



# *Writing Across the Curriculum in a Time of Change*

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*Change is mandatory, growth is optional.*

MICHAEL FULLAN, *Change Forces*

Not long ago, writing across the curriculum (WAC) passed its silver anniversary.<sup>1</sup> As an educational reform movement, it has had remarkable staying power, outlasting other institutional initiatives in higher education and enduring beyond the life expectancy that might have been predicted given the fate of similar movements in the past. Although David Russell in his history of writing in the disciplines has pointed to some of the parallels between now-defunct movements such as Deweyan progressive education, the social efficacy movement, or the cooperation movement, he and others (Thaiss; McLeod "Writing"; Walvoord; Herrington and Moran) have noted positive signs for its future prospects: its institutionalization in many universities, its capacity to link up with and inform other initiatives in higher education, and the positive effect teachers say it has on their pedagogy.

Yet if the prognosticators are correct, higher education is facing massive change in the next few decades, which could spell trouble for WAC programs. Change is already evident. State funding priorities are shifting from higher education to Medicaid,

prisons, and K-12 schooling (Gold and Ritchie). Legislators and boards of trustees are admonishing universities to emulate corporate models and do more with less—increase enrollments, cut faculty lines, and increase teaching loads; the use of cheaper adjunct faculty to fill vacant faculty lines, already a common feature of many institutions, is increasing (see Faigley; Leatherman). Tenure, which most academics see as essential to academic freedom, is under attack; the president of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges argued in an opinion piece for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that “tenure, as it currently operates, has become more of a problem than a help to our endeavors” (Magrath), and a keynote speaker at the 1997 National WAC Conference predicted that tenure would simply disappear in the near future (Sturnick). Public opinion, always mixed with regard to higher education, now seems more negative than positive; two essays in the *Wilson Quarterly* under the heading “What’s Wrong with the American University?” succinctly summarize the litany of complaints against higher education: the escalation of tuition costs, the emphasis on research at the expense of teaching, the feudal culture of the professorate (Finn and Manno; Wolfe). Peter Drucker, the management guru who predicted the effect of the GI Bill on U.S. higher education, is the gloomiest prognosticator with regard to the fate of higher education. In a 1997 interview, he stated flatly: “Thirty years from now the big university campuses will be relics. Universities won’t survive” (Lenzner and Johnson 127).

These developments, along with continuing low salaries and the poor job market for new Ph.D.s in almost all areas, have contributed to sinking morale among faculty. Those involved with WAC are not unaffected by the general atmosphere of gloom. The foreword to a recent WAC book has a *fin de siècle* tone:

The waning years of the twentieth century mark higher education’s winter of discontent, a bleak time of scarce resources and few bright days. Survival is most on our minds, not doing extras that help our students learn more and better. The quest for students, external funding, and ways to save money saps most of our institutional energy while faculty busily sandbag against rising teaching loads and class sizes. . . . Missing motivation, low morale,

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and declining salary dollars engender cynicism about the likelihood of imminent pedagogical change. (Weimer xviii)

In a time of retrenchment and of competition for scarce resources in higher education, will WAC survive in this new millennium?

We believe it can and will. One of the reasons for its continuing staying power is the fact that WAC, broadly conceived, focuses on writing as an essential component of critical thinking and problem solving, key elements in a liberal education. If writing is a mode of learning, if it is a way of constructing knowledge, then the integration of writing with learning will continue, in one way or another, to be seen as a central feature of the learning process. The Boyer Commission Report, one of the latest policy documents from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, recognizes this fact in its recommendations for a new model of undergraduate education at research universities; one of its recommendations is that such institutions need to link communication skills with course work (Boyer Commission 24)—a mandate for WAC if there ever was one. Further, as Russell points out, the WAC movement has been at heart more of an attempt to reform pedagogy than curriculum.

In most of its theory and much of its practice, writing to learn overshadows learning to write. This is one reason WAC has eclipsed all of its predecessors. It asks for a fundamental commitment to a radically different way of teaching, a way that requires personal sacrifices, given the structure of American education, and offers personal rather than institutional rewards. . . . A group of faculty who are personally committed to WAC can ride out any administrative changes (and perhaps increase their numbers), for the reforms are personal and not institutional, and their success depends on conversion not curriculum. (295)

What needs to be done, then, for WAC to continue to involve faculty in this sort of pedagogical transformation in the postmodern, or at least postindustrial, university? Discussing the future of WAC, Barbara Walvoord states that in an atmosphere of changing institutional priorities and funding opportunities, those of us involved in WAC must learn to collaborate with those involved in new initiatives, to “dive in or die” (70). Using an-

other metaphor, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges recently issued a report that called on public institutions to become architects of the coming change so as not to be its victims (Haworth). In the spirit of becoming architects of change, we find it fruitful to rephrase the question about WAC's future from "Will WAC survive?" to "*How* will WAC survive?" How will it grow and change—what new forms will WAC programs take, and how will they adapt some of the present program elements and structures to the changing scene in higher education? What new WAC theories and research will help lay the groundwork for future WAC programs? The essays in this book, written for all who are interested in what will happen to the WAC movement in this new millennium, attempt to answer these questions.

In this book, we focus on some important recent initiatives or developments in higher education (assessment, technology and teaching, service learning, learning communities, changing student demographics), showing how WAC can be involved with or already has adapted to and informed them; we also focus on some continuing program elements or structures (writing centers, peer tutoring, writing-intensive courses), examining how these have adapted to the changing scene in higher education. Finally, we highlight some of the most recent research and theory about WAC, speculating about the implications of such research and theory. We will say a few words in the following paragraphs about the topics of the essays that make up this collection, and then about the paradigm of change we need to keep in mind as we think about the future of WAC programs. But first, let us define more specifically what we mean by "writing across the curriculum."

## **What Is WAC?**

Like the term "general education," "writing across the curriculum" has come to have a vaguely positive aura, seen as something that is good for students even if faculty and administrators aren't sure what it is, precisely. Like general education programs,

WAC programs are defined in part by their intended outcomes—helping students become critical thinkers and problem solvers, as well as developing their communication skills. But unlike general education, WAC is uniquely defined by its pedagogy. Indeed, one might say that WAC, more than any other recent educational reform movement, has aimed at transforming pedagogy at the college level, at moving away from the lecture mode of teaching (the “delivery of information” model) to a model of active student engagement with the material and with the genres of the discipline through writing, not just in English classes but in all classes across the university.

When we speak of WAC, we are talking about two different but complementary pedagogical approaches; we may think of these under the headings of “writing to learn” and “writing to communicate” (see Reiss and Young, Chapter 3, in this volume). The former is most identified with WAC programs. Based on the theories of language and learning articulated by James Britton and by Janet Emig in her article “Writing as a Mode of Learning,” this pedagogy encourages teachers to use ungraded writing (writing to the self as audience) in order to have students think on paper, to objectify their knowledge, and therefore to help them discover both what they know and what they need to learn. The latter approach, writing to communicate, is based on theories of the social construction of knowledge, best summarized in Kenneth Bruffee’s article “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind.’” This approach encourages teachers to take into account analysis of disciplinary discourse and of genre theory (see Russell, Chapter 11, in this volume) as they construct and evaluate writing assignments. We cannot emphasize too strongly that it is an error to see writing to learn and writing to communicate as somehow in conflict with each other. Most of us who have been involved in WAC programs from the beginning see “writing to learn” and “writing to communicate” as two complementary, even synergistic, approaches to writing across the curriculum, approaches that can be integrated in individual classrooms as well as in entire programs.

Now let us turn our attention to the new directions WAC is taking, may take, or should take as we face the changes that are

inevitable in higher education. Each of the essays in this volume addresses one of the initiatives or forces now affecting writing across the curriculum; of these, none has been so public as assessment.

## **Assessment**

Assessment is not new in U.S. higher education—we have always assessed students in terms of how well they do in our classes, and the accreditation process has ensured periodic review of particular programs and of universities themselves. What *is* new is that assessment has been coupled with accountability in a competition for state and federal resources committed to higher education (see Zook; Lively). Legislators and taxpayers quite rightly want to know, in the face of steeply rising educational costs, that colleges are using public money wisely. The 1990s might be termed “the assessment decade,” with various states instituting their own methods for assessing higher education programs and student outcomes, and a call for a national assessment program which would determine whether students gain sufficient skills in their postsecondary education (Blumenstyk and Magner; Jaschik). The American Association for Higher Education now hosts an annual meeting which focuses just on issues of assessment,<sup>2</sup> and it has sponsored a number of useful publications on the topic.

Although there has been some resistance to the assessment movement by those who see it as interference in the educational enterprise, WAC directors have for the most part understood that it is wise not to resist, but instead to jump on the assessment bandwagon and attempt to steer it in the right direction. The danger of all assessment initiatives in education is that they become reductive; legislators and the general public have a good deal of misplaced trust in standardized tests and in the resultant tidy charts, graphs, and percentiles. WAC directors know that student or faculty outcomes in a WAC program cannot be reduced to a number. The challenge for WAC, then, is to develop assessment instruments for both students and programs that satisfy the stakeholders and also avoid positivist measures that do not adequately reflect the complexity of both student learning

and the WAC programs which are structured to facilitate that learning. In "Accommodating Complexity: WAC Program Evaluation in the Age of Accountability" (Chapter 2) William Condon discusses how WAC has adapted itself to the assessment movement, arguing that a constructivist paradigm is the most useful for WAC assessment.

## **Technology and Teaching**

The advent of networked computing, more than any other single factor, characterizes the postindustrial university at the dawn of the new millennium. What new technologies bring to pedagogy, and how these technologies might redefine the role of the teacher, have been issues of some speculation (see Young). College writing classrooms, which were among the first to embrace the heady experimentation of word processors twenty years ago, are often at the center of the debate about the worth of technology. Amid the promise of the revolution and democratization of writing in the digital age (Bolter; Landow; Lanham), and amid simultaneous warnings of the demise of serious writing as a central thread in our cultural fabric as a result of the ascendance of new media (Birkerts), the ultimate impact of computer technology on writing and the teaching of writing is still an open question.

Underlying the pedagogical debate are concerns that what digital technology makes possible in the guise of networked communications and transactions is *different* from what it is proposed to replace. Can a chat room on the World Wide Web serve as a functional analog to the verbal exchange of ideas that takes place between students in a classroom? Electronic mailing lists, newsgroups, bulletin boards, and customized virtual classroom spaces elicit similar questions, but in spite of the questioning, the technology juggernaut rolls on. One of the most useful WAC resources is now electronic: the *Academic.Writing* site at <http://aw.colostate.edu>. Indeed, technology and WAC have become so intertwined that one of the more recent books on WAC, *Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum* (Reiss, Selfe, and Young), doesn't even have the word *writing* in its title; WAC has become ECAC.

There is concern in some quarters that legislators and corporate donors may see technology as a panacea for all they believe is wrong with U.S. higher education. Recently a college president told a group of administrators (which included one of us) that a prominent banker in his state welcomed the advent of computer technology in the university since it would clearly save money. In his own bank, for example, they had replaced tellers with ATM machines, at a considerable savings. The implication was that one could replace expensive (and sometimes troublesome) professors with machines—Freire’s banking model of education run amok.

Taking advantage of the technological revolution, the University of Phoenix and the University of Colorado Online have been early out of the gate in delivering online curricula, offering practical alternatives, according to the University of Phoenix’s Web-based promotional materials, to “the traffic, confining class schedules, and overall lack of flexibility associated with a traditional educational setting” (*University of Phoenix; University of Colorado Online; Teaching/Learning Model*). How should those of us in traditional educational settings respond to what many college administrators see as a new market force?

In many ways, WAC as a movement is poised as a counterbalance to these online efforts, which work from a model of delivery of information and focus on independent study rather than on the learner as part of a social setting that promotes critical thinking and problem solving. Long an agent for the enrichment of education in traditional venues, WAC’s mission must now adapt to meet the challenges associated with this shifting spatial terrain—the challenges associated with maintaining the centrality of cognitively rich activity and writing and learning as a group rather than as a solo activity. In addition to shaping the integration of new learning technologies within the proximal world of the traditional university classroom, the WAC community must now look to apply its profound transformational strategies to new models of student-teacher and student-student interaction. With technology, as with assessment, it is essential for teachers to be involved so that the technology is put to good pedagogical use. In “WAC Wired: Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum” (Chapter 3), Donna Reiss and Art Young provide a



short history of ECAC and reflect on its effect on both writing to learn and writing in the disciplines.

## **Service Learning**

Service learning is one of the newest institutional initiatives on the higher education horizon—so new that when a special Modern Language Association session was proposed on the subject in 1995, the panel was rejected on the grounds that none of the members of the evaluating committee had heard of service learning or understood why a session on the topic would be relevant to MLA (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters 1). The service learning movement is growing, however; a recent volume on service learning published by the American Association for Higher Education (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters's *Writing in the Community*) has an appendix listing twenty-five program descriptions. There is now a service learning special interest group at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, with (of course!) a listserv devoted to service learning and writing.<sup>3</sup> Community service learning programs are popular with administrators because they involve outreach, mitigating the ivory tower image of the institution.

Service learning programs vary considerably across institutions, but they all have one thing in common: they attempt to connect the classroom to the community in a way that encourages experiential learning on the part of the students. In other words, they attempt to link town and gown in ways that simultaneously help the community and fulfill educational objectives. The goals of such programs are to help students understand the connection of learning to life, to stimulate students' social consciences (Herzberg 58), and to help establish writing as social action—to teach civic discourse (Heilker 72). The service component of courses is not meant in the spirit of noblesse oblige, but in the American spirit of volunteerism and social responsibility. At Washington State University, for example, we linked the research writing class and an introductory environmental science course; students sign up for both classes and conduct research in the writing class about the environmental issues raised in the sci-

ence class. The service component involves working with a local environmental group on tree planting and environmental cleanup projects.

Not all service learning programs are also WAC programs, but there are some important congruencies that make WAC and service learning natural partners. First, many service learning programs, like WAC programs, have faculty development as a key component; they involve meetings of an interdisciplinary group of faculty who learn from one another or learn together about the project to which they will assign their students. Faculty members are given the opportunity to be learners as well as teachers. Second, both programs provide students with meaningful writing tasks—real projects for real audiences—rather than what James Britton and his colleagues call “dummy runs,” or writing to the teacher as examiner (Britton et al.). Both service learning and WAC programs help students function not as students but as writers. Finally, both programs link writing to a particular social context and knowledge base, demonstrating the importance of contextual issues in learning how to write. In “Writing Across the Curriculum and Service Learning: *Kairos*, Genre, and Collaboration” (Chapter 4), David A. Jolliffe discusses further the congruencies of service learning and WAC, suggesting ways in which these programs might work in concert or adapt to one another.

## Learning Communities

One of the more sweeping educational reform movements in the past decade was the revival of general education, the third such revival in the twentieth century. Led in part by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and aided by grants from the Lilly Endowment, a number of institutions worked together to develop principles that lead to strong general education programs (Magner). Of interest in this latest general education reform is the fact that the principles developed focused not just on curriculum, but also on pedagogy, advocating a teaching tool already familiar (perhaps in other guises) to writing teachers—learning communities.

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These learning communities take many forms (linked courses, first-year seminars, configurations in which students taking the same classes also live together in the same residence hall). Sometimes they unite disparate course offerings into a cluster (Science, Technology, and Human Values, or The American Myth of Success); in other cases, students might be assigned the same book in several different classes and meet periodically to discuss that common text. The main point of creating a community of learners is to help students see the connections among the various general education requirements in the curriculum. But in many cases, the creation of learning communities has the same effect on pedagogy as do WAC approaches: the teacher moves from being the sage on the stage to the guide on the side, as students learn together and from each other. Courses move from being lectures to conversations (see Finkel and Monk).

The state of Washington, under the leadership of the Washington Center for the Improvement of the Quality of Undergraduate Education, has been the leader in this movement (see Graff; Gabelnick et al.), but institutions elsewhere have also developed innovative learning community programs. In “Is It Still WAC? Writing within Interdisciplinary Learning Communities” (Chapter 5), Terry Myers Zawacki and Ashley Taliaferro Williams discuss the learning community movement and its intersections with WAC, and examine two of these programs—the New Century College and the College of Arts and Sciences Linked Courses Program at George Mason University—to show those intersections.

### **Changing Student Demographics: Non-native Speakers of English**

Changing demographics in higher education mean that the “traditional student” (middle class, eighteen to twenty-four years old) will no longer be in the majority in the next century. We are seeing more adult students, and because of recent immigration patterns, we are also seeing large numbers of students whose first or home language is not English.<sup>4</sup> A 1997 *New York Times* article cited statistics showing that between 1984 and 1994, the number of students classified as “minority” or “foreign” rose

27.8 percent (Menad 48). Particular institutions often top those percentages. At the University of California, Irvine, for example, the Office of Analytical Studies data show that the ESL population at the undergraduate level now averages over 60 percent, primarily students of Asian ethnic background. WAC techniques that work well for native speakers do not work at all for ESL learners. Teachers in the disciplines who are told they do not need to know about grammar in order to use writing in their classes feel betrayed when faced with a non-native speaker's grammatical and syntactic tangles in a write-to-learn assignment. Many WAC directors themselves feel at the edge of their competence in dealing with such situations.

Yet little research has been done on ESL and WAC. ESL pedagogy and composition pedagogy are quite different—indeed, sometimes at odds with one another with regard to the focus on detection and correction of error. Tony Silva and his colleagues argue that the composition community has much to learn from the ESL community (Silva, Leki, and Carson). As Ann Raimés points out, the research and pedagogical foci of the ESL community have been roughly parallel to those of the composition community, moving from a focus on the writer during the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, then to a focus on content (often pairing ESL courses with subject matter courses), to a present academic focus on socializing students into the academic discourse community—a focus known as “English for academic purposes.”

What should WAC directors do to help teachers in all disciplines work well with ESL students? In “ESL Students and WAC Programs: Varied Populations and Diverse Needs” (Chapter 6), Ann M. Johns examines the issue of ESL and WAC, discussing how WAC programs have adapted and also need to adapt to the needs of ESL learners.

## **The Voices at the Margins**

The Conference on College Composition and Communication published “Students’ Right to Their Own Language” in 1974, but the research community in composition studies is still grappling with the implications of this document for issues of race,

class, and ethnicity (see Royster and Williams; Villanueva). The recent backlash against affirmative action in the states of California and Washington and the end of open admissions in New York point toward a future in which many underprepared students of color who might previously have been admitted to institutions of higher education will now find themselves shut out. The national trend toward doing away with courses seen as “remedial” by legislators and trustees indicates that students who are at risk by virtue of speaking and writing something other than Standard English will not find the curriculum they need to succeed even if they are admitted. The emphasis on proficiency testing, in some cases mandated by states for high school graduation or entrance to college, has been blasted as militating against social justice (Tierney), and standardized tests have come under increasing criticism for discriminating against students of color (Haney), but such testing shows no signs of disappearing. What should WAC directors, administrators, and teachers in the disciplines be doing to address some of these thorny issues? In “The Politics of Literacy Across the Curriculum” (Chapter 7), Victor Villanueva examines the political economy of the academy from a historical perspective. He suggests a “third stage” for WAC, one in which all of us are more conscious of issues of cultural identity as those issues intersect with our focus on discourse analysis and the teaching of disciplinary discourse across the curriculum.

## **Writing Centers**

The history of writing centers in U.S. higher education in many ways parallels the history of WAC programs. As David Russell points out in his history of writing in the disciplines, the early 1970s were a time when social pressures—in particular, the boom in higher education and the increased access for students from diverse backgrounds (many first-generation college students)—brought about a “writing crisis” in higher education. This perceived crisis was immortalized in a December 9, 1975, “Why Johnny Can’t Write” *Newsweek* cover story on the apparent decline of writing abilities, shown in the results of the 1974 National Assessment of Education Progress (Russell 274–76).

As a result of the new focus on student writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, student support services for writing became as necessary to institutions as faculty workshops and the development of curricular elements (such as writing intensive courses). Writing centers as well as WAC programs sprang up at institutions across the country (see Carino; Boquet); sometimes the two appeared together, and sometimes one developed from the other or within the other. Writing centers were not new in the late 1970s and early 1980s, of course—Stephen North tells us they have been around since the 1930s (436). But today's full-service writing center model may be dated in the literature from 1984, when North's "The Idea of a Writing Center," Gary Olson's *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*, and Bruffee's "Collaborative Learning and 'The Conversation of Mankind'" all appeared. The relationship between WAC and writing centers, as Burkland and Freisinger pointed out in one of the earliest books on WAC, is a synergistic one. Our own institution, Washington State University, provides an example. In the early 1980s, the writing center began as a tutorial center for students enrolled in composition courses. It was headed at first by our harried director of composition and then by a part-time temporary instructor, and was staffed by four undergraduate and six graduate tutors. Its advertised purpose was to help weaker writers. As WSU's WAC program (begun in 1986) has flourished, so has the writing center, which is now advertised as a place for all writers to get feedback on their writing; it serves the entire university, not just the Department of English (in 1991–92 it recorded more than 2,500 tutorial contacts; by 1998–99 it had more than double that number). It is staffed by a permanent full-time director on a twelve-month appointment, an assistant director, a permanent clerical staff person, and a phalanx of tutors from across the university. The writing center director reports to our new director of writing programs and works with the three-quarter-time coordinator of writing assessment and two coordinators of some curricular elements (one-credit tutorial classes) of our WAC program. WAC and the Writing Center at WSU have grown up together and are now firmly bound by administrative and curricular ties.

As university budgets contract and outside funding for WAC programs becomes rare, writing centers and WAC programs at

many institutions have formed a natural alliance. In some cases, the writing center is a physical and budgetary entity where the WAC program, an interdisciplinary effort with no departmental home, may be housed and sheltered from budget storms. In some cases, the writing center can provide the springboard for a new WAC effort. In "Writing Centers and WAC," Joan A. Mullin traces the parallels of writing center theory and practice to the WAC movement, discussing how writing centers can support an existing WAC program or provide scaffolding for a developing one.

## **Peer Tutoring**

Programs of peer tutoring, like learning community programs, grow out of the same rather simple conceptual base: students can learn from each other as well as from teachers and books. As Bruffee traces the history of peer tutoring (and its result, collaborative learning), the idea first developed in the 1950s and 1960s in London, in a study of British medical education. Briefly, the study found that when medical students examined a patient together and discussed the case, arriving at a diagnosis by group consensus, that process was more effective in teaching good medical diagnosis than the usual practice of asking each student to diagnose individually (Abercrombie 19). The origin of peer tutoring programs in U.S. colleges is more mundane, however. The 1970s was a decade when underprepared students were entering college in increasing numbers; one symptom of their difficulty adjusting to college life was that they did not seek out help or even refused it when it was offered in tutorial or counseling centers. The solution: offer help in alternative venues—from peers rather than from professionals, who might be seen as extensions of traditional classroom structures (Bruffee 637). Administrators liked peer tutoring programs because they were cost effective as well as learning effective; hence the idea spread rapidly. Although some of these programs are run out of writing centers, some are independent, based in the curriculum.

One of the earliest curriculum-based peer tutoring efforts that can be identified as a WAC program started at Carleton College under the administrative leadership of Harriet Sheridan. In 1974,

Sheridan—in response to a newly established writing proficiency requirement at the institution—set up a program of undergraduate peer tutors, called “writing fellows,” to work with students in all disciplines on their writing assignments (Russell 283). When Sheridan became an administrator at Brown University, she helped establish a similar program at that institution, a program that continues to be the model for curriculum-based peer tutoring.

Curriculum-based peer tutoring programs continue to be popular in institutions for a number of reasons: they are relatively inexpensive to run, they benefit not only those served by the tutors but also the tutors themselves, they reinforce collaborative composition pedagogy, and they are generally adored by faculty, who find that such programs aid their teaching. As the university is pressured to increase class size and teacher workload, the pressures on peer tutoring programs will also increase. In “Curriculum-Based Peer Tutors and WAC” (Chapter 9), Margot Soven examines various models for curriculum-based peer tutoring programs and some of the questions they raise, as well as the future of such programs.

## **Writing Intensive (WI) Courses**

One of the most interesting curricular developments that have sprung from the WAC movement is the “writing intensive” course as a university requirement. The rationale for such courses is usually stated as follows: Students do not learn how to write by taking just one writing class, but instead need continual practice with writing in order to improve. A further rationale is sometimes that students learn the general features of academic writing in a first-year composition course, but then need to learn the more specific conventions of the discourse communities in their chosen fields of study—which are known best by faculty in the disciplines. A third rationale, however, one that is often not stated in plans approved by faculty senates but that is at the heart of the WAC movement, is this: writing disrupts the traditional pattern of classroom instruction, what Freire called the “banking model,” in which the students are the passive recipients of knowledge (Farris and Smith 72). Writing intensive courses as defined by



most WAC programs do not simply involve more writing than other courses; they are designed to engage students more actively in their own learning through writing.

Writing intensive courses can take many forms, but the general guidelines, as summarized by Farris and Smith (73–74), have some or all of the following elements. First, class size is limited, or the student-teacher ratio is low, to permit the intensive interaction necessary and make the teacher's workload a reasonable one. The course is usually taught by faculty rather than teaching assistants. The guidelines for such courses usually specify the numbers of papers (or words) and the kinds of papers, as well as what part revision should play in the process of writing and how the writing will affect the grade. Sometimes the guidelines suggest or specify particular assignments or approaches to assignments (such as research papers assigned in stages). Finally, these courses often suggest or require that students and faculty make use of support services such as writing centers or consultation with WAC staff. Many institutions, even large research institutions, have been able to implement these courses with remarkable success.

But faculty workload has been an abiding issue with writing intensive courses. As pressures increase on institutions to increase class size and teaching loads, what will happen to WI courses? In "Writing Intensive Courses and WAC" (Chapter 10), Martha A. Townsend discusses various models for courses in which faculty in the disciplines use writing, examines the case of one institution where writing intensive courses have successfully become the centerpiece of the WAC program, and discusses theoretical and practical considerations for such courses in the future.

## **Qualitative Studies**

A major strength of the WAC movement has been its theory-into-practice approach to encouraging writing in all disciplines. From the beginning, starting with the work of Britton and his associates, the movement has been grounded in research. In recent years, naturalistic studies of college-level writing in the disciplines have been predominant, in part because quantitative

approaches yielded contradictory results in examining one of WAC's central tenets: that writing is a mode of learning. As a result of these naturalistic studies, we now know much more about how students approach writing in the various disciplines; yet these studies have not been systematically reviewed to suggest which pedagogical practices are sound and which may need to be changed or researched further. In "Where Do the Naturalistic Studies of WAC/WID Point? A Research Review" (Chapter 11), David R. Russell examines a number of qualitative studies, highlighting the complexity of what it means to both write to learn and learn to write in the disciplines.

## Theorizing WAC

Writing-across-the-curriculum programs are grounded firmly in the theories of language and learning that have dominated the composition community during the last few decades. Cognitivist psychology has had a powerful influence on our conceptions of writing as a problem-solving process; psycholinguistics has also influenced our notions of the relationship between thought and language, and between language and learning. Poststructural theories and constructivist notions about the creation of knowledge, as well as anthropological notions about culture, have helped shape our understandings of academic discourse and discourse communities. Most recently, communication theories from sociology (on role representation, for example) are being emphasized as useful for the composition community. Further, WAC has flourished in part because program directors and researchers refused to stipulate careful definitions of what exactly we mean by "writing across the curriculum." The WAC tent is therefore large; programs are site specific and various, as local as each teacher's classroom. The theoretical challenge, then, is to find the center of WAC—or if there is no center, no orthodoxy, to examine the ramifications of such a diffuse and elusive concept.

What theories are on the horizon for WAC? In "Theory in WAC: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Going?" (Chapter 12), Christopher Thaiss ruminates on theory under the headings

of “writing,” “across,” and “the curriculum,” and speculates about how WAC’s theoretical base may change as a result of pressures from some of the forces discussed in this volume.

## **A Changing Paradigm of Change**

Having briefly discussed the opportunities for WAC that will be examined in this volume, we return now to the issue of change. The initiatives or forces now affecting higher education as well as WAC are symptomatic of the seismic changes we are facing in this new millennium. The thought of change on the scale predicted by those such as Peter Drucker (Lenzner and Johnson), mentioned earlier, may seem daunting, even threatening, to many of us in academe. Further, institutions of higher learning are conservative in both institutional structure and mission (e.g., the conservation of knowledge as well as the generation of new knowledge); retaining the status quo is much more likely than active response to change in educational systems, systems that are not set up to implement change quickly and efficiently. How should those of us involved or interested in WAC (in a larger sense, those of us interested in the quality of undergraduate education) respond in the face of changes that our academic institutions are in some ways built to resist? What should individuals, as well as institutions, do to plan for such change?

To answer these questions, it is important to understand the nature of educational change. First and foremost, such change is replete with variables (e.g., governmental policy changes, legislative funding whims, new technologies, shifts in immigration, changes in personnel and leadership). One writer about organizational change refers to such change as having “dynamic complexity”; unplanned factors routinely interfere, and cause and effect “are not close in time and space and obvious interventions do not produce expected outcomes” (Senge 365). Change in educational systems is therefore anything but predictable and linear. Yet institutions of higher education tend to respond to change as if it were, following a top-down model for vision-driven change (promulgated by Beckhard and Pritchard, among others): creat-

ing and setting the vision, communicating the vision, building commitment to it, and organizing personnel and processes to be aligned with that vision.

Writers on educational change have argued recently that we need a new paradigm of change, one modeled not on linear theories of cause and effect (e.g., mandate policy and thereby change teacher behavior) but on chaos theory. Chaos in a scientific sense is not disorder but a process by which complexities interact and coalesce into periodic patterns that are unknowable in advance (Gleick)—we might think of this as a postmodern paradigm of change. One researcher who studies organizational and educational change, Michael Fullan, has mapped out with his colleague Matt Miles what they call “Eight Basic Lessons for the New Paradigm of Change” for educational institutions to ponder (Fullan 21–22). Paraphrased for our purposes, these are:

Lesson One: *You can't mandate what matters* (the more complex the change, the less you can force it).

Lesson Two: *Change is a journey, not a blueprint* (change is nonlinear, loaded with uncertainty and excitement, and sometimes perverse).

Lesson Three: *Problems are our friends* (problems are inevitable and you can't learn without them).

Lesson Four: *Vision and strategic planning come later* (premature visions and planning blind us to other possibilities).

Lesson Five: *Individualism and collectivism must have equal power* (there are no one-sided solutions).

Lesson Six: *Neither centralization nor decentralization works alone* (both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary).

Lesson Seven: *Connection with the wider environment is critical for success* (the best organizations learn externally as well as internally).

Lesson Eight: *Every person is a change agent* (change is too important to leave to the experts).

Fullan elaborates on all eight lessons in his book *Change Forces*; although many of these lessons (such as combining top-down and bottom-up strategies) are familiar to WAC directors,

it is the last one we wish to address here. One of us has written elsewhere about the concept of the “change agent” (McLeod, “Foreigner”). This concept grew out of the social activism of the 1960s, in particular out of a number of federal programs designed to improve public education through planned change. Under the sponsorship of the U.S. Office of Education, the Rand Corporation conducted a national study of 293 projects funded by four federal programs specifically intended to produce innovation in public schools—a four-year project that came to be known as the “Change Agent Study” (McLaughlin 11). What the Rand study (and a later examination of it) found was that there were a number of unexamined assumptions about change in schools, particularly about the local nature of change and the importance of involving teachers in implementing change. Policy, researchers found, did not change practice—in Fullan’s terms, it did not mandate what mattered, which was what individual teachers did in the classroom. Instead, pedagogical and curricular change was a problem of the smallest unit, of local capacity and teacher motivation (12–13). The most effective change agents were not in fact outside consultants and external developers brought in for the various projects, but rather the teachers themselves.<sup>5</sup>

This research is congruent with one of Fullan’s major points—change in organizations is brought about in large part at a very local level. Fullan argues that for educational change to be effective, all teachers must become change agents, which means being self-conscious about the nature of change and the change process. Institutions must pull teachers out of their isolation and work with them on (among other things) shared vision building and collaboration (12). One of the strengths of the WAC movement has been its work at that very level, with individual teachers, on their pedagogical practice, in collaborative workshop settings. One of the common outcomes of such workshops, the “conversion” experience described in the literature (Russell 295), is due in large measure, we would argue, to the fact that they involve shared vision building about the educational process itself. Over the past decades, many teachers who have attended WAC workshops have become more reflective about their teaching and more collaborative in their pedagogy (see Walvoord et

al.)—they have become what may be defined as change agents. WAC programs have continued to grow in large measure because of their continued success and support at the local level.

By its very nature, then, WAC has been and continues to be a dynamic movement, one well suited to a postmodern paradigm of change in higher education. Change may be unsettling, but it also provides new opportunities for program development like those described in this volume. WAC programs could transform themselves so completely in the coming decades that the phrase “writing across the curriculum” might even disappear; but we trust that as long as there are teachers and administrators who care about effective teaching and student learning, the goals of WAC programs will continue to inform whatever new educational initiatives might appear on the horizon.

## Notes

1. The first WAC faculty seminar was held in 1970 at Central College in Pella, Iowa, directed by Barbara Walvoord (see Russell 283; Walvoord 75).
2. For information about these conferences, contact Barbara Cambridge, Director, AAHE Assessment Forum, One Dupont Circle, Suite 360, Washington, DC 20036-1110.
3. For information on how to subscribe to the Service Learning and Writing Listserv, write to [listmgr@lists.ncte.org](mailto:listmgr@lists.ncte.org).
4. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 changed the old quota system for immigration, which favored immigrants from Europe, to a system that favors family members of people already in the United States. In the 1950s, the top three countries of origin for immigrants were Germany, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Today, about half of the legal immigrants to the United States come from seven developing nations: Mexico, the Philippines, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, China and Taiwan, Korea, and India (see Cassidy 41).
5. An excellent example of how a single teacher can bring about enormous change is the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, begun in 1980 by English teacher Mary Catherine Swanson of Clairemont High School in San Diego. Swanson combined rigorous

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classes and a supportive environment to help at-risk students get ready for college. The program is now nationwide; nearly 95 percent of the students who experience it attend college (Freedman).

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