

Rewriting Across the Curriculum: Writing Fellows as Agents of Change in WAC

Guest Editors' Introduction

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With this special issue of *ATD*, we are pleased to present new theory and research about the multiple and complex roles that Writing Fellows play within WAC programs. For the past ten years, we have been privileged to develop and lead the Writing Fellows program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where we have seen first-hand the integral role Writing Fellows play in furthering the missions of the Writing Center, WAC, and the culture of writing across a campus. Although Writing Fellows programs vary in the specifics of their implementation at colleges and universities across the country, all of these programs share several key features: they link students to specific writing-intensive courses; they encourage partnerships between a Writing Fellow and a course professor; and they promote collaboration between peers. Whatever the name for such a program (Peer Mentors, Writing Associates, or Curriculum-Based Peer Tutors), it unites in powerful ways ideas of collaborative learning, peer education, WAC, and faculty development.

Since the early 1980s, Writing Fellows programs have influenced how writing is learned, taught, and practiced across the disciplines. While early publications on Writing Fellows focused mainly on introducing, explicating, and describing how to implement these programs (e.g., Haring-Smith, 1992/2000; Stoecker, Mullin, Schmidbauer, & Young, 1993), more recent studies have begun to explore and theorize the important role Writing Fellows have in furthering the goals of WAC. Margot Soven (2001), for example, has argued that Writing Fellows serve as "an invigorating agent" (p. 201) in WAC programs. Joan Mullin (2001) claims a similarly significant role for Writing Fellows, suggesting that course-based tutors can "provide . . . WAC with insights never gleaned without being in a classroom" (p. 189). Demonstrating the complexities of Writing Fellows' relationships to students and to disciplinary writing, Jean Lutes (2002) shows how working with Writing Fellows not only may help students think critically about the relationship between writing and their discipline, but also may unintentionally reify relationships between disciplinary writing and social identities such as gender. These and other works published over the last ten years suggest that Writing Fellows have begun to achieve more prominence within writing center literature and within the theoretical and applied WAC literature. See also, for example, articles by Leahy (1999) in *Writing Centers and Writing Across the Curriculum Programs* (Barnett & Blummer, eds., 1999); by Corroy (2003); by Severino and Trachsel (2004); by multiple authors in the collection *On Location: Theory and Practice in Classroom-Based Writing Tutoring* (Spigelman & Grobman, 2005); by Mattison (2007); by Severino and Knight (2007); as well as articles in recent issues of this journal.

The articles in this special issue of *ATD* extend current research by showing how Writing Fellows can offer a means to explore and re-think some of the issues and debates central to WAC. This new research explores just what Bazerman et al. (2005) identify as critical "ongoing concerns" in WAC: "the particularity of disciplinary discourses," "the place of students in disciplinary discourses," and "the rhetoric of different disciplines." These concerns are examined here through a new kind of lens—Writing Fellows—one that allows us to see directly into the WAC classroom, and into the pedagogical practices of professors and student writers. The research in these articles, drawn from Writing Fellows' narrative reports, journal

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entries, interviews, and transcripts of faculty discussion groups, thus offers fresh perspectives on the relationships among students, faculty, writing, and the disciplines. The authors in this special issue acknowledge the complexities and contradictions inherent in the role of Writing Fellow (occupying the spaces between peer and professor, specialist and generalist, WAC and WID). At the same time, these articles show how the interstitial position of Writing Fellows affords new ways to view these contradictions. Taken collectively, these pieces testify to the ways in which Writing Fellows, rather than reifying existing binaries, work to transform and refigure how we think about the binary relationships that structure our lives in university settings.

Carol Severino and Mary Trachsel begin their article, "Theories of Specialized Discourses and Writing Fellows Programs," by asking "how much do specialized academic discourse communities matter to undergraduate writers? To what degree should theories of specialized discourses influence the design of undergraduate Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs?" In answering these questions, the authors show the striking similarities among writing assignments given throughout the curriculum. Their results show that teachers, students, and Writing Fellows often value writing skills that inhere across the curriculum (i.e., critical thinking, using sources, analysis) over writing skills particular to a single discourse. The authors suggest, then, that Writing Fellows programs have a corrective function for WAC programs—enabling us reconsider discursive and disciplinary similarities in addition to differences.

In "Writing Fellows as WAC Change Agents: Changing What? Changing Whom? Changing How?" Terry Zawacki uses case studies and Writing Fellows' narratives to explore the complex experiences Fellows had working with particular faculty in five upper-division writing-intensive courses. These case studies demonstrate how much individual faculty differences in pedagogy and philosophy—more than generalized disciplinary differences—influence WAC classrooms. Zawacki candidly reveals her goals for placing Writing Fellows with particular faculty across the curriculum and critically examines the mixed results when Fellows encounter variations in how committed faculty are to teaching with writing (even within writing-intensive courses), in how faculty define the roles that Fellows will play, and in how much specialized discourse and content knowledge faculty expect Fellows to have.

In "Challenging our Practices; Supporting Our Theories: Writing Mentors As Change Agents Across Discourse Communities," Joan Mullin and Susan Schorn examine closely the experiences of four Writing Mentors linked to such wide-ranging courses as Germanic studies, women's studies and NROTC in order to show how mentors create learning opportunities in classrooms not just for the students they work with but for professors as well. Mentors do this, they argue, by making explicit classroom and writing operations and "articulating" them for professors and students alike. This piece suggests how Writing Mentors function as a lens through which to consider the social dynamics of the writing classroom and the interactions between its participants which in turn can help establish a new "culture of writing."

By researching professors, students, and Writing Associates in an introductory biology course, Jill Gladstein, in "Conducting Research in the Gray Space: How Writing Associates Negotiate Between WAC and WID in an Introductory Biology Course," shows how Writing Associates' close connection to the course allows study participants to explore relationships between WAC and WID, to probe writing goals deeply, and to trade information that flows in new directions between the groups. Gladstein suggests that the "gray space" created through the WAs' interactions with professors and students enables a symbiotic relationship between the groups characterized by new dialogue and inquiry.

Information and influence flow in similarly complex ways between Writing Associates and faculty in "The Protean Shape of the Writing Associate's Role: An Empirical Study and Conceptual Model," by Rhoda Cairns and Paul Anderson. Cairns and Anderson explore the differences between what they call Writing Associates' "proper roles" (the director's vision and program policies) and their "actual roles." Using discussions within a WAC learning community of four faculty working with WAs, written reflections from and interviews with WAs, and evaluations from student-writers, Cairns and Anderson develop a lexicon

and conceptual model for understanding the complex roles that Writing Associates play and the dimensions along which those roles vary, and they offer advice for directors implementing such programs. Their research reveals the multiple and inter-dependent ways that cohorts of Writing Associates themselves and students--as well as faculty--influence the work of WAs within a writing-intensive course.

Because British university students write within disciplines from the beginning of their undergraduate studies, Peter O'Neill argues, in "Using Peer Writing Fellows in British Universities: Complexities and Possibilities," that undergraduate Writing Fellows are an ideal way to bring WID initiatives into British higher education, in ways that are consistent with the academic literacies approach. O'Neill explains sources of resistance to peer Writing Fellows by reviewing current literacy debates within British universities—about whether writing should be taught at universities, who should teach it, and how it should be taught—and explores the potential for translating the US writing fellows model into a different academic culture, in the UK generally and at London Metropolitan University specifically.

We hope that the pieces in this special issue play a role in establishing the significance of Writing Fellows to WAC and in demonstrating the value that research and theorizing about Writing Fellows hold for WAC scholarship. We are deeply grateful to the many authors who submitted proposals and manuscripts for this issue, who have taught us so much through their research, and who worked so patiently with us through reviews and revisions. And we are equally grateful to Michael Pemberton for inviting us to be guest editors for this issue and for guiding and encouraging us throughout this process.

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