and reading in my peers' projects and applied them to my teaching approach." Even more than reflecting on their own writing pedagogies, the 702 students also began to see the possibilities of writing pedagogies across the curriculum. One respondent confided:

> [My main takeaway from this project is] how important it is to examine the writing that is happening across the curriculum and what is being asked of students. Without that knowledge and view of the writing landscape, the way we teach writing and prepare students risks being disjointed, and even, at times, contradictory.

Another respondent similarly expressed that understanding the disciplinary writing and writing pedagogies on our campus "infomed[ed] the revision of some of our assignments and curricular goals in the classes [they] oversee." This respondent went on to explain, "In other words, knowing what writing happens at the upper-division levels across the curriculum can help me think through how to build in the necessary rhetorical and linguistic skills in our first-year writing courses." This student has in effect learned the ideals of the vertical curriculum in a way that will then authentically guide their teaching.

Students unanimously agreed that their conversations with faculty in the disciplines increased their knowledge of writing instruction in other disciplines. For example, one respondent noted, "I learned that teaching and learning writing in other disciplines is frequently limited to simply adding writing assignments to a typical course in a discipline. The course itself rarely ever includes lessons on writing." Additionally, these insights into how writing is taught or characterized in other disciplines were usually linked back to the field of WAC and of composition in general. For example, one respondent answered, "[One of the most important things I learned about WAC practices is] where the discussion has been and currently is in composition." This is a powerful realization for those interested in both composition and WAC programs—many of us come to this work from composition, but the contexts and the realities outside of these familiar contexts, as seasoned WAC program leaders know, are often quite different.

Encountering Situated Research Practices

Most importantly, our surveys demonstrate an increased awareness of how research projects unfold—authentically and messily (to recall Reid and Rickly)—in WAC contexts. In Survey 2, when asked, "Of the following 'learning moments' [concerning research processes] offered in our initial survey, which of the following remain significant examples of your learning in 702?" Our respondents indicated increased understandings of the processes and logistics that all program leaders must be ready to account for (Table 2).

Table 2

Significant "learning moments" about research one semester later

Significant "learning moments" about research one semester later	Graduate Student Responses (n=9)
How research can be messy and "iterative"	5
The process of coding	5
How long effective research takes	5
The ethics of research	5
Choosing methods carefully	4
The importance of triangulation of data	4
The nature and importance of protocols	3

Relatedly, graduate students also commented upon how the integrated research context prepared them for future projects, especially dissertation and more autonomous professional research. For example, one respondent noted, "I have begun to have more confidence in my ability to create meaningful and thoughtful projects." Another student observed that this crossover project had given them "a more cohesive picture of what a project should look like," which has increased their interest in "beginning to create [their] dissertation project." These responses reveal how these authentic WAC contexts influenced students' understandings of conducting research on a pragmatic level—organizing, posing and revising research questions, and grounding research questions within the work of a dyamic field *and* the slippery nature of all sites of writing. As they encountered the real world unpredictablities of research, graduate students' understanding of the resilience necessary to carry out effective research and work within the authentic contexts of the university deepened.

Follow-up interview responses lead us to conclude that exposure to authentic WAC contexts can have a meaningful impact upon the teaching and institutional savvy of graduate students. These experiences can also prepare them to use research as a listening tool to inform work with writing and writing instruction in multiple contexts. One respondent, for instance, noted:

> As a writing teacher, it was interesting to learn (through the WI faculty interviews) what aspects of teaching writing they influenced based on their perceived needs of students. These needs were sometimes at odds with my perceived needs of first year composition students. This is not to say that WI faculty were misidentifying these needs; on the contrary, they opened my eyes to things that I sometimes overlook or take for granted. This reminds me that the writing experiences of WI faculty are important for faculty who teach in more familiar contexts (composition, writing centers, etc.) need to hear as well. We can all learn from each other.

Another respondent spoke to one of the biggest hurdles we face within WAC progam work, particularly faculty development:

> I've also realized that most professors don't need to be convinced of writing's importance to the learning process and for entering disciplinary ways of knowing/doing: they don't have to have all the writing theory to understand how important it is that their students learn to write in the discipline. The problem is the PEDAGOGY . . . Valuing writing and knowing how to successfully teach/integrate writing into a "content" course are NOT the same thing.

In closing this section, we want to acknowledge that two respondents did share a frustration about the focused nature of the research entailed in the crossover project; these two students noted in their responses that they would have liked more latitude to change the RE/V protocol or to develop their own study. To be fair, not all students in the research methods course were necessarily interested in WAC-related work or its contexts; as employees of university offices and programs, or established professional and technical writers, they already had experiences outside of English, even if they had not studied the shape of writing instruction outside of English. These are valuable counterpoints for this ongoing conversation about preparing graduate students in writing studies through exposure to authentic WAC contexts, and, we believe, a further argument to establish an ongoing research-based conversation about mentorship and preparation of graduate students within writing studies.

Conclusion

> There's so much more to learn about research that I'm convinced one course cannot do it real justice.
>
> —Research Methods Course/WAC Program Review Graduate Student

Ultimately, we call for yet more explicit attention to and study of the ways in which authentic WAC contexts can act as a critical site of situated learning for graduate students in writing studies. We particularly believe that the authentic, and even chaotic, contexts of WAC programs have much to teach graduate students about the nature of writing, their students, their colleagues, and the university at large—as well as the situated and local nature of research practices. We are struck by how our crossover project compares to recent calls for the value of "teaching for transfer" in our undergraduate writing classes, a conversation that has refocused how many of us teach composition and support WAC-related conversations on our campuses. For example, Howard Tinburg's charge that the teaching for transfer approach "boldly charges students to develop a portable theory of writing applicable across broad and varied contexts, including the workplace" (para. 2) strongly resonates with our own reflections on this crossover project. We would offer a similar conjecture—the students who took part in our project were required to think in new ways about writing, often in the face of what they thought they already knew.

The significance of introducing graduate students in writing studies to the actualities of writing outside of English cannot be understated. The gains of awareness we saw are, we contend, unlikely to be replicated by reading publications by leaders in the field of WAC in a seminar. Just as we have shifted to better prepare our undergraduates for the varied and unique contexts they will encounter as they cross the

curriculum as writers, so may we shift our work with graduate students to better prepare professionals in writing studies who will be colleagues, coaches, and teachers to those within *and* outside of English.

One of the graduate students from the crossover project puts the realizations at the heart of work in WAC-contexts into words for us:

> I think the biggest thing I've realized about writing is that every discipline (and then even different professors within the discipline) has a slightly different language for TALKING about writing. There are some common terms that float around—editing, formatting, argument, "good" sentences, literature—but everyone is using those terms slightly differently. No wonder students struggle with writing from course to course!

What might the core pedagogies of writing studies look like if more of our courses offered an integrated practicum that exposed them to WAC contexts? What would our research activities look like if more of our graduate students were exposed to the actualities of writing, writers, and writing instructors who lived quite comfortably outside of English?

Further, we want to suggest that these types of projects are themselves provocative sites of study; they have the potential to extend, enrich, and integrate our field's conversations about preparing graduate students to be effective leaders. They offer sites primed for the study of how ideas about writing and writers proliferate across institutional boundaries and the transfer of pedagogical ideas—a topic as important as the transfer of writing ability during the undergraduate degree process. Our project's findings suggest that there is work yet to be done around how required research methods courses might promote the wide variety of research and administrative skills our students will need to be successful once they enter their own professional spheres. We hope that others will join us in continuing this project, sharing their own course designs, local opportunities, and found knowledge uncovered by these experiments.

Echoing the epigraph from Joan Mullen that begins this essay, we saw throughout the ways in which this crossover project benefited the graduate students involved. From increasing the graduate students' knowledge of how to carry out a research project from start to finish, to a more situated knowledge of WI courses and authentic WAC contexts, to the ways writing functions within larger institutional structures within a university—the benefits were clear. The graduate students we worked with not only gained experience with the foundations of research, but came away with rich and grounded understandings of the contexts that make up the broader culture of writing on our campus, including (but hopefully not limited to) the highly situated nature of writing, the differing value systems that inform and shape ideals of writing, and the many constructions of writing at work in WI courses.

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Notes

1. George Mason University is the largest public university in Virginia, serving over 23,812 undergraduate and 11,092 graduate students (GMU, 2017). In February of 2016, the institution was recognized to be among the highest research institutes by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (GMU, 2016). The Ph.D. in Writing and Rhetoric is in its fifth year, with 47 total students.

2. The WAC program was created in 1993 through a provost office initiative. The program's primary charge is to oversee the WI courses offered in each major and to support the professional development conversations of the faculty who teach those courses.

3. Alisa was not enrolled in the course, but acted as the program's research assistant and Co-PI on elements of the project's work.

4. We also hoped to establish a model that could be repeated (with variations) and built upon the next time Michelle would be scheduled to teach the Research Methods class in the PhD program.

5. Alisa visited the course to fully explain, complicate, and contextualize all of the processes that occurred before the course started, including the IRB application and the protocols.

6. Key readings included: Blakeslee and Fleischer's *Becoming a Writing Studies Researcher* (2007); Rubin and Rubin's *Qualitative Interviewing* (2012); Haswell's "NCTE/CCC's War on Scholarship" (2005); Smagorinsky's "The Methods Section as Conceptual Epicenter in Constructing Social Science Reports" (2008); Lillis' "Ethnography as Method, Methodology, and 'Deep Theorizing'" (2008); and Johanek's *Composing Research* (2000).

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Appendix A

Survey 1 (Initial End-of-Term Survey for 702 Students)

1. What is the most important thing you learned about research methods from this class/project?
2. What is the most important thing you learned about WAC practices or theories from this class/project?
3. What unique challenges did you face as a research assistant for the WAC RE/View Project?
4. If you could change one thing about your participation in this research project, what would it be and why?
5. How did participating as a research assistant for the WAC RE/View Project relate to and/or prepare you for your own research interests or goals?
6. What is your main take-away from this course and this project?

Appendix B

Survey 2 (Follow-Up Survey for 702 Students One Semester Later)

1. Of the following "learning moments" offered in response to our initial survey, which of the following remain significant examples of your learning in 702? (Please check all that apply). I learned more about . . .

    a. The nature and importance of protocols
    b. Choosing my methods carefully
    c. The ethics of research
    d. The importance of the triangulation of data
    e. The process of coding
    f. How long effective research takes
    g. How research can be messy and "iterative"
    h. The perceptions and attitudes of people outside of English
    i. What it means to have a WAC program on campus
    j. What it means to study WAC contexts
    k. The challenges and opportunities WAC programs face
    l. What it means to direct a WAC program
    m. What it means to be a student in writing courses outside of English

   n. The challenges instructors outside of English face when they include writing in their courses
   o. Opportunities for and challenges in providing professional development to faculty who teach writing outside of English
2. Did this collaboration increase your understanding about teaching writing in other disciplines or the people who teach writing in other disciplines?
3. What theories and practices from WAC have stayed with you since the 702 class/project?
4. Have any of your experiences in 702 changed how you teach composition classes?
5. Have any of your experiences in 702 changed how you interact with colleagues outside of English on your campus?
6. How did your experiences as a research assistant in the RE/View Project prepare you for your professional goals?
7. In what ways have you drawn on your participation as a research assistant in the RE/View Project to pursue your own research interests and goals?
8. What is your most lasting impression of the 702 course and RE/View Project now that another semester has passed?