Interview

Carol Rutz: Conversations about Writing in WAC and Beyond

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The *WAC Journal* is delighted to introduce a new column "Conversations about Writing," formalizing the interview columns conducted by Carol Rutz over a period of 12 years in the early 2000s during which she talked with colleagues in the field about their writing practices. In identifying a column, we hope to invite ongoing dialogue about writing across the curriculum (WAC) and all the ways it is implemented in workshops, classrooms, and campus environments. As we well know, WAC offers an umbrella for a broad range of pedagogical and scholarly endeavors from writing to learn, writing in the disciplines, writing-intensive and writing-enhanced classrooms, and more broadly, communication across the curriculum.

Investigating her colleagues' engagement with WAC, Carol has shown us the value of interviews. Research has demonstrated their usefulness. For example, Dana Lynn Driscoll (2011) found for primary research that interviews provide in-depth views into people's "behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes" (p. 162).[1] Similarly, Baird and Dilger (2018) suggest that for understanding the contexts of writing transfer interviews "provide insight into motivations by investigating [instructors'] writing lives, classroom practices, and engagement with curricular structures while simultaneously illuminating department cultures" (p. 26).[2] Carol's interviews with scholars dedicated to WAC, from John Bean (2003) to Jill Gladstein (2016)[3] not only succeeded in bringing to light multiple different strategies for helping faculty think about writing as a passion and a craft, but also portrayed these insights with zest and humor, allowing us to see the deep personal investments WAC scholars bring to their profession.

1. Driscoll, Dana Lynn. (2011). "Introduction to primary research: Observations, surveys, interviews." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, vol. 2, edited by Charles Lowe and Pavel Zemliansky. http://wac.colostate.edu/books/

2. Baird, Neil, & Dilger, Bradley. (2018, December 26). "Dispositions in natural science laboratories: The roles of individuals and contexts in writing transfer." *Across the Disciplines*, 15(4),21-40. Retrieved from https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/articles/baird-dilger2018.pdf

3. For a list of all the interviews by years, see Appendix 1.

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This interview, for which Carol and I communicated in June 2020 over Zoom, the virtual meeting platform, necessitated by coronavirus, proved useful to accommodate our distant locations in Minnesota and South Carolina, respectively, and provided a near face-to-face environment, a welcome break for both from quarantine. In conducting this interview, I hewed closely to the format Carol used in many of her interviews; I was conscious, also, of following in the footsteps of Terry Zawacki, who interviewed Carol in 2014 for the *WAC Journal*, entitled "The Tables are Turned."

I opened our conversation from a point that Carol had raised in response to Terry's question about Carleton College, the institution where Carol spent thirty years of her career.

Cameron Bushnell: One of the take-aways from your interview with Terry was about a particularly important role for small universities and colleges, like your institution, Carleton. Smaller, more nimble institutions could provide a model, you suggested, operating as a small, experimental laboratory for programs that could be taken out into the larger world. I'm curious as to how you thought that worked. Could Carleton be considered an incubator of sorts, a place for pilot projects? What we can learn from Carleton about the experiments you tried out over the years?

Carol Rutz: I'm not sure how it scales, frankly, but part of it, I think, has to do with the relationship I had with Carleton. For the first ten years I worked there, I was on the staff. I was in student services; I was in publications; I was in other places, and at that point, I decided to go back to grad school. But after ten years I knew everybody; it's a tiny place. And it's a very democratic place in the sense that—at least at the time, this would have been from like '83 to '92—things weren't as stratified in terms of status, and nobody was skipping lunch for email, so there was a lot more circulation. You saw people at lunch, you saw people on the sidewalk, and so it was, since I worked in so many different places and had different points of contact and the place is small, it didn't take much. If you're halfway alert, you kind of know what's going on.

Having worked in a number of different offices, I was able to connect people and ideas from across campus; this became particularly true after I left Carleton for graduate school at University of Minnesota but then returned to campus with new perspective.

When I went to Minnesota, Chris Anson [currently, distinguished university professor and director of campus writing and speaking program at University of North Carolina] was the director of writing and composition. I entered the PhD program with no illusions about finding a tenure-track job. I was over forty, and I was geographically bound, but I thought I could work in business, or maybe at a community college, or something. Mostly, I just wanted to learn how to teach, and

that certainly happened. To my great surprise after five years, there was an opening at Carleton, a temporary opening. A maternity leave and some other things fell together; two of my staff colleagues had sent me the job description independently, and so, I called the associate dean who was in charge of the search and asked her if it was appropriate for me to apply. She encouraged me: "Well, come see me." She put together a search committee, and I got the job. At first, it was just a temporary position for a year, and I'm thinking, "Okay, I've got this dissertation to write, I will have an office and a computer and a door to close. This is all good." Pretty much, that's how it played out.

At first, I wasn't doing anything spectacular at all except picking up the pieces of work for someone who was no longer available. But I was located in a building that was across the hall from the writing center, so I helped out over there once in a while, too, and did some training with them because in grad school, I'd done a lot of TA training. Additionally, since Chris and I together had led a College-in-the-Schools program, a dual enrollment program, I felt I could pretty easily step into the work required at Carleton.

It was a very congenial environment. People welcomed me back, which was very flattering. And then the dean launched a search for a permanent position. Now this would have been about '99, and this is how badly she misread the market: She launched a search for halftime adjunct in teaching writing and halftime administrator of faculty development and got a grand total of fifteen applications, including mine. So she dumped the search and asked me if I would continue while they figured it out, and I said, "Well, if you'll let me teach, yes." They agreed, so I never left.

CB: Ah, how wonderful to have it work out that way!

CR: I'm sure it wasn't a universal joy on campus, but it was enough to keep me there and keep me busy in a good way, and I'm very grateful for people that took that chance.

CB: Would you say that Carleton has always been a good place for you, the right place for you? You had the experience of a small college, but also of a big university when you went off to Minnesota. Did you ever wish you'd worked in a larger institution?

CR: That was very interesting, you know; Minnesota is huge and well I don't know who put that that river in the middle of it, but you know it's complicated, and I enjoyed it for the most part. But it was nice to go back to where I knew where the bodies were buried.

CB: I sympathize; I've often wished for a smaller venue for teaching and working. I have a career not unlike yours in that I went back to school after I had worked elsewhere, in my case, in nonprofit and in business at Nike International for a while. When I went back to school, I felt like you and had no illusions of working in academia. But I decided to go for it when my family urged me to.

CR: It was wonderful in some surprising ways. We had kids in middle school at the time, and I could work out my schedule so that I got home pretty much when they did, which would not have been true if I would have kept an eight-to-five job. And I ended up being the one that went to the track meets and went to the consults or—what do you call them?—the meetings where teachers tell you how your kid is doing, and all the other events because my husband traveled a lot. It worked out really well in that respect, and I think my kids paid attention to what they were seeing: Here's a grown-up working hard on stuff and staying up late at night writing papers and things, and I think they learned some things from that model. Well, it was not easy. It certainly wasn't cheap, even though I did have support, but you know, we got by.

CB: But to return to Carleton's small experimental laboratory—you said you weren't sure that the scale up happens. Could you explain?

CR: Well, my experience is my experience. So again, I'm not sure how generalizable it is, but it seemed to be the case—both where I worked and in the larger network of WAC people that I got to know—that these things are relationship-based. If people are interested in you and trust you and you show your interest in them, things go well. But if there's some sort of interference in the form of status or disciplinary disagreements or methodological disagreements, it's harder. I feel very fortunate that I've been interested in everything my entire life. (Again, I grew up under a field biologist.) And so, if somebody from computer science wanted to talk to me about what they were doing for senior projects, I was all ears, and I wanted to help. I don't know that my colleagues in the English department, let's say—I was never fully part of the department; they made sure of that—but my colleagues in the English department weren't necessarily tuned that way. They were specialists; I was a generalist and happily so.

CB: That's a great segue to the next question. I find myself exceedingly concerned and curious about this divide that exists between writing and literature in English departments—and we certainly have it. As director of a relatively small professional writing center at Clemson, Pearce Center for Professional Communication, I've experienced some resistance in the English department for writing across the curriculum activities, such as training graduate TAs, who not in English not only how to write better themselves, but more importantly, how to teach writing themselves

to their undergraduate students. Even though graduate TAs are often responsible for assigning and assessing lab reports, for example, the question always seems to come up: can non-English majors effectively teach writing?

I noticed this issue of disciplinary divide informed one of the first questions that you asked in the interview with John Bean. I love the way you put it: "How did a nice Spenserian scholar find himself in this writing field." What kind of a divide did you find in your career, and what can we do to, or should we do anything, to try to ameliorate it?

CR: Well, I don't know. I guess it may be more place-specific than we would like to think. I mean, there may be traditions that are hardened in certain places that are just impenetrable for whatever reason. It may be a question of, as it was at Carleton, certain people needed to leave, you know, needed to age out, since they were iconic, revered from the old days. Those people eventually left, but sometimes it just takes patience. I think it helped that I was not much of a threat to them. I was in a non-tenure track job; I taught a couple of courses they didn't want to teach, so that was fine with them, and I took on advisees. Not major advisees, God forbid, but, you know, in terms of the freshman and sophomores that are crawling all over the place in a small school looking for direction.

I also did a lot of outreach, and I don't think they ever noticed until—this is really funny—the college was slow to ramp up reviewing procedures for non-tenure track and staff. And so, I had my first real teaching review (outside of the usual annual review with my supervisor in the dean's office, which was usually, you know, "Keep up the good work") only after I'd been teaching for years. The first teaching review with observations and student evaluations and so forth wasn't done until I'd been in the job fourteen years. That meant that three senior members of the department who were in the next wave after the crummy guys left were visiting my classes and looking at my CV and my publications and my evaluations. I'll never forget, the chair of the department, who was a fine Renaissance scholar, sat me down partway through this review and said, as he looked at my CV, which was full of conferences, papers, publications: "You know, I just can't believe that we've had somebody working with us all these years who's more productive than anybody else in the department." I taught like two or three courses a year, but I also did a lot of faculty development, and I was on the road a lot doing conferences and helping people, mostly at other small colleges. I think I went to thirty-some consultations over the twenty years that I was in that job—a lot of it was about WAC, a lot of it was about assessment, a lot of it was just, you know, we need help with X. And I think he was totally blown away by that, and I looked at him, and I said, "Hey, it's been fourteen years. Stuff adds up!" I mean, come on!

I had been so far under the radar from their perspective and so far out of their interests—and actually, vice versa—I didn't care what they were doing because I knew they weren't particularly receptive. Now I have to say this: Individually, they were fine, with one exception. One person was horrible, but everybody else was very nice. We got along fine—they came to my workshops; I went to their talks; it was good. But in terms of collaboration or having a project together…hmmm [not so much.]

CB: But I wonder if you ran into colleagues, often from the English department, who think that they are the only ones that should be teaching writing; the implication is that it wouldn't be wise to leave the teaching of writing to a chemistry professor, for example. There seems to be resistance, even suspicion that it could be effective in teaching students how to write.

CR: Well, see, that's our big coup at Carleton. And this is what the English chair realized during that review. He says, you know, Carleton was a big leader in writing across the curriculum since the '70s. Because it was fired up by Dean Harriet Sheridan who got it going in English, her home department, English was stuck with it, along with a few other select places on the campus. But the chair said, "You've changed that; you've taken that burden away. Things are spread out; everybody's doing it. Everybody's happy to do it. This has been wonderful." But it took that focus on the fact that the curriculum had spread out and that I was willing to go out and do what you just described—hold somebody's hand while they tried to figure out how to build a rubric or whatever the problem was. There were people in that English department when I came back to Carleton who were still using, an old textbook that had a bunch of nineteenth and twentieth century British pieces like Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant"; that's the kind of stuff they were using in a writing class!

CB: Sounds like it was the wrong text.

CR: You know, it was crazy, but they didn't know that. Their approach was a very high, *belle-lettres* kind of a philosophy; that's what most English instructors thought they were supposed to do. And I'm sure they carried that in from their own graduate training. Well, anyway, we did disrupt that content. The other thing that disrupted this aesthetic approach to teaching writing was the introduction of sophomore portfolios for assessment; we read portfolios from every sophomore, which changed faculty attitudes, particularly of those in English and history who had done most of the writing instruction up to that moment. They suddenly realized that great writing was going on everywhere and that we were all teaching the same kids, all of us. And that if we were all holding to the requirements like revision and multiple drafts—the obvious things that make writing better—then students were going to do it. They weren't

going to whine because one mean writing teacher was making them do something that they didn't have to anywhere else in the world. We changed that.

CB: That's fabulous! So I'm curious: One of the—and this may be a small school thing, but I'm really interested—how do you help the chemistry professor, co-teach, for example, and yet avoid an expectation that you as the writing teacher would do all the feedback on the paper as the "expert." How do you make sure that both content *and* assessment are conducted in partnership? What do you do if you encounter resistance from instructors outside of the humanities who insist "We're in math, we don't know how to write." Even though they have degrees and surely are published in multiple venues! I think sometimes the protest arises out of fear that it's not their field.

CR: I can remember starting workshops with people from all kinds of disciplines, and the first thing they had to do was make a list of everything they were writing right now, from Christmas cards to grocery lists to scholarly work to whatever. We expose that they write—they write all the time. And that they'd learned that. That was the next phase: Where did you learn to do this? And for most of them, if they're lucky, it was in grad school. Otherwise, it was on the job. Grant proposals, all that kind of stuff, on the job. And you know, they figured it out themselves. "This is nuts. I've got smart students who want to go on and do great things in the world; it's my job to help them. And this is one of the ways it's going to make a difference." They get it.

CB: That's interesting. I love the fact that you don't let them sit with this myth that they're telling themselves.

CR: No, I'm mean and evil, through and through! I was provocative, and I got away with that, you know. Again, we all knew each other reasonably well, and with new people, of course, it's easy because they want to be accepted and they want to be taken care of, and I was more than happy to do that. But in many cases, it was just, by the time many of these individuals and various departments were catching on, they were immediately evangelistic—immediately. They would see the reasoning, they would see the benefits to their students, they would start showing off their students' work, and that's how it spreads.

CB: Was it simply fortuitous that you began your career studying with Chris Anson? Maybe he wasn't as well known in the WAC field then.

CR: He was, even in the '90s. He was doing lots of workshops and conference gigs by then, and he was also a full professor—and one of the handful of Regent's Professors. He was highly regarded.

CB: Was he?

CR: At the time I arrived in 1992, I didn't know anything about him. Again, I was place-bound, so I applied to Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, and I got into Wisconsin and Minnesota, but Wisconsin was going to be a tough commute, so I went to Minnesota. I was very fortunate to be there at a time when the kind of teaching techniques I needed to know were being taught. The fact that I was older and that there were administrative roles in the [WAC] program meant that I got to be helpful. It didn't hurt a bit when it came to recommendations and coming back to Carleton where I'd already been in lots of jobs. But now, I had even more job experience that was pertinent to what they needed. I think that really was just plain luck.

CB: Well, it does seem like it worked out well. One of the things that I've been immensely grateful for is that Art Young was a predecessor (a few people removed). But it was very nice that I got to meet him sort of after the fact. He retired the year that I came, in 2007.

CR: And [Kathleen Blake] Yancey had been gone for a while, right?

CB: Yes, she'd already been gone. I didn't actually meet her, but have met her since at conferences, but I didn't actually get to work with her. Art lives in the area, so I've had the pleasure of getting to know him, which I'm very glad about. I was at a workshop last year for emerging, restarting programs, and Chris Anson was the facilitator, and that was a great pleasure to get to know him.

CR: He's extremely good at workshops. People just get completely enthralled.

CB: I want to go back to that issue of administrative work and sort of tie this into the sort of backhanded question with Stephen Wilhoit where he talked about stealth WAC. He was getting to the idea that people don't realize how much leadership is involved in WAC even though administrative leadership is critical to running a writing program. But I also like the idea of stealth, of coming in through the back door, of getting things done by starting where possible. I guess I'm partial to the term because I feel I've sort of had to go through the back door. At Clemson, I have not started with faculty workshops, so it feels a little backwards. But I started where I felt like I could start, which was with graduate students. I like the question you posed to Stephen, and I just wondered whether or not you felt that there were ways that somehow we sort of have to, many times, have to come through the back door and discover more that is required of us in these writing jobs than perhaps meets the eye when you first get in there.

CR: I can't remember how I phrased it. Do you have it in front of you?

CB: He used the term "stealth" in relationship to "talking about how easy it is to overlook the leadership necessary to the writing program administration."

CR: Well, at that point, Steve and I had been collaborating a lot over the years. I think we met at WPA conferences, and then we'd bump into each other at 4 Cs. We saw each other a couple times a year. I did bring him in to do a workshop with my faculty fairly early on, and he was a great hit.

One of the things that Steve really epitomizes for me is that he's a guy in the right place. He's working with this Catholic institution, the University of Dayton, and he has the real belief in and mastery of servant leadership. That's where he starts. He organizes for faculty these year-long seminars they have to apply for, I think. It could have changed since we've talked about it. And they met regularly. I don't know if it was every week or twice a month or something, but there was a curriculum. And he really held to that and held them to it. And again, it turned out to be sort of evangelistic; people that experienced that tended to contaminate their colleagues in really good ways. And that's just the kind of guy he is. And I think one of the things that interview talked about is how his kids blamed him for all the writing they were doing in their high school because the high school had reached out to him, and he responded. I mean, it's just who he is. His techniques and his foundations are solid, and he's a quick learner and establishes rapport very easily. I think that's why it feels stealthy sometimes because you don't see it coming.

CB: As I remember your interview, Stephen talks about the things that got done and how they got done, the sort of forceful imperative that he brought to the job. Stealth isn't mentioned anywhere except in your title; "Stephen Wilhoit: A Stealth WAC Practitioner." I thought it so interesting that you put together his personal and programmatic attributes in a way that captured, I don't know, how he works magic somehow."

CR: He's a magic mushroom!

CB: That reminds me to ask about people like yourself who started in the '70s and were, you know, the engines behind WAC and …

CR: I wasn't there in the '70s!

CB: So you were there in the '90s?

CR: No, no I inherited that. I should have been clearer about that earlier. I inherited a faculty that believed in writing pedagogy. But it wasn't very systematic, and there were people who could exempt themselves. And that's less common now. Again, assessment is what changed that.

CB: So could you explain this to me. I'd like to be doing more faculty development, but I'm not certain how assessment becomes the motivation for faculty. It seems a mystery. In other words, how do we get the faculty to be interested in assessment, in ways that makes faculty development sort of the thing that they want to do?

CR: Well, actually, they don't want to do it. They don't want to do assessment.

CB: That's my experience.

CR: They don't want to do it. And that was the case when I came back to Carleton, but we were at a point there where a local foundation in St. Paul that had given us money pretty regularly had essentially extended an offer, you know, "send us a proposal for something that you really want to do, and we'll be happy to review it." And my boss, Elizabeth Ciner [now Emerita, Department of English, Carleton], who's a genius at this kind of thing, said, "We've got to do something about writing" because at that time, again, we still had these pockets of practice, but it was kind of on its last legs. The system that Harriet Sheridan[4] developed, allowed students to choose to more or less attempt the writing requirement in a range of courses. But that meant the professor had to agree that a subset of the class was doing more writing than others in the class, and then had to deal with the management of the two tracks of instruction. To help them with that problem, Sheridan also invented what we now call writing fellows or writing assistants. You had senior English majors that would help with the assessment, essentially. At the end of the course, the kid might get a B for the course, but not pass the writing requirement if her work didn't show well enough. That was the system that was in place, which was twenty-five years old and moribund. Something had to change.

So we asked: "what are we going to change?" We started working on what we could do, and since I was fired up after going through this graduate program about Writing Across the Curriculum and the people who were doing the research, which nobody on my campus knew anything about, I said, "Let's get money to bring people in and help us with this. Let's learn what assessment might be like; let's find out about barrier exams and find out about rubrics. Let's find out about placement. Let's find out about all this stuff that we aren't doing." Well, we put all that into the grant, and then the reviewers said, "Well, that's nice, but where's your assessment of what you're going to do?" Oh. So we went back to the drawing board, and we decided that what we needed to do was get faculty to—not get them to, but expose faculty to—more writing than what they were assigning, that we had to make that distinction:

4. In 26 years at Carleton, Sheridan served variously as the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities, English Department Chair, and the university's acting president; she went on to be undergraduate dean at Brown University, 1979-1987.

Assigning writing is one thing; teaching writing is something else. And our genius idea was to require students to—well this had actually come up years before in a review of the writing program in the early 90s—but now we thought: "It'd be nice if everybody had students collect all their writing and we could kind of look at it at the end. But how would you ever administer that?" We decided to put a frame on that and design a way for students to submit a manageable amount of stuff to be read that was bounded by criteria. It had to be done at a strategic moment in the sophomore year that fit with our calendar and when the majors are declared and all that kind of jazz. And we'd have faculty read them and score them, and for anybody who didn't pass, we would offer remediation in the form of working with me or with the writing center or whatever seemed to be appropriate. That got funded.

With the grant, we still got the visiting speakers to tell us about good assessment and WAC stuff. We also got the funding for the portfolio project, which meant like the first time we read portfolios, Kathy Yancey, [currently, Kellogg W. Hunt Professor of English and distinguished research professor, Florida State University] came in. She set up the readings. For the second time, we hosted Richard H. Haswell [Professor Emeritus, English, Texas A&M.] We had fabulous, well-experienced people, and Bill Condon currently Professor Emeritus, English, Washington State University, was the overall consultant for this whole business. So, all in one swoop over six years, my colleagues were exposed to the scholarship in the field and the scholars themselves, who are all very approachable and tootin' fun to be with. Faculty read all this writing that they did not assign—that's what finally did it.

CB: Interesting! So the lesson is that the students are learning to write in all these other different places and that . . .

CR: Yeah, and those professors who were claiming they couldn't write had to admit they have amnesia. They did that stuff. They just don't remember. They made it through the bachelor's degree from history to French to biology to whatever, right—that's how you survive college. You know, it was so intuitive in those days. There was no writing center when I was an undergraduate. There was nobody telling me in detailed assignments what was expected. It was, "write about the Civil War" or whatever the heck. That's gone. I mean, our faculty now have superb methodology in terms of presenting assignments and evaluating them and helping students understand their strengths and weaknesses. I have to say that they were already really, really good because the students are so good, but now it's phenomenal what they get out of all of those kids!

CB: That's amazing. We still have many faculty that don't use rubrics; their graduate students tell them how useful they are, and they're shocked; they just don't realize how much easier grading can be.

CR: I still have colleagues that line edit. Sometimes you just got to give up on it. But at the same time, they know what they're looking for, and they also know that their other colleagues are using rubrics. Or their other colleagues are doing pop quizzes or other things that mitigate the problems that everybody is trying to work on. Because there's more of a team feeling to the whole thing.

CB: That's great. After hearing the way things unfolded at Carleton, I have to agree with your hesitation. I'm not sure if it's ever going to scale up, to be appropriate for a university like Clemson that is kind of siloed. If we could get some group of stakeholders together . . .

CR: Well, that's where you should talk to Steve Wilhoit. That's the kind of thing he did; he did it through the learning and teaching center, this seminar that he's been doing for however long. He could help you with how they got started, who paid for it, and so on. You might want to give him a call. I hope he's still there. Anyway, he's one of those people who can help size up the situation on the campus and help choose people who are willing or even invite people who are unwilling—sometimes that works just as well. The cohort model, as you know, is so effective.

CB: One of the things you talked about with Bill Condon was his opinion that you really needed to attract the tenure and tenure-track faculty to your program, as well as the adjunct and lecturers, even though the latter tend to be much more interested in this stuff than the tenure and tenure-track. Do you think that kind of balance among faculty ranks is necessary for a successful program?

CR: Bill was always in large universities, and his work with us, I think, was revealing to him. I think he started to change a little bit on that. And then when he and I and others got that grant from the Spencer Foundation and wrote that book on faculty development, a lot of what he provided from Washington State was evidence that, at the college level, the department level, the unit level, and among people like lecturers and TAs, there was great faculty development going on that the top end didn't know about. So I think he was much more, well, he was excited about that professional development that was going on kind of under the radar. He could see how much it counted; that students were benefiting—that's the main thing. But also, he also realized that you can have institutional aversion, maybe, to some of this stuff, but you can still promote it.

CB: I find that really encouraging because I do find a lot of enthusiasm among my lecturer colleagues for what we're doing, and so maybe I don't need to be concerned with getting the tenure-track, at least in the first round. Maybe you can get some enthusiasm going on the campus and some stakeholders identified in other departments, which is what I need to do more of, I feel.

CR: I remember being asked many times when I'd visit different campuses, "How do you get faculty to participate, and I remember saying, "I have to push back on that a little bit." That sounds like faculty are a problem to be managed, and if that's how you feel, that's going to make it hard for you to find a way to invite them into something you know is good, especially when you also know it's hard work, but it's going to be better for them when they learn how to do it. And that sounds very school-marmy. That's hard. So the trick is in the inviting part, I think, in many cases. If you're looking for stakeholders, you might want to start with the people you're having coffee with, the people whom you walk home with or those you meet informally. You're working with lecturers from a bunch of departments?

CB: One or two from engineering, who I was happy to meet, but most of them are in English, so I need to branch out a little bit.

CR: Well, yeah, but that's a fine place to start. They're enough different that they're going to learn from each other without even trying. I was at Otterbein College in Ohio shortly after I retired, in fact the last paid workshop I did. And they were having all kinds of problems. There were giant budget cuts and enrollment worries and God knows what all, and some of the fallout had to do with changing requirements. I was going to see two groups that day. In the morning, it was English people; in the afternoon, it was going to be more WAC-ish. So it was kind of hard to prepare for, but I brought everything I could think of, and it went fine in the morning. We came up with some great ideas for trying to accommodate the fact that the requirements had changed, which, I think, boiled down to the fact that no student had to take more than one course in literature, which didn't seem to be enough for the group teaching those courses.

Finally, toward the end of the morning, one woman was visibly distressed. So I finally said to her, "Well, you know, all your students are going to major in something. And every major has a literature. And your English majors come to that literature after twelve years of preparation. That's not the case in mechanical engineering. That's not the case in psychology. But because they've been exposed to your literature in high school and in required classes here, they have tools that help them address the new literature, as well as the guidance of people that are experts in it. And this is how it's supposed to work." And for some reason, in that group, that was a huge

breakthrough. I don't know how it came out of my mouth, but it was one of the few times in my life where I felt I was making a difference.

CB: Wow, that's great, really. And how smart! People draw such divides, not only between English and writing, but of course between sciences and humanities. Many don't think that anything you learn in the humanities might actually be applicable, and vice versa, actually.

CR: Which is baloney. We're in the liberal arts, aren't we? I don't know. But anyhow, something you might want to try is to talk to people about the major and writing in the major; often that's a way in.

CB: In your interview with John Bean, one of the things he said that really struck me was he said, "I made my breakthrough when I could help finance solve the problem in finance. You know, and I wasn't trying to do anything other than address a problem that the finance department had." He was really making the point that it's fruitless to insist that you're an expert on writing and that you're coming into someone else's class to rescue writing instruction. The way he put it in your interview was very helpful. But I wrote down this idea of invitation, I think, is important. Well, I'm conscious of the fact that it's probably been too long here today, so, just two questions. One, I was curious, did you have that mentor like . . .?

CR: Well, I think in large respects, it was Chris. I mean, he did a really good job for me. He was my primary advisor. There were others on my committee who were better readers than he was because he was slow to get back to me. They made up for that, and he certainly supported me and wrote recommendations and did lots of things. I think he thought that in some respects I settled for Carleton, but he understood the economic and geographical and every other factor. And he came to campus, two or three times, maybe more than that, to do workshops with me, which was very flattering. And he was always so well received. But other people: Bill Condon was certainly important, Kathy Yancey was important, and Rich Haswell—we're still in touch, even though he's been retired a lot longer than I have. There are such a lot of fine, fine people out there that will pitch in. I think this is something I said to Terry, though maybe I didn't in the interview she did with me. When I would invite people to come to my school and do something, nobody ever said "no." It might take two years to set it up, but nobody said outright, "Oh no, I can't do it." They were all so willing and so available. For example, [Irwin] "Bud" Weiser at Purdue came for a talk—even though Purdue had no WAC programs whatsoever—to discuss how Purdue's Online Writing Lab led to the illusion they had WAC, and how the university had benefited from the misperception. I just can't believe that I lucked into such a friendly, scholarly community.

CB: I have thought that writing may be a more more generous field than English. You can run into a bunch of snooty, ego-driven professors —maybe anywhere—but the English department sponsors its fair share.

CR: I don't know, sometimes I think it's sort of a casting call.

CB: That's a good way to put it.

CB: Anyway, you're off to Cannon Valley Elder Collegium. How are you liking that, and is there a translation there between what you've done and what you're doing and what you'd like to do with them?

CR: Well, I did get that grant in, but for the first round, the Spencer Foundation was overwhelmed with responses. They made it a really short call and had three review dates, two in May and the last one was on June 8th. That's the one when we sneaked in under the wire. For their first review, they had to extend the review period, and they funded two percent of the proposals. So I'm not very optimistic. My only hope is that, first of all, our population is so understudied, and secondly, we're this little, tiny nonprofit out in the middle of nowhere with no resources so that, the proposal is essentially an assessment. I worked with colleagues from the Science Education Resource Center at Carleton, and the project is designed so that it's about classroom observations, student surveys, faculty interviews, and focus groups. There's no thumb on the scale. The outside people would be doing all the assessing, and then we would have a way of making sense of both student and instructor experiences as we change our delivery system from in-person classes to remote learning. This place has been running on autopilot since 1997. And this COVID is a sea change. It's also a total watershed in terms of how to engage older learners in liberal arts materials at a distance given that they're not going to come to a classroom; they're not going to do it.[5]

CB: Not right now, that's for sure.

CR: It's not going to happen, and if we have to go even another term without any connection with them, I think we're done; we have to try. We've got nine courses teed up for fall, and they're good! Instructors, many of them, are my old Carleton colleagues. They are stepping up; they are trying something new. They're worried about Zoom delivery, but they're very adventurous, and the material is solid. They have a reputation in the community. They're the kind of people who draw students anyway. I'm hoping that even with a reduced number of courses and a limited enrollment figure, that the classes will fill. Then people will have their new experience, and the

5. The proposal was not among the 2% funded in the final round.

next time it'll be better. Maybe by winter we can have some things in person, but I ain't holding my breath.

CB: I don't think we can really predict; it's kind of a crazy time. So, it's a whole range of courses? It's not just writing, it's not just . . .

CR: Oh, no. Let me tell you; I have them right here. We have one on the history of mathematics, one from a couple who grew up in Turkey talking essentially about sort of socio-political stuff, a course on Reinhold Niebuhr and democracy.

CB: Oh really, yeah, interesting. That's appropriate.

CR: It is! That should fill in a minute. We have a retired developmental psychologist doing "Numbers in the News: Lessons from the Pandemic." That should fill in a hurry. We have a philosopher doing ethics and literature. We have a retired minister doing "The Holocaust and The Churches." We have a wonderful retired physicist—who talked me into this job, but I still adore him—doing a course called "It's About Time." So, it's "time" in the sense of physics as well as philosophy and human experience. I took that course the first time he offered it; it's fabulous. And then we have a guy teaching Poetry 101; and we have "Oceans, Climate, and Corals." Presumably that course will draw connections and perspectives from Minnesotans since we have none of those things—given we have climate, but not oceans and corals. And that's about it.

CB: Sounds fabulous! So, Cannon Valley is around Carleton? Where is Cannon Valley?

CR: The Cannon River Valley is a chunk of southern Minnesota, one of the tributaries to the Minnesota River, which dumps into the Mississippi. And our catchment area is largely south and southeastern Minnesota; we typically have a couple hundred registrations a term. Some people take more than one, but we're aiming at, you know, nine courses, low enrollment of fifteen, total enrollment of 135. So if we can fill all that, that'll keep us going, and then we'll have some momentum into winter, however that shakes out. But the classes are very popular, attendance is good, and evaluations are strong. People miss them. It broke our hearts to have to cancel spring term. When we did a little poll—partly for the grant, but partly just to see if this was worth doing—people were very eager to get back into class. A few said, "Nope, not until there's a vaccine"; a few said maybe, but most said, "Online, sure, I'll take two." Or "I don't have transportation. This is the only way I can do it." Or "I moved away from Northfield; this would be great to get back in." That surprised us.

CB: Are you actually administering this program, and does it actually draw on what you did?

CR: Well when you were talking at first about this interview and future of WAC, I kept thinking, "This is where old WAC people go to die; the colloquium is a situation where you have to deal with everything—I mean oceans, Niebuhr, world cultures, the Holocaust—I'm game."

CB: Sounds actually fascinating.

CR: I think this conversation and one that I had recently with—do you know Susan Thomas down in Sydney, Australia? She's running a WAC program there, and she came out of one of the Georgia universities. I got to know her before she went to Australia through WPA mostly. But anyway, she's doing a collection, I believe, on something like "unexpected things in writing careers." She had questions for me about the faculty development/assessment thing, just as you were, and I think one of the things we talked about a lot was how essential it is in WAC (and this goes back to that Otterbein conversation too) to be respectful of many fields of knowledge, including their methods. That if you're going to sniff at test tubes as not being relevant to your moral worth or something, you're missing something. And you've got to be generous in your assessment of your colleagues, that they know a lot more than just their specialty. They have a lot to teach you.

CB: I completely agree; I feel that WAC is one of those centers or those collectivities where that interdisciplinary work actually happens, even though it's not usual, at big universities in particular. You know, the chemistry people are over here, and the history people are over here, and they never talk. And yet WAC is a center or a site where people can actually collect and share those ideas. I think it's almost more important than it ever has been. And yet, in some places, WAC programs tend to have cycles of strength and weaknesses on various campuses. Do you think there's a way to sort of keep them re-energized on a regular basis?

CR: Well, that is the challenge. Ed White always talks about it as a cycle, you know, a boom and bust, and that if you lose your director or something, it goes to hell, and that may be true in some places. I always viewed it as more of a sine curve and that my job was to keep the amplitude up. If things were sagging, I needed to do something about that, whether it was with the students or whether it was with the new faculty, whether it was with the Learning and Teaching Center, whether it was, you know, something sneaky and indirect like having lunch with a colleague of mine, I was willing to do that.

CB: I like the fact that you reported to the dean as opposed to, for example, the chair of some department, English for example.

CR: It turned out to be a good thing.

CB: Yeah, I was wondering if you thought it was a good thing and why. Is it because that automatically gives you reach across . . .?

CR: It cuts a couple different ways, Cameron. I think I was suspect because I worked for the dean. But on the other hand, the first ten years or so that I was in that job, I worked for a very compatible associate dean, Liz Ciner, who was also plugged in everywhere on campus. So she was a great broker. If I screwed up, she was there to set me straight or else to defend me, whatever was needed. After she retired, then I was reporting to a new person every couple of years, and that was less satisfactory. They tended to be associate professors who'd been picked out for some administrative experience, and then they'd go back to their departments and become chairs and other things. Lovely people, all of them. But at that time, the dean was not one to be inviting a lot of innovative ideas. I don't know how many times I would sit and talk to my current supervisor about something I wanted to do—for instance, I thought that communication across the curriculum is something we should get into and include non-curricular stuff and all kinds of things. We had Chris come in and do a workshop on that; people were all fired up. And so, I was looking for permission to start looking at grant opportunities. And, month after month, I would bring this up, and the current associate dean would say, "Okay, I'll talk to the dean," and finally he talked to the dean, and she said, "Hmm, not now." And that tends to be her default. I hate to think how she's doing these days with all the all the turmoil, because I think it's very hard for her to be adventurous. Now, you know, she's stuck. She's just stuck with this horrible situation, all this responsibility. For her, almost any twitch in a new direction is opening a can of worms. Poor woman. Her technique worked for a long time. I don't think it works for my successor. He would rather be in English, but he also might be more welcome in English because of his more literary scholarship. But in any case, for me, it worked when it worked. And then when it didn't work, I had to get sneaky.

CB: I'm really curious about this. I have split responsibilities, some to the Center and some to the English department. I teach a course in English and work with the graduate students in the center. We have a new dean coming on; I would like to actually make a pitch to actually report to him. And it does sound like there are some advantages to doing that, so I want to think about that.

CR: It could work. As I said, the one thing English, I think, appreciated about me is I taught first-year writing seminars that many of them were tired of teaching, and I taught them the way I wanted to (no shooting an elephant). I had a lot of fun with that, and they could deploy their people otherwise. I think they liked that, but they were…they were careful.

CB: Yeah, I guess, that's what has to happen. That about wraps it up. This has been such a pleasure, Carol. Thank you very much for your time.

Appendix 1

Up Close and Personal with a WAC Pioneer: John Bean (2003)

WAC and Beyond: An Interview with Chris Anson (2004)

The Tallest WAC Expert in North America: An Interview with Bill Condon (2005)

Martha "Marty" Townsend: A Different Kind of Pioneer (2006)

Terry Myers Zawacki: Creator of an Integrated Career (2007)

Considering WAC from Training and Hiring Perspectives: An Interview with Irwin "Bud" Weiser of Purdue University (2008)

Richard H. Haswell: A Conversation with an Empirical Romanticist (2009)

Making a Difference through Serendipity and Skill: An Interview with Kathleen Blake Yancey (2010)

A WAC Teacher and Advocate: An Interview with Rita Malenczyk, Eastern Connecticut State University (2011)

Joe Harris: Teaching Writing Via the Liberal Arts (2012)

Committed to WAC: Christopher Thaiss (2013)

Stephen Wilhoit: A Stealth WAC Practitioner (2014)

The Man Behind the WAC Clearinghouse: Mike Palmquist (2015)

Jill Gladstein: A Data-Driven Researcher (2016)

and . . .

The Tables Are Turned: Carol Rutz by Terry Myers Zawacki (2014)