Mapping the Present to Shape the Future: An Interactive, Inclusive e-Map Supporting Diverse WAC Practices and Writing Sites

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In this article, we share our experiences developing and launching an interactive digital map, *Writing Sites*, which explores WAC/writing trends at diverse institutions. *Writing Sites* 1) validates otherwise hidden writing initiatives, 2) highlights various forms of WAC/WID and writing programs (official and nonofficial), and 3) supports new-to-the-work WAC/WID practitioners and WPAs. Our map invites users to explore trends in writing at a range of institutions along institution size/type, descriptive data (WAC/WID and writing programs), support for multilingual writers, and incorporation of implied or explicit antiracist pedagogies and practices. By mapping present sites of WAC and writing practices, especially solicited from institutions and individuals situated at the borders of typical research, we hope to create space for more diverse, too-often marginalized voices to be represented, thereby creating a broader, more inclusive future for WAC as a scholarly community.

Imagine these scenarios:

An untenured multilingual writing specialist co-directs an academic support center that strives to forge informal partnerships with departments across campus at a small liberal arts institution without a named writing program. She hopes to expand the footprint of her center to one day include a Writing Fellows initiative. Does what she's doing count as WAC?

A community college professor who is a dual enrollment liaison tries to help her high school-based colleagues break out of the literature-only focus common to their curriculum; as her school has no named writing or WAC program, she takes the lead to create professional development sessions about interdisciplinary writing, including interviewing faculty from a range of fields about the writing they expect from students. Could she be considered a WAC professional?

Introduction

Perhaps due to writing studies' historical traditions of praising tidy organization—the precise outline, the carefully categorized notes, and all the other moves to "neaten" up the messy work of writing—we also have a rich history of mapping inquiries and projects, from categorizing our field's scholarship (Johnson, 2019) to mapping higher education's many sites of writing into orderly viewpoints and definitions (Gladstein and Fralix, n.d.; Klausman, 2008; Pinkert and Moore, 2021; Thaiss and Porter, 2010). While maps by their very nature represent an oversimplification of the world they represent, they—including pedagogical activities such as mental maps—provide valuable insights into people's perceptions of that world, along with their accompanying ideologies, perspectives valuable for those of us in writing studies (Reynolds, 2004). Many such large-scale mapping endeavors, such as the National Census of Writing or the initial Writing Across the Curriculum/ Writing in the Disciplines Mapping Project, collected data that identified trends across institutions and serve as the prevailing narrative for what WAC/writing practices and programs can do and, to some degree, should look like. Similarly, Ridolfo's rhetmap.org charts composition PhD programs and job listings via an easily navigated digital map.

Although these contributions remain undeniably relevant, their large-scale nature also means they remain limited in terms of *what* they show about the evolving state(s) of *where* writing happens, *who* is typically represented, and *how* the resulting data may not be particularly accessible to many WAC practitioners or WPAs. Stakeholders at the margins of writing studies (those who teach at institutions without named writing programs; direct programs without tenure, release time, and/or research support/funding for administrative work; teach part-time in settings without necessary training or acknowledgment; and so many more) can be excluded by these mainstream projects. Importantly, there has been a recent urgent push in the field as a whole to do better at making visible the experiences and labor conditions of multiply marginalized and underrepresented (MMU) WPAs, writing instructors, student populations, scholars, and scholarship, as well as at diverse institutional types (Carter-Tod, 2019; García de Müeller and Ruiz, 2018; Hancock and Reid, 2020; Itchuaqiyaq, 2022; Perryman-Clark and Craig, 2019). Despite the fact that such stakeholders actually represent the majority of writing studies practitioners, those of us in more liminal, less established positions are too often, quite literally, left off the map (Macauley et al., 2021; Ostergaard et al., 2019).

In situations where institutions have yet to establish outwardly visible cultures and practices of writing—much less funded, titled WAC/writing program administrator lines—WAC and writing program work still happens. In the absence of official

programs, many of us teaching and researching in these less defined spaces know that behind-the-scenes work can be just as robust, as intellectually challenging, and as impactful for our students. Perhaps even to a greater degree than scholars, teachers, or administrators in more established writing programs, uncharted writing advocates navigate twin imperatives to justify their own expertise and respond to the concerns of colleagues from across the disciplines (Hesse, 2005). Like more recognized counterparts, such practitioners work to expand students' and colleagues' ideas about writing, writers, and writing pedagogy. Those of us living, writing, and teaching within these margins do the work with even less published research that directly addresses the specific constraints, concerns, and affordances that frame our emergent praxis.

Another limitation to large-scale research is that findings can be hard to disseminate in inclusive and user-friendly ways. New-to-the-field WAC advocates, untenured WPAs, and other emergent practitioners frequently lack resources and time to comb through text-heavy reports to identify—much less adapt—practices that can speak to the idiosyncrasies of writing instruction in their unique institutional contexts.

Building on the foundational mapping projects such as rhetmap.org and the National Census of Writing, we aim to create space for too-often marginalized voices to join the conversation and get much needed support via a follow-up to the WAC/WID Mapping Project: *Writing Sites*. An interactive digital mapping prototype, with data on writing spaces and practices in diverse programs at diverse institutions, *Writing Sites* 1) validates writing initiatives that might otherwise remain hidden (Denham et al.,1996), 2) offers robust description to highlight the various forms WAC/WID and writing programs take, and 3) supports newer WAC/WID practitioners and WPAs in identifying how colleagues at similar institutions have tackled or are tackling similar tasks. In other words, we aim to elevate the very stories of writing work that are so often invisible. As WAC as a discipline continues to mature, we hope that our map transforms the landscape regarding who becomes represented and how.

Who Are We?

Each member of our team characterizes a specific niche of higher education in the United States. Although still far from universally representative, we particularly embody folks who are not in traditional tenure lines at research institutions. We should note that our team has varied over the years. Dr. Veronica Joyner co-presented in our first conference session in 2018, providing invaluable perspectives from her then-position as a graduate student navigating WAC work in writing center tutoring; she later began work on a dissertation focused outside WAC and moved on. A reality of those of us who lack tenure-track resources and frequently occupy liminal spaces is that at any point we may lose the time or energy needed to pursue endeavors like

this map. What we are trying to do with these maps is hard—made harder as well as more imperative by the marginal nature of our roles and consequently limited ability to engage with WAC as an (inter)national institution.

Despite mostly lacking tenure-track careers ourselves, we acknowledge that we speak from positions of relative privilege. We are white, with full-time, health-benefited jobs, and have been in our respective roles for several years; we recognize that a large proportion of folks in writing instruction roles are not similarly positioned. However, we aspire to use this privilege to help ensure more voices are represented in our work: we have focused extensively on equity, access, and social justice through iterative revisions of our survey tools and careful consideration of feedback offered at all presentations. We aim to ensure that colleagues in more precarious positions find participation in, and access to, our map both feasible and valuable.

To illustrate the possibilities of what we hope this map can and will accomplish for the future of WAC over the next 50 years, the following sections frame our own positions within WAC—liminal as they may be—by briefly discussing our own contexts and interests.

Kendon (A Current WAC Program Administrator)

Kendon, with his background of applied linguistics with a composition focus, seemed likely to assume a traditional academic career. Since he was interested in bringing together WAC and L2 writing, his dissertation advisors consisted of Christopher Thaiss, Michelle Crow (formerly Cox), and Dana Ferris, all prominent academics. However, that traditional tenure appointment has yet to materialize. Rather, Kendon currently manages the WAC consultation program at an R1, a position in which consultants provide pedagogical support for the six hundred instructors of all levels (graduate students through deans and provosts) who annually teach discipline-specific Writing Experience (our writing intensive) courses. In this role, Kendon supervises a team of between three and five full-time teaching faculty members who receive course releases.

While full-time, Kendon had been on a year-to-year appointment, with no concrete guarantee of continued employment (although that recently changed as he received continuing status). Teaching faculty at the University of California frequently struggle with feeling unheard or unsupported, which, in the case of these WAC roles, can result in tensions between WAC consultants and faculty in the disciplines, especially tenured professors. Kendon's WAC program also faces departmental/institutional pressures due to receiving the course releases necessary for consultation work: budgetary constraints and departmental needs result in continued scrutiny and costs justification. Perhaps strange for an independent writing program established by Christopher Thaiss that features internationally known WAC experts

like Dan Melzer and extensive WAC/WID course offerings, the current WAC program features only teaching faculty with little official job security or formal recognition by campus administration.

Greer (Former L2 Writing Specialist/WPA, Current Academic Honesty Administrator)

Despite having at one point entertained a goal of traditional faculty work, Greer ultimately chose to work full-time while pursuing doctoral studies and entered academia with the intention of forging an *alternative academic* (Bethman and Longstreet, 2013) career path. As that path unfolded, she gained stability and specialization, moving from applied linguistics/English for academic purposes and writing program administration to faculty development and academic honesty, writing a WAC-related action research dissertation along the way. This grounding has come at a cost—moving Greer further out to the margins from where WAC "typically" happens—but has also afforded opportunities that a more routine trajectory might never have opened up.

Greer's present full-time role blends policy development with academic affairs administration, including direct student and faculty support, at a midsize, private R1 in Western New York that emphasizes STEM programs. Greer also teaches part-time in the writing program, enjoying close working relationships with colleagues there. Together, they have evaluated text-matching software(s) and collaboratively revised source-based writing and plagiarism-related sections of the school's academic honesty policy. To move initiatives through faculty and senior leadership approvals, Greer cultivates relationships across campus, collaborating with and responding to concerns from colleagues in fields like computer science, biology, economics, religion/classics, and political science.

So far, Greer's expertise in writing and writing pedagogy has proven to be both respected and instrumental to her professional success. Her work crosses the curriculum, contributing to Rochester's culture of writing—but would almost certainly never be captured in traditional surveys or show up on a traditional map.

Robyn (A Community College, Dual Enrollment Administrator and Instructor)

Robyn writes from an academic position that is already seen as liminal within our larger scholarly conversations: the public two-year community college. The material conditions at Robyn's institution make sustained WAC work difficult: faculty's primary function is teaching, with a fifteen-credit-per-semester load, and her institution has no defined writing program.

Because her school's promotion model meant that salary raises required a doctorate, Robyn became what she jokingly called the "world's most reluctant PhD student" in a writing/rhetoric program, adding to her previous work in applied linguistics.

Fortunately, reluctance transformed into excitement while working with the then-director of her university's WAC program, Michelle LaFrance: she merged the casual conversations about writing she had long enjoyed with her colleagues across disciplines into her academic work and began finding small pockets of support, such as grants to begin WAC faculty groups. However, even as her institution is currently working on a re-accreditation plan centered on student writing, the college still lacks a defined writing program or funded WAC work, and tensions remain about just whose "job" writing is.

In Robyn's current role, half of her time is spent as a liaison with a cohort of about forty-five dual enrollment teachers who teach the college's two-semester writing sequence in local high schools. There, teachers have long struggled with uncertainty about what "college-level" writing means, and faced tensions with parents' and high-school administrators' concerns about content; this has become especially difficult during the second semester, when teachers are supposed to be developing students' argumentation skills while also complying with new state directives against teaching "divisive concepts" in K-12 schools.

Kat (A Tenure-Track WAC Program Administrator)

Writing from the WPA position with the most traditional institutional privilege, Kat is a tenure-track WAC director and assistant professor of English at a private SLAC in the upper Midwest. Her background is rhetoric/composition/writing studies with specializations in WPA work and L2 writing. Though this current position is stable and she enjoys relative autonomy, Kat's role has its own unique challenges. An overhaul in writing placement for incoming students has been an ongoing learning experience. Kat faced pushback from various spaces on campus (in disciplines across campus, but also within her own English discipline and the humanities division) when advocating for structural change (e.g., lowering course caps in writing intensive courses, updating WAC language in the faculty handbook). Another ongoing obstacle is sustaining efforts to support faculty in implementing program-wide policies informed by antiracist WAC (Syracuse University College of Arts & Sciences, n.d.) and other inclusive pedagogies at her predominantly white institution (PWI).

Kat also oversees the ten to twenty faculty members each semester who teach writing intensive courses in the college's core curriculum, conducting teaching observations in line with the institution's tenure and promotion protocol. As WAC Director, she also lends writing-related expertise beyond the classroom, providing faculty-facing professional development workshops and student-facing writing seminars, and acting as liaison for the cohort of local high-school English educators who teach dual credit courses. These initiatives—both visible and invisible—involve students, writing teachers, disciplinary colleagues, and sites of writing that the *Writing Sites*

map could help make visible and track over time so that actors in similar networks (Latour, 2005) can share experiences across programs.

Where Did We Start?

A series of happy circumstances drew the four of us together who otherwise might never have been grafted due to our very different positions and pathways. Our work really coalesced into the beginnings of the *Writing Sites* maps at a panel presentation at 4C18 (Kansas City), where we discussed our approaches to WAC/WID in our diverse institutions. Drawing on our conference experience, we realized that nascent academics such as ourselves would have benefited from more descriptions of WAC work in different institutions; coupled with support from Christopher Thaiss and his mapping project, this realization prompted the idea of creating an interactive map to make resources more widely accessible. Several conference presentations later (including IWAC 2021), we have continued to hone what features are emphasized in the map. We solicited feedback from conference attendees regarding blind spots in early iterations of our work, finding that people were eager to engage and positive about an interactive map-as-resource.

In addition to conferences, we met with Christopher Thaiss and Michelle Crow (formerly Cox) in December 2019 to gain some insights about our approach to our WAC survey. That fruitful meeting resulted in rethinking the initial scope of our project and how widely (or not) we wanted to start soliciting survey responses. Based on their feedback, we revised and honed survey items, in particular polishing word choices to help clarify our intentions.

We decided to be intentional about soliciting initial survey responses from specific institutions to populate our alpha versions of the maps. We relied on connections to colleagues at other institutions to pilot our survey and solicit further feedback about survey items. After revising yet again (by adding sections on professional development, academic honesty, and implied or explicit antiracist pedagogies and practices), we developed final survey versions and asked those who had already engaged with our research to retake the surveys, providing updated data.

Where Are We Now?

Because of the extensive nature of the data we are collecting, we decided early on that a single map would be overwhelming. Accordingly, we developed two *Writing Sites* maps currently in beta form: one charting WAC sites of writing and one exploring more traditional writing programs, equipped with various filters and search options. These are similar to rhetmap.org, with the distinction that our focus is not only on how to gain employment or understand employment trends (listing formally named positions and programs) but also on the work itself (describing program features

and material conditions to illustrate the myriad ways WAC/writing studies work gets done). Via the maps, users can identify trends across discipline-specific writing requirements and programmatic features at a range of teaching and research-focused institutions, including:

- Institution size/type
- Writing program descriptive data
- Student placement procedures
- Hiring procedures/degree expectations for instructors
- WAC/WID descriptive data
- WAC program sustainability measures as per Cox, Galin, and Melzer (2018)
- Support for multilingual writers (such as multilingual course offerings and TESOL-trained faculty or tutors)
- Professional development approaches and emphases
- Incorporation of antiracist pedagogies and practices (implied or explicitly identified)

See Figure 1 for an image of the WAC *Writing Sites* beta map. Note that in their beta forms, not all variables are currently represented; our ultimate vision for the maps requires more resources and programming than we have yet been able to leverage.
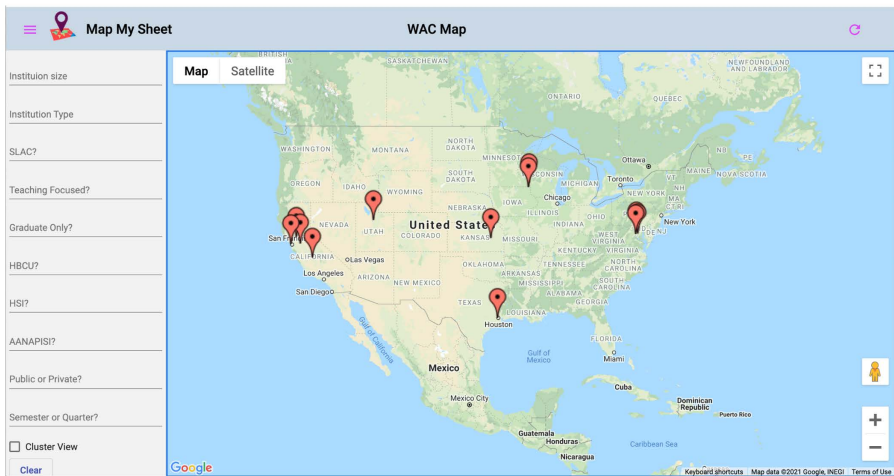

Figure 1. Image of the Beta Version of *Writing Sites* WAC Map.

Users can also explore the variables we include via snapshots of specific institutions. Survey respondents can elect to have their institutions represented anonymously,

using descriptors of their choice (e.g., "a master's-granting regional state institution in the Midwest"). Such institutions are placed in the geographical center of their descriptor or on a state boundary line to obscure identity. This approach provides users with critical information about an institution (as social norms vary extensively across the country) while still affording confidentiality for survey respondents who may be particularly vulnerable.

Where Are We Going?

As we move into the next stages of the *Writing Sites* project and consider its place in the future of WAC, our aims of continuing to expand and question borders of what it means to be a writing or WAC program—and to make more visible the often hidden labor in this work—are very much grounded in persistently precarious positions that have become the norm in higher education (Welch and Scott, 2016). Titled programs and directors, dedicated funding for sustained WAC programming, reassigned time for faculty to further develop programs and practices, or even the security of knowing the same people will have jobs, year-to-year or semester-to-semester, might be the ideal ground to cultivate sustainable WAC programs (Cox, Galin, and Melzer, 2018). However, the entrenchment of neoliberal visions for higher education will only continue to strip institutions of such features and create ever more austere conditions (Adler-Kassner, 2017; Welch and Scott, 2016; Wilkes et al., 2022). As Griffiths (2017) puts it, those of us who work in writing—even in positions as relatively privileged as we four hold—are all too aware that we face "the perpetual demand to 'do more with less'" (p. 63). If we only count as WAC that which exists in its traditional definitions and program forms, we are going to find WAC's presence continuing to dwindle—*fast*.

While recognizing the very real difficulties in many of our current material conditions, we also see our map as providing hopeful visions for where WAC can go. The map renders more visible the myriad ways WAC work gets done and better connects WAC enthusiasts and practitioners who otherwise might have not seen themselves represented. As just one case in point, we can look at the current position—or, more accurately, the absence—of knowledge and research on WAC in the two-year public system. Although these institutions actually provide the majority of undergraduate writing instruction in the United States (Hassel and Giordano, 2013), they are often found only in the margins of WAC research: of the twenty-four vignettes of WAC programs in various stages of development featured in Cox, Galin, and Melzer's *Sustainable WAC: A Whole Systems Approach to Launching and Developing Writing Across the Curriculum Programs* (2018), just three of these are taken from two-year colleges. While we do not discount the work this text does in illuminating sustainable practices for WAC, such a slim profiling of two-year schools might be interpreted to

indicate WAC does not exist in these spaces. Yet our preliminary mapping work suggests instead that interdisciplinary writing collaboration and ample labor based on core WAC principles both happen regularly in these spaces—it just may not be called by names or be structured in ways that are familiar to dominant scholarship.

Similarly, we hope that the *Writing Sites* WAC map may become a nexus for organizations and groups missing from larger conversations situated within current WAC. Specifically, we hope to feature representation and voices from regional WAC organizations, graduate student organizations, HBCUs, HSIs, AANAPISIs, tribal institutions, religious institutions, graduate-only institutions, etc. Administrators, staff, and faculty from such institutions should feel welcome to engage with the surveys and resulting maps and become involved with guiding future iterations or publications stemming from the project. (More thoughts about our approach to inclusion and outreach for MMU institutions and positions can be found in the following section.)

Much as Spiegel, Jensen, and Johnson (2020) argue that we need new ways to understand writing program work if we want to capture overlooked writing cultures (including, for instance, at two-year schools), we hope our map can do the same for WAC work in the liminal and transitional spaces where it happens: short-term grants that faculty cobble together, graduate student work funded via TA-ships, the work of writing centers and tutoring centers, isolated pockets of faculty collaborations—and the many more forms we likely have not considered yet. In short, we hope to bring the marginal into the map. Griffiths (2020) calls for more interinstitutional collaboration to "make more visible the overlapping missions of all literacy educators for the purpose of validating and sustaining more equitable educational practices" (p. 88). Along the same lines, given the tensions and limitations that all of us who work with student writing and writers face, we see the ability to find like-minded travelers—companions who have traversed a similar route, making do with similar sets of environmental constraints—as more important than ever.

What Do We Hope?

While we are excited to (finally!) have two interactive maps sharing variables of writing sites at a number of different institutions in beta form, we look forward to furthering developing our *Writing Sites* maps to include all variables collected from our surveys in the near future. We hope to utilize a purposeful sampling approach in reaching out to colleagues at institutions who might not have as much opportunity to participate in more canonical research. Cross-referencing Itchuaqiyaq's (2022) self-identified MMU Scholars' List with our own personal connections and contacts, then asking folks to take one or both surveys (or to forward the surveys on to others

at their institutions), could be one way to prioritize programs and efforts that have not yet become as visible.

We also want to recognize some important potential pitfalls with this approach. First, attempts to foster visibility and inclusion this way could easily become shallow, little more than superficial lip service. Second, they could end up imposing excessive time or resource demands on the very people whose roles can least afford to accommodate this. We want to do better than expecting marginalized persons to come to our work on our terms. Eventually, we realize, "doing better" will likely involve pursuing grants in order to more fairly and equitably incentivize, support, and compensate survey completion—as well as building out and hosting more sophisticated versions of the maps.

Even as we valorize and problem-solve pursuing a more selective approach, we acknowledge this could compromise—or at least complicate—the generalizability and objectivity of what we are doing. But especially at this point, as WAC moves into its next fifty years, we see such tensions more and more as the cost of doing inclusive business. We do not apologize for endorsing scholarly *praxis* as our goal (rather than seeking to keep "research" and "practice" in their traditionally separate domains). We do not believe other emergent, contingent, and liminal WAC enthusiasts should have to apologize for it, either. After making initial connections (e.g., through the MMU Scholars' List), we will ask participants to pass on our surveys to others who are likely to be missed. Such a snowball-sampling approach hopefully will prove effective at capturing voices who are usually lost.

We also will open up the surveys to anyone willing to take them via established listservs: our goal is that anyone and everyone who works with writing will feel invited to mark space on the map and continue enriching our field through an expansively inclusive view of what writing programs, sites of writing, and WAC efforts entail. (While we have no specific plans to pursue grant support as of now, eventually achieving some level of institutional/organizational sponsorship seems like a worthy goal. Funding could be used to create fellowships for conference attendance or to offer small stipends that offset time spent completing our surveys. Such gestures are admittedly small but could nevertheless form a significant building block in the effort to increase representation and expand inclusion of who or what gets counted—who or what gets to count—as WAC.)

Beyond mapping the admittedly simplified variables that our survey items and maps capture, we eventually hope to present narratives written by WAC/writing specialists on the represented campuses. Such narratives could be personal profiles (along the lines of our own WAC mini-biographies above), statements of institutional/program position, or something similar. So long as they are used to capture the essences of these institutions and help research move beyond more recognized quantitative

paradigms, they will have accomplished our goal. While research can certainly be a large part of what the *Writing Sites* maps facilitate, we also hope that vulnerable WAC/WID practitioners and WPAs will use them to identify trends across similar institutions and thus strengthen their own positions. These narratives could expand into traditional academic work via edited collections, along the lines of *Writing Programs Worldwide*, centered around particular contexts (i.e., WAC work/writing programs in community colleges, R1s, R2s, small liberal arts colleges, HBCUs, etc.). However, we also want to keep challenging and expanding the definition of what counts as "research." We see that as integral to what we mean when referring to inclusive WAC.

A final note to readers: If you feel on the margins of WAC, we end this paper with encouragement and solidarity. We want to hear and support your work in whatever manner(s) possible. (Also, please fill out the surveys and share the maps with friends and colleagues!) As the scenarios that begin this article—composite snippets of our own experience—show, doing WAC work without the recognition of a formal WAC title or the stability of consistent funding is isolating. We hope our maps can help more of us find paths to each other for the support and collaboration this vital work requires.

However, we suspect many reading this probably occupy a more traditional position situated within academia/WAC. For you, we end with calls to share our efforts—these surveys and maps—with friends and colleagues who might not be in a place to know about this *Writing Sites* project. Together, we can help map a broader, more inclusive future for WAC as a scholarly community.

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