Reading an Institution's History of WAC through the Lens of Whole-Systems Theory

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This case study of a WAC program at a high-research university uses a whole-systems approach to long-term programmatic evaluation. The study underscores the role that a university writing center can play in providing meaningful data for analyzing the historical ebb and flow of WAC in the presence and absence of supports necessary to sustain WAC's momentum. The study suggests how to develop a rubric for measuring and interpreting such data at important historical checkpoints, to assemble a story that can inform a university about how past challenges and successes will help a WAC program move toward integration with key elements of a university's social, economic, and institutional systems. As such, this modeled reading of WAC's history at one university promises to inform WAC leadership at other universities about how they might gather and interpret evidence that paves the way for WAC's future.

I. A Question of Momentum

Twenty years ago, a Midwestern high-research university hired me to coordinate writing across the curriculum (WAC). The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) and the English department contracted my position as a joint hire. I had a small but adequate start-up budget. English sent me up for tenure as associate professor during my second year, based on my experience and publications. According to Thaiss and Porter's (2010) national survey of WAC programs, these conditions augured well for the security I needed to recover and develop a program that two predecessors had attempted to establish (pp. 540–542).

However, my campus's state of writing support, my college's changing priorities, and my department's programmatic needs impinged on the leadership role I envisioned. I sometimes chose and other times got drafted into contiguous roles—a writing-center director, a participant in a partnership with a local school district, an assessment consultant, an acting director of first-year composition, an undergraduate

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studies director, a general-education taskforce consultant, and most recently, acting chair of English. This mélange of roles still provided many opportunities to take on substantial WAC projects, such as building a viable university writing center (UWC); bringing WAC to low-income schools; creating departmental cultures of writing and evidence; collaborating on programmatic portfolio assessments; and establishing an upper-division writing requirement in the undergraduate curriculum.

Cox, Galin and Melzer (2018) observe that leaders in such circumstances may tend to mimic "elements of other programs and use a trial-and-error approach to program development" (p. 65). What kind of WAC program does this approach produce? Is it sustainable? And if so, *how* might a university—and a WAC coordinator—sustain it? WAC's accomplishments and struggles at my university speak to these questions.

I will look at these questions through the lens of Cox et al.'s whole-systems theory. Cox et al. intend their theory to provide a structured approach toward developing new WAC programs. However, I propose an adaptive use of their theory that can also enable long-term WAC coordinators to describe a program's history, placing it in a coherent and information-rich institutional context that foregrounds ongoing formative assessment, tracks programmatic improvements, and clarifies a program's earlier trajectory. I therefore suggest that this theory is flexible enough to make a WAC program's history more readily available at critical moments when a program has veered too closely to the boundaries of what Cox et al. call a "band of equilibrium" (pp. 134-135) so that WAC coordinators, program stakeholders, and upper-level administrators can review what kinds of action have served a program well in the past and what kinds of problems they should avoid repeating.[1] I believe this case study will prove instructive for other WAC programs. But first I'll review the scholarship that informed program development at my university, previous to the advent of whole-systems theory.

According to a taxonomy that Condon and Rutz construct from "actual characteristics of existing programs," WAC at my university reflects elements that stretch sporadically across three of four program types they identify (p. 361). Even after twenty years, for example, the program might only be categorized as *foundational* because it depends mostly upon my energy as a leader and focuses largely on the schedule of workshops I conduct. It draws a loyal though slow-growing range of practitioners who apply writing to learn and learning to write (pp. 362–363).

Yet I could argue that the program is *established* because the university has expanded WAC to upper-division courses that come from the whole curriculum.

1. A "band of equilibrium" reveals when a WAC program possesses or lacks the sufficient resources, support, or capacity to remain stable, as measured by indicators that can demonstrate that program's sustainability.

Our offices of Faculty Development and Assessment Services as well as many department chairs, deans, and other program directors recognize WAC's campus presence. WAC has participated in influential committees and has helped shape the university's student-learning outcomes (pp. 362–363).

Yet again, the program might claim to be *integrated* within the university's various systems because it has joined three externally funded, multi-million-dollar research projects. At critical points, it has attained substantial budget growth to train faculty and expand writing-center staff. WAC has contributed to our institution's accreditation and participated in our upper-level administration's quality-enhancement projects. It has designed large-scale assessment projects with multiple benchmarks. Participants publish on WAC in their own disciplines (pp. 362–363).

But Condon and Rutz stipulate that WAC adds up to much more than this checklist of elements (p. 360). WAC must demonstrate "a complex partnership among faculty, administrators, writing centers, faculty development programs—an infrastructure that may well support general education or first-year seminar goals" (pp. 357–358). Thus, a bona fide program "can describe where it is headed" and "make decisions about the future of that program" based on how its *momentum* aligns with the institution's trajectory (pp. 360–361, my emphasis). *Momentum* so-described leads toward the fourth program-type in their taxonomy: *change agent.*

WAC as a change-agent philosophically and culturally transforms curriculum, faculty, and a university's matrix of social, economic, and institutional systems. It yields an identity for WAC that reflects the institution's other curricular supports and initiatives. It aligns with and influences the institution's multiple efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and—as in *some* academic units at my university—it fully theorizes its strategic plans through scholarly research, publication, and actual practice (pp. 362–363).

While this taxonomy provides a fine-grained description of WAC-program development, Cox et al. point out that we have lacked a theoretical framework to explain and strategize WAC's momentum from foundational to change agent (p. 1). The most well-articulated theory for decades came from Walvoord's (1996) adaptation of social movement theory to WAC. She critiqued WAC's vague goals and outcomes, urging proponents to confront challenges at the micro-level (in foundational programs) and the macro-level (in established or integrated programs). At the micro-level, she urged WAC leadership to re-examine WAC-faculty membership, workshops, and follow-up to support faculty's ongoing growth, to direct them toward "a network, a culture" for spreading WAC's influence (p. 72). At the macro-level, she said WAC leaders should work with other institutional initiatives, relate to administration, understand the impact of technology, and above all, "deal with assessment" (pp. 67–74). Although this critique has helped many institutions develop

WAC—including mine—Walvoord (2018) concedes that it remained "limited as a framework for building transformative and sustainable WAC programs" (p. ix).

As a result, Cox et al. observe that "WAC programs fail to survive at an alarming rate of more than 50%" (p. 1). To grapple with this failure rate, Cox et al. propose that whole-systems theory provides a framework for "creating and assessing change" in the dynamic complexities that affect a university's approaches to teaching and learning (p. 25). Whole-systems theory advocates studying an institution's *social networks, systems,* and *capacity for resilience* to guide WAC leadership, gain insights about WAC's development, and gauge WAC's sustainability (p. 25). Studying *social networks* of students, faculty, administrators, and board members helps WAC administrators understand "the network of communications" among these institutional stakeholders so they can identify people who may "serve as conduits and/or bottlenecks" in program development (p. 25). Studying the institution's *systems* shows where in its organizational structures WAC leaders can find "leverage points . . . to make small changes that lead to significant impacts" (p. 25). Studying the institution's *capacity for resilience* can help administrators see how it handles stresses that change brings to its networks and structures, "yet maintain a relatively stable state"—while avoiding points where WAC could cross "a critical threshold" that may result in undesirable competition with other programs for resources and status (p. 25).

Accordingly, whole-systems theory can explain WAC's momentum in individual universities such as mine by analyzing its principles of

- Wholeness "as a significant intervention in a complex system"
- Broad participation, "engaging stakeholders from all levels"
- Transformational change "at multiple levels" in the system
- Resilience "to program challenges"
- Equity, minimizing disparities among "WAC faculty and student writers"
- Leadership, with the authority to plan, develop, and assess WAC
- Systematic development, with "a clear mission and prioritized goals"
- Integration "into existing structures and practices"
- Visibility "through multiple means of reporting"
- Feedback, to inform decision-making, program balance, and WAC-project sustainability (pp. 46–47)

Keeping these principles in mind, WAC leadership can deploy a methodology for initiating and sustaining project-based momentum that begins with *understanding* (which maps the campus mood and its ideological constructs toward writing), proceeds to *planning* (which involves identifying stakeholders, gathering their support, and setting WAC's mission), and moves on to *developing* (which identifies sustainability indicators for WAC projects and uses them to measure successful implementation

(p. 55). Within this methodology, *leading* entails management of program growth and change through assessment, improvement, and communication (p. 55).

Equipped with a theory and method that encompass such a scope, WAC leadership can "look at data collected across time" and ask, "What do these data tell you about the ways the program has changed and grown? Has the program turned any indicators of distress into indicators of success? What could be adjusted to keep the program resilient"? (p. 198). Just so, whole-systems theory offers a systemic approach not only to program-building and sustainment but to evaluating WAC's *institutional history* as well. Evaluating WAC's history helps its leadership look back so it can think ahead.

In the following case study, I shape what Cox et al. call "sustainability indicators" into a sample rubric that can help WAC leadership read its institutional history. I then use this rubric to assess WAC's momentum during three periods at my university: program-building, decline, and recovery. I conclude with a reflection on what such a historical reading of a program might tell its institution, its stakeholders, and its leadership about WAC's sustainability.

II. A Tool to Gauge WAC's Momentum

Cox et al. say that a whole-systems approach grounds program development in "discrete projects that work through cycles of planning, doing, checking, and improving using *sustainability indicators* (SIs) to monitor progress" (pp. 25–26, my emphasis). They assert that this approach emphasizes formative, not summative assessment—as well as programmatic improvements, not quantified proofs of programmatic efficacy. But years of submitting reports on UWC and WAC data have taught me that faculty, committees, and administrators who agree to implement WAC also want quantifiable information about *every* project a WAC program conducts so as to establish a tenable number of writing-intensive (WI) courses throughout the curriculum. The information they seek breaks into data points that look a lot like SIs:

- Departments and programs with potential or existing WI courses
- Capacity of student support to grow WI courses
- Amount of faculty support needed to grow WI courses
- Equitable numbers of faculty willing to teach WI courses
- Budget capacity to support WI courses
- Capacity to assess and improve WI courses
- Control of class size for WI courses
- Capacity of a university committee to oversee WI courses
- Capacity of a WAC coordinator to manage WI courses
- Communications to promote WAC-program visibility

Cox et al. also identify many of these data points as potential SIs (pp. 152–153). Extrapolating SIs in such a manner does not meet Cox et al.'s ideal of collaborating directly with WAC stakeholders to determine what SIs to use. But extrapolating what faculty, committees, and administrators repeatedly request goes far in "establishing baseline SIs" that determine "which actions will be sustainable" when assessing the momentum and vulnerabilities of WI courses (p. 56). Concurrently, I suggest a six-point scale for each SI as: minimal, fair, moderate, sufficient, good, and substantial. Within this scale, I adopt what Cox et al. call "a range within which actions will be sustainable"—or a "band of equilibrium" of 1–5 (p. 56).

Although no specific collaboration occurred at my university with the SIs identified above, a committee of cross-curricular faculty and I indeed collaborated on what defines WI courses. Before we proposed to establish a two-course upper-division baccalaureate writing requirement at our university, we agreed that such courses should cap enrollment at 35 and require final approval from the university's General Education Committee. Writing should count for at least 25% of the grade. Each student should meet a minimum of 3,000 words. Faculty must conduct class discussions about their writing assignments and provide substantive, on-going feedback (perhaps in concert with the UWC). Faculty teaching WI courses must also obtain prior approval from department chairs so if others teach the same course, they must satisfy the requirements too.

The above SIs and definition of WI have enabled me to design the rubric in Table 1.

Table 1.

Sustainability Scales for WAC

Degree Programs*	**Student Support***
Minimum (10-15% w/ 1-2 WI courses) **Fair** (15-25% w/ 1-2 courses) **Moderate** (25-50% w/ 1-3 courses) **Sufficient** (50-65% w/ 3 or more courses) **Good** (65-80% w/ 5 or more courses) **Substantial** (above 80% w/ 5 or more courses) *~140 combined undergraduate and graduate programs	**Minimum** (UWC or equivalent capacity for 1–2% of undergraduate enrollment) **Fair** (as above for 2-5% of undergraduate and graduate enrollment + adequate tutor-training) **Moderate** (as above for 5-10% of enrollment + well-focused, credit-bearing tutor training that includes work with English-as second-language students) **Sufficient** (as above for 10-15% of enrollment) **Good** (as above for 15-25% of enrollment) **Substantial** (as above for 25-33% of enrollment) *Assume < 5% annual users turned away

Faculty Support	Equitable Number of Faculty to Teach WI*
Minimum (UWC or other supplemental writing instruction) **Fair** (as above + 1–2 major workshops) **Moderate** (as above + workshop series + in-class support + assessment projects + faculty incentives) **Sufficient** (as above + faculty department and program leaders + administrative commitment of resources) **Good** (as above + university-wide assessment) **Substantial** (as above + support for WAC research)	**Minimum** (8-10% of instructional faculty; over half in FYC and general education in English) **Fair** (10-20% of instructional faculty, at least 1/3 professorial) **Moderate** (20-–35% of all instructional faculty) **Sufficient** (35–60% of all instructional faculty) **Good** (60–75% of all instructional faculty) **Substantial** (75% or more of all instructional faculty) *Includes TAs and instructors in FYC
Budget Capacity	**Capacity to Assess**
Minimum (paid/reassigned staff that meets student demand for UWC services) **Fair** (as above + dedicated position for UWC director + funds for tutoring supplies and UWC publicity/outreach) **Moderate** (as above + tenurable/continuous position for UWC/WAC director(s) + discretionary funds for faculty workshops) **Sufficient** (as above + access to grants/ resources + assessment funds + research support) **Good** (as above + scheduled institutional replacement cycle for technology and equipment) **Substantial** (as above + in-built support for UWC/WAC staff expansion and pay upgrades)	**Minimum** (UWC feedback to students and faculty on tutorial help with writing skills relevant to FYC outcomes) **Fair** (as above + UWC assessment projects/ reports on student skills) **Moderate** (as above + documented WAC influence on assessing disciplinary writing skills in academic departments' learning outcomes) **Sufficient** (as above + documented WAC influence on assessment projects measuring writing skills embedded in institution's baccalaureate learning outcomes) **Good** (as above + WAC leadership in continuous assessment projects that assess individual degree-program writing outcomes) **Substantial** (as above + participation in assessment projects through coalitions, disciplinary organizations and publications)

Control of Class Size	Committee Oversight
Minimum (faculty decide which classes are WI-appropriate) **Fair** (departments and program directors set caps for writing courses, per college's' approval) **Moderate** (as above, but using class-size limits comparable to caps that other institutions set) **Sufficient** (limits recommended in agreement with National Council of Teachers of English) **Good** (as above, with limits established for all WI courses by a standing university committee) **Substantial** (as above, with resources to protect and sustain class-size limits)	**Minimum** (small faculty group that collaborates occasionally with supplemental-writing staff) **Fair** (ad hoc committee formed as a task force to address WAC issues) **Moderate** (standing college/university committee that receives UWC/WAC reports on a regular basis) **Sufficient** (standing university committee that evaluates WAC courses and WAC/UWC reports) **Good** (as above + capacity to reward progress or respond to WAC/UWC issues + supervision of relevant projects) **Substantial** (as above + ability to negotiate curricular policies in colleges, departments and programs + recommend resource allocations for WAC/UWC)
Coordinator's Course-Management	**Program Visibility**
Minimum (6-8 weekly hours for micro-level WAC duties—e.g., designing and conducting workshops and follow-up activities) **Fair** (as above + opportunity to develop/teach for-credit undergraduate/graduate courses in WAC pedagogy) **Moderate** (as above + recognized role as WAC consultant in assessment and curricular decision-making at departmental and programmatic levels) **Sufficient** (as above + recognized as participant in curricular decision-making at institutional level) **Good** (as above + defined role in standing committee or office that assesses curriculum at institutional level) **Substantial** (as above + role in deciding assessment-based institutional actions/ policies)	**Minimum** (website/materials to promote services) **Fair** (as above + online resources for faculty and students) **Moderate** (as above + alliances with other student services and professional development projects) **Sufficient** (as above + campus-wide recognition as an institutional teaching and learning asset + scholarly publications) **Good** (as above + strong reporting lines to multiple institutional systems) **Substantial** (as above + recognition of WAC as a source of institutional data that contributes to decision-making)

To illustrate how this rubric can help assess WAC's history, I begin with my first year of hire. Table 2's overview shows where WAC had succeeded, where it failed, and what remained.

Table 2.

Baseline Indicators for Development (Year 1)

INDICATORS	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Degree programs with existing/ potential WI courses	39 degree programs (per writing-center documentation)
Capacity of student support to grow WI courses	8 writing fellows assigned to 6 departments in 3 colleges (350-400 total sessions annually) Writing center (~1,200 sessions annually) Total WF/WC visitors > 1% undergraduate enrollment
Amount of faculty support needed to grow WI courses	Previous workshops/faculty retreats discontinued Consultations sporadic
Equitable number of faculty willing to teach WI courses	~50 faculty across 6 colleges, ~39 departments and programs Instructors and TAs primarily in First-Year Composition
Capacity to assess and improve WI Courses	No formal UWC documentation of tutorial feedback No clear WAC connection to assessing WI courses One TA consistently reported back to English
Budget capacity to support WI courses (training, assessment, resources)	Funding for 8 writing fellows (1-2 course assignments each) 2.5 FTE FYC instructors/TAs reassigned to writing center (10 course assignments); funding for 6 to 8 peer tutors
Control of class size for WI courses	Faculty decision
Capacity of a university committee to oversee WI courses	No committee; small faculty core who support WAC
Capacity of WAC coordinator to manage WI courses	2 course releases for a non-tenured instructor to oversee a small writing center 1 course release for another instructor to supervise writing fellows
Communications to promote WAC program visibility	Newsletter for 5 departments (WAC TA, editor) WAC website (maintained by WAC TAs) 1 TA's annual report on WAC in five departments, sent to CLAS dean and English Chair

Table 2 consolidates writing-center data to suggest how previous workshops and consultations had raised faculty awareness in approximately 39 (or 27%) of the university's ~140 degree programs—implying that the campus was receptive to WAC. Even so, only about 50 professors, non-tenured instructors, and TAs currently assigned writing that motivated ~1,200 annual student visits to the writing center. First-year composition accounted for most. Neither students nor faculty received documentation of tutors' feedback. A "culture of writing" had yet to take hold where: 1) a faculty majority valued writing and practiced effective assignment design; 2) departments included writing to assess degree-program outcomes; and 3) the university expected degree-programs to report such outcomes in review cycles.

The concept of WAC as a program had become nebulous. A non-tenured FYC instructor received a two-course reassignment from his four-course load to oversee a writing-center staff of instructors, TAs, and undergraduate students. But he felt unprepared to train them. Another non-tenured FYC instructor received one course release to supervise six English TAs and two psychology TAs who served as writing fellows in various departments. But her efforts to engage more professorial faculty met with scant response. Individual writing-fellows "guesstimated" that they handled 40 to 50 undergraduate sessions per year. One writing fellow issued a WAC newsletter regularly to the departments of economics, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. Other English writing fellows helped maintain a WAC website with tips for assigning and responding to student writing. These communicative structures made WAC visible, but programmatic interconnectivity had nearly withered.

Table 2 captures this situation, but as Cox et al. suggest, radar charts such as Figure 1 provide administrators and stakeholders with a more easily grasped measure of "how all SIs for . . . a WI program can be mapped together" (p. 151). Figure 1 identifies a minimal number of faculty and students accounted for this situation. The chart reveals minimum budgeting capacity to expand WAC and a somewhat fair communication effort to raise WAC's visibility. But with no committee to review syllabi or advocate for enrollment limits, WAC-influenced courses ranged as high as 500 or as low as 10. Taken together, Figure 1's map of WAC's sustainability yields a calculation of .75—a program clinging to the inner boundary of the band of equilibrium, very near to its demise.

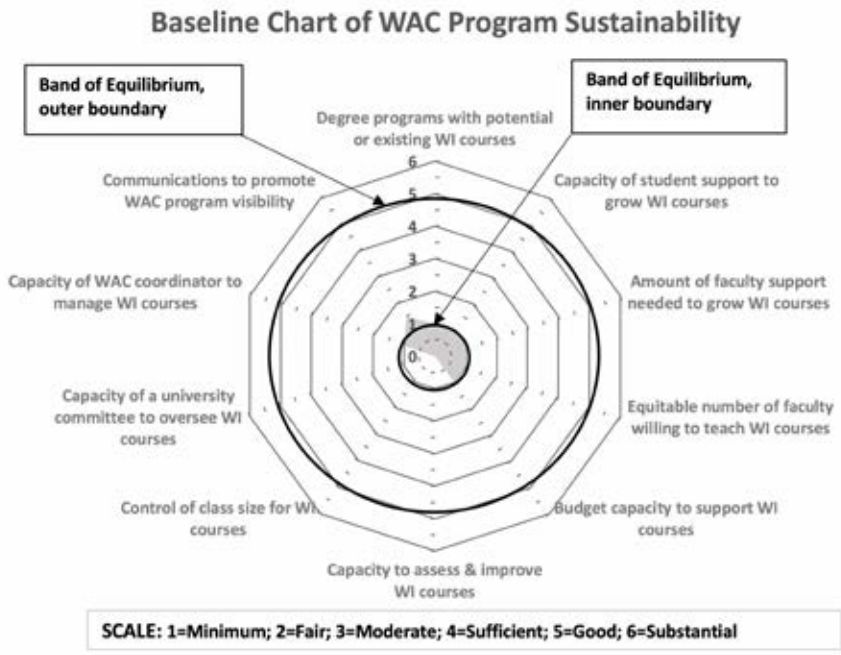

Figure 1. Baseline chart of WAC program sustainability.

Cox et al. recommend that such charts offer "a negative feedback loop mechanism" which points to "interventions when conditions warrant change" (p. 151). Although I had no such chart to illustrate it, in year one I told supporters in CLAS and English that WAC must first set up a viable writing center. Without it, WAC would have no future.

III. Measuring History: Five Years of Momentum

Cox et al. aver that WAC programs which "take a deliberate project approach are predictably more viable over time" (154). Everything depends, however, on *which* projects should take precedence. Our initial project to build up a viable UWC would provide maximum leverage for WAC because the existing cubby-hole in the English department would never serve the university—even at its lowest point of enrollment.[2] Furthermore, transforming a sleepy little writing center into the mainstay for

2. The campus *Data Book* (2018) shows at that point, we had 60 undergraduate and 80 graduate degree programs, 12,788 undergraduates, 4,121 graduates, 654 tenured or tenure-track faculty, 523 instructional faculty, and 1,319 graduate assistants (p. 82).

WI courses would help us grasp "the complexity of the [university's] system[s] and its curricular ecology" (see Cox et al., p. 154).

When English colleagues and an associate dean agreed to get behind the UWC project, I assumed its directorship. A small staff of instructors, graduate assistants, undergraduate tutors, and I ventured into classrooms campus-wide. Many faculty expressed surprise that a place existed where their students could get extra writing instruction. So we got the message out. In addition, an increased schedule of WAC workshops helped draw together a "grassroots network of faculty" who discussed and implemented WAC pedagogy and lent support to "WAC policies and initiatives" (Cox et al., p. 156). The trickle of students coming to the writing center became an overflow. However, we did not yet understand the campus culture of writing well enough to formulate what Cox and Galin (2020) call "'baseline SIs,' which could be used for planning interventions and assessing their impact" (p. 43).

A group of invested professors who represented each of the university's colleges agreed to convene as a WAC advisory committee to help turn the writing center's overflow problem into an opportunity. With the committee's input, I wrote a WAC self-study to request an external consultant-evaluators' visit from the Council of Writing Program Administrators (see McLeod 1991, pp. 73-75; Brady 2004, pp. 85-86). The self-study helped us better understand aspects of the campus writing culture, including where hubs of faculty concern about writing were located—and how institutional power was distributed across campus (see Cox & Galin, p. 43). A rudimentary WAC mission and a sense of programmatic goals began to coalesce: WAC and the UWC would aim to support faculty and students in the university's efforts to improve teaching and learning, especially by promoting the growth of WAC-informed courses. Thus, the advisory committee, the associate dean, and my English-department colleagues helped me plan a UWC project that could accommodate the whole campus and pull WAC's sustainability into the band of equilibrium that Figure 1 illustrates. The CLAS dean approved. He especially appreciated that the external CWPA team would help us form productive connections with other colleges and upper-level administrators throughout the university, while also performing functions similar to those of an accreditation agency (see "Consultant-Evaluator Service," 2020).

As this "macro-level" project garnered interest that reached "the higher scales of departments, colleges, academic senate, [and] institutional assessment," WAC became a university-wide concern, making "strategic interventions" into its complex social, economic, and institutional systems (see Cox et al., pp. 58, 157-158). Following the CWPA visit, the provost helped us shape the UWC project into a plan that we submitted to the state's Board of Higher Education. In a year, we received $190,000 annual funding to initiate the UWC's construction. These advances poised

WAC to make a substantive curricular footprint. From UWC records of student sessions and faculty assignments, we saw that workshop participants, newsletters, and the redesigned WAC/UWC website were spreading WAC pedagogy even to faculty who didn't attend WAC events.

When we moved into the new UWC (complete with tutoring areas, a smart classroom, meeting space, offices, bathrooms, and a kitchenette), construction funds converted into a budget for expanding staff and faculty outreach. The university's Assessment Office helped us initiate a University Writing Project to evaluate "WAC faculty's" student learning outcomes (SLOs), and I held workshops at other campus initiatives such as our Multicultural Institute. The School of Nursing asked me to help with their portfolio effort, which became a long-lived campus model for authentic assessment of WAC. The College of Business requested a year-long series of workshops to revise their departmental writing outcomes. A WAC-Advisory Committee member convinced me to join her National Science Foundation project in an urban school district, where I introduced WAC to high-school teachers. Research and publications emerged.

Table 3 provides more details of WAC's momentum during this period.

Table 3.

WAC Sustainability During the UWC Project (Years 1-5)

INDICATORS	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Degree programs with existing/potential WI courses	Increase from 39 to 51 degree programs annually
Capacity of student support to grow WI courses	New UWC established Class visits and in-class assignment workshops begun UWC's smart classroom constructed for FYC courses 2.5 FTE English instructors/TAs reassigned to UWC; writing fellows converted to UWC tutors Increase from ~1,700 to 7,714 sessions (12% of university enrollment) Credit-bearing undergraduate/graduate courses developed to train peer tutors/TAs in WAC/UWC pedagogy
Amount of faculty support needed to grow WI courses	10-15 faculty workshops offered annually Annual day-long faculty workshop initiated in May 25-40 faculty consultations annually Discipline-specific workshops for Nursing and College of Business
Equitable number of faculty willing to teach WI courses	Increase from ~50 to 645 professors, instructors and TAs across 7 colleges (including Law) Increase in UWC staff's ethnic diversity and majors WAC's participation in university's Multicultural Institute

INDICATORS	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Capacity to assess and improve WI Courses	WAC self-study for CWPA consultant-evaluator visit Portfolio assessment developed in baccalaureate Nursing degree University Writing Project (UWP) assessment of WI-course outcomes initiated 2-year UWC assessment of `800 multiple-draft writers conducted
Budget capacity to support WI courses (training, assessment, resources)	Funding for writing fellows converted to UWC staffing funds New funding stream to add UWC staff positions (associate director, 1 FTE instructor and ~25 peer tutors) 2-3 annual WAC grants for department and faculty projects WAC stipends established for May workshop participants WAC grant to develop Nursing portfolio Assessment Office funds for UWP Funds set aside to assess UWC outcomes NSF-grant funds to develop workshops and teach graduate-level WAC courses for high/middle-school teachers
Control of class size for WI courses	Faculty decision—but WI-course caps discussed in WAC Advisory Committee
Capacity of a university committee to oversee WI	WAC Advisory Committee established to support WAC and advocate for construction of new UWC Increased WAC-Advisory influence on departments and colleges NSF-grant committee to plan high/middle-school outreach
Capacity of WAC coordinator to manage WI courses	Per-semester course release to coordinate WAC and direct UWC (~15 hrs./week) Bi-weekly meetings with Nursing Portfolio Committee Bi-weekly involvement with NSF high/middle-school project Credit-bearing undergrad/grad courses and independent studies developed for UWC tutoring and WAC pedagogy
Communications to promote WAC program visibility	70-100 annual "brochure talks" in cross-disciplinary classes Newsletter for all departments, 6 colleges (WAC coordinator, editor) UWC website updated (WAC coordinator, webmaster) Annual reports to CLAS and English Chair (WAC coordinator, compiler) Scholarship on UWC methods and WAC outcomes

Moving from Table 3 to Figure 2, WAC/UWC data show a moderate growth in departments and degree programs with potential or existing WAC-informed courses. The moderate increase in WAC workshops parallels the increase among faculty who

encouraged students to use the UWC. WAC's participation in the university's annual Multicultural Institute brought a fair rise in diversity among professorial faculty, instructors, and cross-disciplinary TAs willing to teach WI courses. A sufficient budget allowed us to develop a two-year assessment project to measure UWC SLOs in 802 student folders containing multiple drafts of writing assignments. We estimated that our capacity to help students improve their performance in WI courses was approaching a moderate level. Our budget also exerted a moderate impact on increased campus outreach and communications. More staff also yielded more class visits and in-class workshops, moderately increasing WAC's capacity to manage WI courses. I initiated WAC/UWC-training courses and did independent studies for peer tutors and graduate students. Figure 2 thus maps how WAC's engagement on the macro-level affects program development.

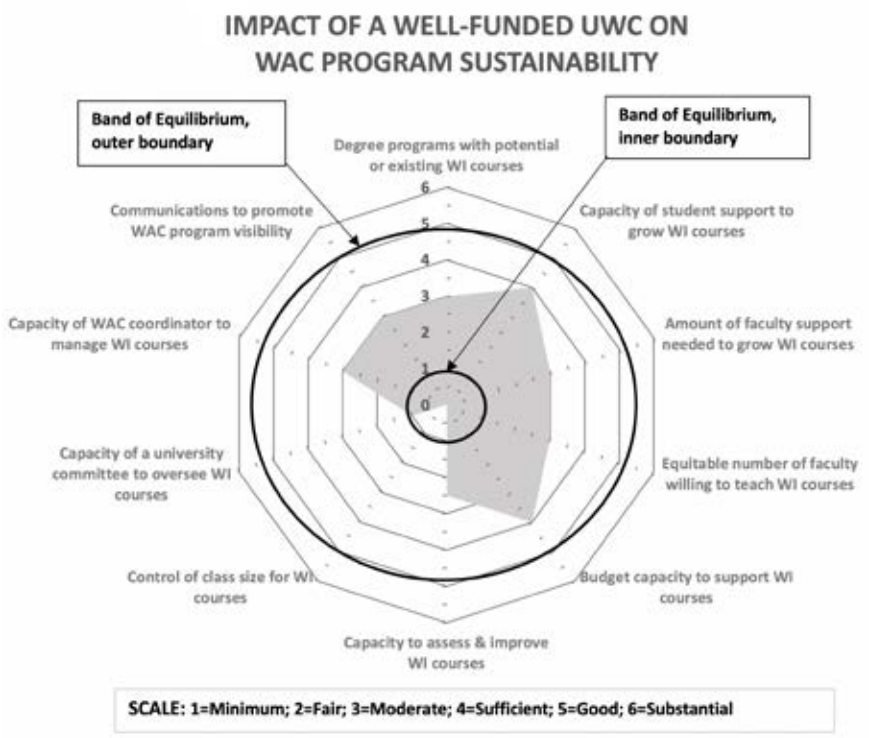

Figure 2. Impact of a well-funded UWC on WAC program sustainability

But assessing the improvements that our UWC project exerted upon WAC also shows where momentum lagged. The advisory committee served WAC well in helping us establish the UWC, but still the university regarded it as an ad hoc entity.

The committee did not have the institutional clout to propose baccalaureate writing requirements in upper-division courses in the major or exert controls on enrollments in WAC-informed courses. These factors had a negative impact on faculty willing to implement WAC pedagogy more fully. Nor had we formulated what Cox and Galin identify as "proto SIs" to gauge internally how we could more closely align our rudimentary program mission and goals with what the upper-level administration expected from us externally (p. 43). The administration had set benchmarks that would satisfy protocols for annual and eight-year review cycles (e.g., appropriate increase in number of students served, clear documentation of contact hours, cost-effective use of resources for staffing, adequate outreach to academic units, substantial signs of faculty satisfaction, and ideally, measurable impact upon SLOs). Accordingly, Figure 2 suggests that the WAC program's sustainability score had nearly risen to moderate (2.65)—a promising trend, yet one that encountered barriers and implied that we had yet to establish a stable means to strategize and safeguard that sustainability within the band of equilibrium that the rubric gauges.

IV. Assessing Decline: The Next Six Years

Universities undergo constant change. WAC stakeholders come and go as priorities shift. Institutional memory falls prey to amnesia if WAC leadership does not keep its projects in sight of faculty and administrators, working "at both the micro and macro levels" (Cox et al., p. 156).

Ironically, WAC's decline came about because of its expansion. An undergraduate English course on WAC drew increasingly more students from different bachelors-degree programs. I developed a graduate seminar to train advanced English TAs to teach multiple sections of the course and assess the course portfolios with a rubric I'd refined from a university workshop on the national VALUE Rubric Development Project (see Association of American Colleges and Universities 2010). I took on more independent studies, theses, and dissertations focused on WAC. The portfolio-assessment project in the School of Nursing thrived, and its faculty requested frequent workshops. When the NSA grant ended, CLAS and the College of Education obtained federal and state grants to continue the school-district partnership. The CLAS dean assigned me to set up WAC resources in partner schools. I developed a graduate-level course for high-school teachers that I taught onsite for several semesters. As my department chair urged me to publish more so I could be promoted to full professor, the onsite school-district courses led me into research projects—including one with a high-school science department. The first-year composition director and I co-wrote a successful application to join the Inter/National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research (I/NCEPR, 2017) for three years. But these over-commitments cannibalized my release-time for WAC.

As Cox et al. would put it, I joined other WAC leaders who get "overwhelmed by ever-expanding micro-level demands" (p. 156).

Trusting that the UWC would provide ample support for WAC-informed courses, I gave up its directorship to pursue multiplying WAC projects. The associate director—an English MA—replaced me. This change weakened the connections WAC had made at the macro level. The WAC Advisory Committee disbanded. The University Writing Project continued, but with fewer faculty contributors from WAC workshops. More problematic, a hostile dean replaced our friendly one. He viewed WAC and writing centers as a misdirected use of resources. With my energies focused elsewhere, the UWC became the target of budget cuts and staff reductions, increasing the UWC director's workload. A replacement cycle for the UWC's smart-classroom technology fell by the wayside.

Cox et al. warn that if a program never moves on from—or retreats to—an over-concern with micro-level work, WAC becomes "difficult to sustain, and may never get to the tipping point where it has a transformative effect on the campus culture of writing (p. 156). Table 4 details six years, during which WAC tipped far away from campus transformation.

Table 4.

WAC Sustainability During School-District Partnership and Budget Cuts (Years 6-11)

INDICATORS	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Degree programs with existing/ potential WI courses	Decrease from 72 to 41 degree programs across 6 colleges annually
Capacity of student support to grow WI courses	UWC services strained Continued in-class visits and assignment workshops (70-100 annually) UWC smart-classroom accommodation for FYC courses hampered by outdated technology Continued 2.5 FTE reassignment of English TAs in UWC Decreased UWC visitors (12%→9% of university enrollment) and increased number of sessions (7,714→9,390); 749→1,683 students turned away annually Continued credit-bearing courses to prepare TAs as UWC tutors and instructors in English WAC course

INDICATORS	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Amount of faculty support needed to grow WI courses	2 FTE instructors in UWC eliminated and peer tutors reduced 50% 2 continued day-long faculty workshops in May (one on academic publishing) Continued workshops for Nursing 8-10 WAC consultations with university faculty annually
Equitable number of faculty willing to teach WI courses	Decrease, 645→464 professors, instructors and TAs Discontinued WAC participation in Multicultural Institute
Capacity to assess and improve WI Courses	Continued WI course assessment by University Writing Project Continued Nursing baccalaureate-degree portfolio assessment Continued portfolio assessment of English WAC course WAC-assessment research in high-school partnership
Budget capacity to support WI courses (training, assessment, resources)	Decrease in college budget for UWC staff Reduced WAC stipends for faculty in May workshop WI course assessment funded by University Assessment Office—team of English instructors paid Continued grant funds for courses in WAC instruction and research for high-school partnership
Control of class size for WI courses	Faculty decision
Capacity of a university committee to oversee WAC	WAC Advisory Committee disbanded
Capacity of WAC coordinator to manage WI courses	Course releases replaced by onsite courses in high-school partnership Management time redirected to WI courses and research in high schools Oversight of credit-bearing English course on WAC—4 sections annually
Communications to promote WAC program visibility	Separate UWC and WAC websites (maintained by UWC director and WAC coordinator) Continued annual WAC and UWC reports to dean, English chair Continued scholarship on WAC in secondary schools and Nursing portfolio-assessment

With a shrinking staff, the UWC director limited student sessions to 30 minutes to meet a fair level of undergraduate and graduate student need. She visited an average of 70 to 100 classrooms per year to do UWC "brochure talks" and assignment workshops. Thus, a fair number of departments and programs kept sending students, despite alarming percentages of turn-aways at busy times such as midterm and the semester's end. Turn-aways caused the number of faculty and degree programs offering WAC-informed courses to creep downward toward fair. My work with the university's school-district partnership meant minimal oversight of WAC-informed courses on campus. Faculty support in WAC dwindled to two day-long May workshops and discipline-specific workshops for Nursing. Figure 3 reflects as much.

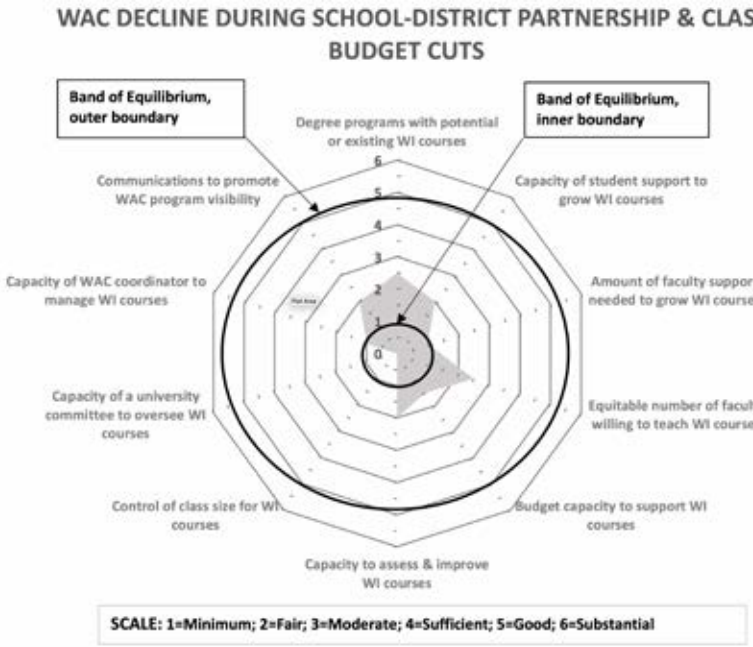

Figure 3. WAC decline during school-district partnership and CLAS budget cuts

As budget cuts continued, UWC staffing lost two fulltime instructors. The dean allowed the UWC director to convert one instructor's salary into peer-tutoring funds, but the other's salary disappeared along with half of the UWC's budget. The absence of a WAC advisory committee didn't help. Professorial faculty no longer had a representative body to contact when the UWC was forced to turn their students away. And although the UWC and WAC continued to submit annual reports, the hostile dean disregarded them either as requests for support that he did not want to

give or activities that focused more on high-school teachers than university faculty. As the UWC and WAC websites grew outdated, communication lines grew quieter.

As such, Figure 3 reveals a WAC program whose six-year contraction rendered sustainability lower than "fair" (1.45). SIs crept down toward the inner boundary of the band of equilibrium. The program had destabilized.

V. Project-Based Interventions: A Nine-Year Turn-Around

Cox et al. observe cases where faculty demand for WAC support remains high but is met only by a writing center. They say such support, crucial as it is, does not result "in a robust culture of writing" or give faculty the incentive to sustain—let alone develop—WI courses (p. 150). WAC's six-year decline at my university tends to confirm, but what could be done? Cox et al. argue that recovery requires "project-based intervention, with a clear set of problems, a clear set of targeted solutions, transparent lines of WAC leadership, and a grassroots approach to change" (150).

The next nine-year period substantiates Cox et al.'s argument. Our university orchestrated a concatenation of quality-enhancement projects. WAC's shift back to a macro-level focus occurred as it participated. This participation added up to a series of project-based interventions.

Recovery began unexpectedly when my department asked me to assume acting directorship of first-year composition. My colleague needed a break to work on his promotion. Thereafter, the assessment office contacted me for a report on the FYC SLOs that our research project with e-portfolios had produced. I requested a year to collect data that could tie together FYC SLOs and upper-division WAC outcomes from the University Writing Project. The assessment office asked me to prepare a presentation for the board of trustees. I did so. At the end of that presentation, the provost proclaimed that the continuum of FYC to WAC, with the UWC assisting, was "really a prototype for things as we develop baccalaureate goals and look at revising general education" (Banks-Wilkins, 2009, p. 9). Ears pricked up. Change was afoot.

Later, the provost issued a university-wide call to submit proposals for Strategic Initiative Projects to support curricular quality-enhancement. When I contacted the UWC director and learned the full extent of damage that budget cuts had wreaked, we teamed up to write a proposal. The hostile dean saw an opportunity to shift CLAS's funding burden for the UWC to the provost's office. He supported our proposal, and it got accepted.

Our Strategic Initiatives proposal morphed into a five-year "Vision Project." We received a combined $82,500 annual funding for UWC and WAC. If our annual reports to the Vision Committee and the dean proved convincing, we could receive a permanent addition to our budgets—nearly replacing the cuts the dean had made. UWC numbers and services gradually improved. Turn-aways dropped. Run-down

technology in the UWC smart classroom got replaced. WAC workshops increased again, attracting new faculty.

Nevertheless, when funds for our Vision Project ended, the hostile dean did not recommend continued UWC/WAC support. His rationale: little curricular change, no evidence of improved learning, and too much drain on more worthwhile projects. He cut the UWC budget even further and eliminated WAC's budget altogether.

Cox et al. advise WAC administrators "to take a systems approach to [such] challenges, which includes not taking things personally, exercising patience, listening carefully, thinking logically, and using common sense when dealing with conflicts" (p. 164). This approach includes "collection of any necessary data, consideration of the scope of its reach, attention to primary stakeholders, a desire to balance the concerns that need to be considered, and a willingness to be flexible" (p. 164). At this time, my stint in FYC ended. My department asked me to direct its undergraduate studies program. The FYC directorship had taught me that such a position would enable me to maintain upper-level contacts I'd made and help form new ones.

Opportunities appeared. The provost appointed a Baccalaureate Review Task Force charged with researching what students, parents, alumni, employers, and other stakeholders had to say about graduating seniors' skills. Underdeveloped writing skills rose to the top of the list ("Baccalaureate Review," 2009, pp. 16-17). The provost consequently appointed another task force—including WAC-friendly members from the Vision Project and Baccalaureate Review—to revise the university's general-education program. I contacted this Task Force on Progressive Learning in Undergraduate Studies (PLUS) as well as the assessment office about WAC and the UWC. My concurrent positions in undergraduate studies and WAC elicited positive response.

We began a three-year study that funded faculty participants in WAC workshops to test and assess what they'd learned about tentative WI requirements. The assessment office gathered baseline data from FYC e-portfolio scores. Using the university's course documentation system, the assessment office identified students who took WAC-informed courses and compared them with students who did not. UWC records cross-checked data. Statistically significant gains in writing skills emerged for the undergraduates in WI courses. Sharing these results with the PLUS Task Force and the university's Academic Planning Council led to a revision of lower and upper-division general education that proposed resources to support a new university-wide definition of writing-intensive courses. The university president, in turn, agreed to move the UWC out of CLAS and put the UWC under the provost's purview so it would have adequate funding. A vice provost shopped the PLUS proposal to all the university's colleges to validate a two-course, upper-division writing requirement (PLUS Task Force, 2014, pp. 5-7). Colleges agreed, with a caveat. Faculty wanted

support for developing WI courses. The Faculty Development Office (FDO) agreed to sponsor an ongoing series of faculty workshops that I would design and conduct. Upon getting the colleges' go-ahead, the university President ordered immediate implementation.

Table 5 elaborates upon these and other macro-level details of this nine-year turn-around.

Table 5.

WAC Sustainability During Vision Project, Revision of General Education and Implementation of Plus Program (Years 12–20).

INDICATORS	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Degree programs with existing/ potential WI courses	Increase, 73 degree programs across 7 colleges (including Law)
Capacity of student support to grow WI courses	Continuation of UWC services, including 70-100 in-class workshops UWC smart-classroom technology replaced Increase in UWC staff (10 TAs and 14 peer tutors) Increased UWC visitors (18% university enrollment, 12,615 sessions); turn-aways reduced to 174 Continued credit-bearing courses to prepare TAs as UWC tutors and instructors of WAC course in English (8 sections annually)
Amount of faculty support needed to grow WI courses	Increased faculty workshops annually (15-17) plus 2 daylong May workshops 20 to 35 faculty consultations annually Continued workshops for baccalaureate Nursing degree
Equitable number of faculty willing to teach WI courses	Increase, 506 professors, instructors and TAs (including Centers for Black, Latina/o, South Asian, and Women's Studies)
Capacity to assess and improve WI Courses	5-year Strategic Initiatives assessment of UWC and WAC services Continued WI-course assessment by University Writing Project Longitudinal SLO assessment of 640 WI/non-WI students Continued Nursing baccalaureate-degree portfolio assessment; portfolios initiated for RN-to-Bachelor of Nursing Continued portfolio assessment of English WAC course

INDICATORS	SPECIFIC DETAILS
Budget capacity to support WI courses (training, assessment, resources)	UWC budget shifted from CLAS to Provost and staffing resources increased FDO sponsorship of 2 daylong May workshops and new workshop series Assessment Office funds for 3-year study of SLOs in WAC classes Continued Assessment Office stipends for English instructors to score upper-division student writing
Control of class size for WI courses	Class size for WAC courses limited to 35, per upper-division baccalaureate writing requirement
Capacity of a university committee to oversee WI courses	5-year Vision Committee oversight of UWC and WAC Ad hoc committee appointed by Vice Provost to establish upper-division baccalaureate writing requirement Curriculum committees in 6 colleges to identify writing-infused courses General Education Committee to approve development of WI courses
Capacity of WAC coordinator to manage WI courses	2-year appointment as Acting First-Year Composition director, 1:1 course load 5-year appointment as director of Undergraduate Studies in English, 1:1 course load Faculty training for 3-year study of WI SLOs Collaboration with First-Year Composition and PLUS Program to incorporate WAC-specific content Collaboration with Vice Provost and cross-curricular faculty to establish upper-division baccalaureate writing requirement Collaboration with UNIV 101/201 to develop writing assignments for annual common-reading experience
Communications to promote WAC program visibility	UWC and WAC websites updated Annual WAC/UWC reports to CLAS, various task forces, Provost Presentation of FYC SLOs to Board of Trustees and Provost Presentation to University Assessment Panel, 3-year study of SLOs in WI courses Continued scholarship on WAC

During this nine-year period, the UWC recorded a moderate rise in degree programs with potential or existing WI courses. UWC budget increases allowed student

support to reach a level of good. The faculty development office's sponsorship of WAC workshops helped faculty support increase to moderate. The results of the three-year project on SLOs in WI-courses sparked a moderate rise in assessment efforts, numbers of faculty willing to teach WI courses, and my capacity to manage such courses. Updates to the WAC and UWC websites, website descriptions of the PLUS Program, online catalog information about WI courses, and WAC/UWC reports submitted to various task forces and the Provost raised WAC's visibility to sufficient. Meanwhile, task forces and committees contributed to a moderate level of WI-course oversight. Moreover, the PLUS Program's revision of university baccalaureate learning outcomes led to a revision of FYC courses to include introductory WAC instruction.

As Figure 4 demonstrates, WAC reached an overall sustainability rating of 3.3—placing our program right in the middle of the band of equilibrium. Such a reading, however, can mislead. Even when a program's SIs go higher on a rubric, conditions don't necessarily get better. If more than one SI reaches "substantial," for instance, this rise may place the program in jeopardy of overcommitment and *un*sustainability. Just so, program coordinators may need to exercise caution in sharing externally all the information that internally raises hopes of ongoing equilibrium. Moreover, unanticipated changes can hit. To illustrate, a conservative governor decided to suspend the budget for our state university system for two years. The hostile dean—as well as influential and friendly supporters—left, bringing others to the fore who needed to learn about WAC. I went on sabbatical, and upon return, was asked to serve as acting department chair—adding new opportunities as well as new obligations that complicated the task of program leadership.

All of these events affect and reflect the formative nature of assessment informed by whole-systems theory. As such, our WAC program's SIs did not remain at the fortuitous levels that Figure 4 documents. But thus far, WAC's integration into the university's whole-systems structure has managed to retain moderate-to-fair programmatic stability within the band of equilibrium. Will it go on this way, despite the fluctuations? Our history warns us not to make assumptions. Hence, I suggest with caution that program coordinators elsewhere will find that whole-systems theory is invaluable to tracking their program's historical sustainability. But above all, it's important to share the data that its application can generate, to show WAC administrators and university stakeholders where to take action to protect a program's strengths and prevent its decline.

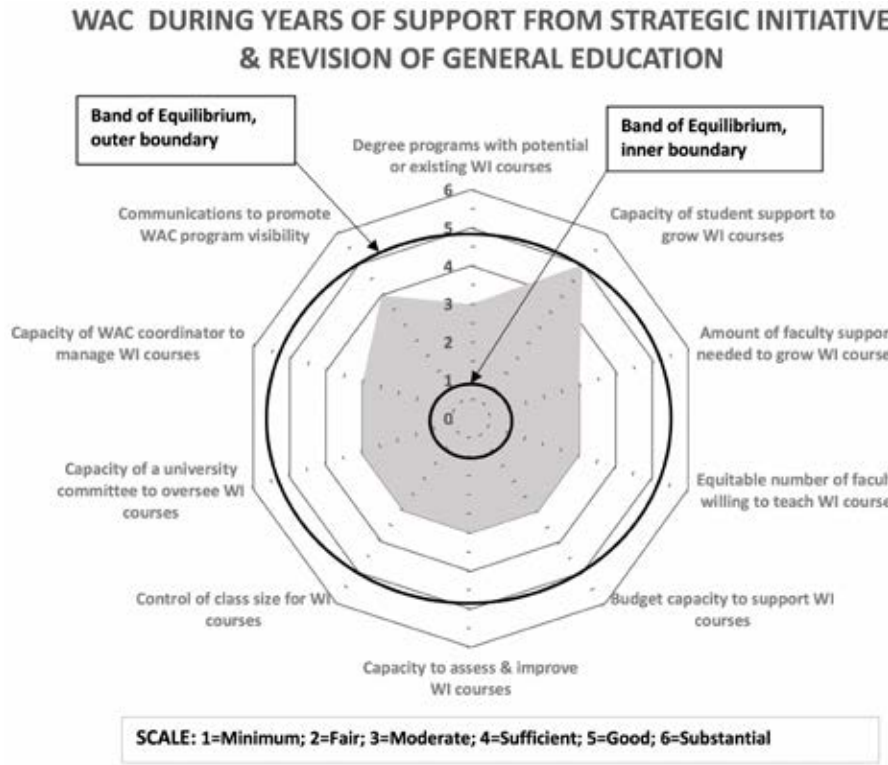

Figure 4. WAC during years of support from strategic initiative and revision of general education.

VI. History Lessons

Haswell (2001) writes that "programs are living, dynamic systems, whose parts have to differ to function," and not everyone will experience or understand them the same way. . . . This is the actual ecology, the essential synergy, the real history" of how WAC evolves (p. 2). The foregoing evaluation of one such program's dynamic systems, differing parts, and evolution suggests that history only means something if it successfully reveals "the integration of lived experience with the theoretical framework" that a whole-systems approach can afford (Walvoord, 2018, p. xi). Such an approach to an institution's history of WAC can enable its administrators and stakeholders to see where they can make "the kinds of sustainable and transformational changes that have long been the goal of the field"—and how they can counteract "the lack of resilience that has plagued so many WAC programs and may threaten the field itself" (p. 234).

Along these lines, what insights does this particular whole-systems approach to one institution's history of WAC reveal that other institutions might take into consideration? Possibly, the following:

- External consultant-evaluators such as those from the CWPA can play a critical role in establishing a precedent and local institutional context for assessing WAC-program sustainability.
- Serviceable SIs and institution-specific rubrics may derive from a combination of whole-systems theory and institutional criteria for assessing other programs or initiatives, when it's not feasible to collaborate more closely with WAC stakeholders.
- A whole-systems assessment of WAC's history can yield the long (and quantifiable) view of WAC's institutional impact on faculty and students.
- Historical patterns surface that can indicate what systemic factors have contributed to WAC's expansion and contraction—and the effects that these patterns have exerted upon faculty and students.
- Useful ways to deal with or work around obstructions to WAC's development and continuity become clearer with a whole-systems approach, as do the ways that campus ideologies about writing have evolved or devolved.

And, in general:

- A history of WAC, informed by whole-systems theory, can provide a powerful instrument for program advocacy

As for advocating for WAC at my university—or any other university—making and updating historical studies from a whole-systems approach can also provide a basis for keeping university-wide conversations about writing at the forefront. Such a history can thus bring stakeholders together at regular intervals for WAC pulse-checks. Such a history can raise questions and encourage stakeholders and decision-makers to focus on how WAC's SIs might change to accommodate demographic shifts in student populations, keep pace with enrollment concerns, reflect adjustments to admission requirements, affect retention rates, and so forth. And most important, such a history can inform a university about its faculty's desire to engage in the high-impact practices that uphold the quality of general education and undergraduate majors.

At the same time, several recommendations emerge from this historical study. WAC program administrators who would undertake a similar project should plan from the start to set up and maintain a close working relationship with the institution's writing center and join it in developing mutually useful data-gathering strategies. They should obtain annual reports and eight-year reviews of the UWC and

FYC programs to see where collaborative ventures have—or could have—benefitted them all. They need to form an immediate alliance with the university's professional development office to coordinate workshops and other events. They will also want to establish a rapport with university assessment officers and the university's annual data reporting centers to see how WAC assessment might be folded into these entities' routine operations. WAC administrators should identify the university's committees for curriculum development and improvement—and wherever possible, examine annual summaries of these committees' activities. Under advisement, they might embrace opportunities to serve in other administrative roles where WAC could feasibly participate in academic units' functions and policy-making efforts. They should network with key campus leaders whose institutional memory will help put WAC's mission and goals in perspective.

Twenty-some years is a daunting span of time to reconstruct WAC's presence on a university campus. But using whole-systems theory has helped me (and will help others) gain a much clearer picture of what the program has been, what it is, and what it can become. I surmise that if other WAC administrators on other campuses replicate a similar project, they can gain the same.

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