

## Programs that Work(ed): Revisiting the University of Michigan, the University of Chicago, and George Mason University Programs after 20 years

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**Abstract:** The article explores three WAC/WID programs that were presented in 1990 in *Programs That Work: Models and Methods for Writing Across the Curriculum* by Toby Fulwiler and Art Young. The author interviewed current directors of the University of Michigan program, the University of Chicago Little Red Schoolhouse, and the George Mason University WAC program to ascertain how these programs had changed over the past twenty years. Each of these programs reflects different student populations and diverse WAC program structures that are unique to particular university settings. In having a "class reunion" for these three programs the author addresses three specific questions: How have the programs adjusted to and use emergent technology (the World Wide Web, advanced electronic publishing tools, and new computer based literacies) since 1990, what kinds of changes have occurred in fourth generation programs, and do the directors of these programs connect these changes to larger shifts in the field? The author found that these programs had changed in various ways, remaining flexible and continuing to grow. Technology, however, does not seem to be a key aspect of a continuing successful program today, bringing into question the perceived need to incorporate new media writing into classrooms. WAC has the task of meeting student and institutional writing needs, which calls for a more explicit discussion of technology and hypermediated communication. The author concludes that WAC is in the unique position to complicate new media writing in the classroom, and the wider academic discourse, to meet emerging literacies.

In 1990, Toby Fulwiler and Art Young published *Programs That Work: Models and Methods for Writing Across the Curriculum* to "allow readers to browse through a real range of program possibilities finally collected together in one sourcebook and to make their own comparisons and contrasts" (p. 5). This goal was met by featuring fourteen program directors reporting on their institutions' missions, funding, organization, the challenges each institution faced, and samples from their WAC courses (pp. 5-6). *Programs that Work* simultaneously describes a variety of program models and theorizes some of the challenges and solutions that WAC practitioners employ (Trimmer, 1990, p. 481). Still widely cited, *Programs that Work* is a source for understanding the range of ways WAC can function within the university. Now, twenty years after *Programs that Work*, I am curious: where are these programs now? *Programs that Work* offered (and still offers) an excellent snapshot of second and third generation WAC programs, and I revisited three of those programs to see how they look in their fourth and fifth generations.

By interviewing three programs that had been chronicled in detail 20 years ago, I hoped to begin constructing a narrative of WAC changes in recent history. *Composing a Community: a History of Writing Across the Curriculum*, edited by Susan H. McLeod and Margot Iris Soven (2006), gives insight into WAC from the early '70s to the mid '90s, highlighting the early pioneers of WAC (including Christopher Thaiss of the George Mason University WAC project, as well as Margot Soven writing further about the University of Chicago's contributions to WAC). However, this history ends in 1990. In having a "class reunion" for these three programs, I hoped to address a few specific questions: What kinds of changes have occurred in fourth generation programs, do the directors of these programs connect these changes to larger shifts in the field, and, most driving for me, how have the programs adjusted to the use of emergent technology (the World Wide Web, advanced electronic publishing tools, and new computer based literacies) since 1990? I found shifts in programs and in WAC, but I received very little information about WAC and technology. To understand the minimal discussion of technology in these successful programs, it is important to review the WAC literature on technology to date.

## WAC and Technology

Since 1990, WAC as a field has consistently referenced emergent technology in its literature. However, WAC has not done extensive theorizing about how new media change the composing process, nor attempted to develop a deeper understanding of how disciplines across the university have been using technology to change knowledge making strategies and wider communication within fields. Much of the WAC and technology discussion has focused instead on how to use computers in the classroom, and how technology can improve writing to learn and communication in WAC (Bazerman et al., 2005).

As new technologies for writing have emerged, WAC has been vocal in how to incorporate these tools in the classroom. In 1989, William J. Taffe published "Writing in the Computer Science Curriculum," in the first issue of *The WAC Journal*. This article made the case that computer science students did, in fact, need to know how to write to communicate within their field. This may have been one of the first explorations of how writing and technology meet in a classroom. In 1990, just as Programs that Work was coming out, personal computers were just gaining popularity for a mass audience. Few universities had computer labs available, and even fewer were part of the still emergent "World Wide Web." Articles and projects that demonstrate strategies for using technology to learn to write, like *The Epiphany Project*, Miller (2001), Sherman (2000), and Murray (2002), all paved the way for WAC to use emergent technology as tools in the classroom. In their review of WAC research over the last forty years, Ochsner and Fowler (2004) note that Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum also invited a variety of communication techniques (not those based strictly on written text) to WAC, "incorporat[ing] with writing the related objectives of speaking, visualization, and electronic communication signaling an important shift in writing instruction as the superior or perhaps primary mode of learning" (p. 119). Simultaneously, WAC has been contemplating how new communication technology can be used to further interdisciplinary dialogue, and critically examining the value of computers to the teaching of writing.

Examining not only how to use technology, but its value to WAC and teaching, has been a prominent discussion over the last 20 years. In his article, "Computers and Composition: Do They Mix?", Russell Lord (1992) writes an account of setting up a "computer classroom" and observing changes in the classroom dynamic in a new environment, and whether computers were a positive shift for the writing classroom. Lord (1992) notes that, "most young people today take naturally to computers" (p. 37). Only two years after the publication of Programs that Work, conversation about the changes technology was bringing to the field were underway, and it is interesting to note that some of those students from 1992 now comprise faculty seeking tenure and running programs. Michael Palmquist, Dawn Rodrigues, Kate Kiefer and Donald Zimmerman (1995) introduced some of the possibilities inherent in using electronic media when organizing a WAC program. By developing curricular materials easily accessible via the web, Colorado State University was able to support a much larger WAC faculty base than previously possible. In 1998 Donna

Reiss, Dickie Selfe and Art Young edited *Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum* (now available in full text on the web), which represented the emerging need to invite computer technology to the WAC/WID teaching philosophy: "Included are word processors; electronic mail; newsgroups; MOOs, MUDs, and other synchronous conferencing systems; multimedia development systems; and World Wide Web (WWW)-related applications" (p. xvi). By the year 2000, it was becoming increasingly clear that textual literacy also hinged on knowledge of visual layout, and the ability to use publishing software and other applications of the computer to communication. The first volume of *academic.writing* featured a conversation titled "Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Communication Across the Curriculum" (2000). In his closing statement, Tharon Howard declares, "If you're a WAC/CAC program director and you haven't begun the process of integrating technology into your programs, then you risk putting your students on the wrong side of the digital divide" (para. 6). But how deep does this divide run?

In her 2005 article, "Dealing with Online Selves: Ethos Issues in Computer-Assisted Teaching and Learning," Mary Lenard complicates the current discussion about technology and its use in the writing classroom. She points to some of the complicating factors of online teaching and writing, mainly the difficulty in creating a productive ethos and clear communication in a body-less setting. Lenard (2005) begins a conversation that goes beyond the idea of technology as a tool, or a series of tools, to a medium that is composing the author as much as the author composes. When we consider how technology facilitates identity, and changes strategies of knowledge making (removing or altering the body, as one example), how we approach new media in the classroom and the disciplines is again complicated. Writing to learn, writing to learn through technology, and writing to learn with technology may all be different forms of experiencing WAC. From early articles that need to explain what "WWW" stands for, to more current discussions about identity challenges in the computer classroom, new media is challenging WAC programs' definitions of literacy, the role of written communication in shifting electronic landscapes, and the ways that WAC will address rapidly evolving electronic education needs. By inviting communications technology into its purview over the last twenty years, WAC has also been able to participate in a complex conversation about what communication across the disciplines will look like in the next twenty. While there have been many articles dedicated to the possibilities of combining WAC and emergent technology, I wanted to know how programs that were successful 20 years ago had chosen to incorporate technology as this conversation occurred.

## Revisiting Programs that Work

### University of Michigan Sweetland Writing Center

According to the current director of the Sweetland Writing Center (SWC), The University of Michigan's WAC program has, from its inception, been designed to become an academic "way of life" rather than another program among many. In 1979, the University of Michigan began requiring a junior or senior level writing intensive courses for all majors (Hamp-Lyons & McKenna, 1990). These courses were designed and approved within each discipline, and then reviewed by the English Composition Board (ECB) of UM (then composed of faculty from multiple disciplines who consulted with faculty in the first year writing program) to make sure that they met the university's general requirements for writing intensive courses (Hamp-Lyons & McKenna, 1990, p. 258). Because of the additional time and effort writing intensive courses take, faculty were also provided with trained Graduate Student Instructors (GSI) from multiple disciplines to help support writing education. While the program was connected to the university writing program, the design was overall decentralized. Faculty within the discipline decided what constituted writing in their field, and the ECB provided a cross-disciplinary review board. Workshops were offered for both faculty and GSIs across the disciplines on teaching writing in a variety of ways (Hamp-Lyons & McKenna, 1990). The University of Michigan already had a successful writing program in 1990, and they were looking toward the

future, expecting to extend underused resources to faculty, alter their training emphasis, and expand the role of GSIs.

To find out more about what the current WAC program at the University of Michigan (UM) currently entails, I interviewed Martha Vicinus, director of the Sweetland Writing Center at the University of Michigan, as well as the "head" of their WAC program. Vicinus began our interview by pointing out that there is currently no WAC program at UM *per se*:

I think that we are so thoroughly institutionalized that there is no problem with funding, and there is very strong support on the part of departments and faculty for the upper level writing requirement...but it's certainly not novel anymore. Everybody just assumes that it's something you have to do. (personal communication, January 11, 2008)

According to Vicinus, over the last twenty years, UM's upper level writing requirement has become an expected part of undergraduate education. Hamp-Lyons and McKenna (1990), in their *Programs that Work* chapter, show that integrating writing into the larger university culture of UM was a goal right from the beginning of the program. They quote Richard Bailey (the 1991 director of the EBC) as saying, "faculty view the acquisition of writing skills in the same way that they view the acquisition of other kinds of knowledge" (Hamp-Lyons & McKenna, 1990, p. 258). Because of the long term nature of this goal UM seems to have succeeded in making writing an embedded part of an undergraduate education, and has successfully framed it as important to each discipline. Rather than facilitating WAC, The Sweetland Writing Center now acts as the review board designed to ensure that university standards are being met in individual writing intensive courses, to support faculty, and to train GSIs.

In the early iteration of UM's WAC program, through the eighties in particular, faculty seminars were presented by the English Composition Board. When Eleanor McKenna and Liz Hamp-Lyons reported in 1990 on the UM program, faculty training was already shifting:

...since the early days of the WAC program, each semester the ECB has presented a term-long seminar in the teaching of writing to the Michigan faculty in the disciplines, which was at first well attended. Over the years, however, the number of faculty attending declined, in part as faculty became experienced in WAC courses. In 1979 all faculty in the WAC program were new in the junior-senior writing courses, while in the 1987-88 academic year only 20 in a program of 170 courses are new. Gradually, the faculty seminar evolved to a faculty-and-TA seminar, with fewer faculty each year. (Hamp-Lyons & McKenna, 1990, pp. 259-260)

The ECB shifted in 1997 from a multi-disciplinary body back into the English department. In 1998 Terri Tinkle, then director of the newly endowed Sweetland Writing Center, reported that the duties of the ECB would be shifting back to the English department (Tinkle, 1998). Currently, there are no faculty seminars or formal workshops offered on the teaching of writing. Rather, by examining each new course curriculum proposal, Vicinus is able to flag specific syllabi and work with instructors on a one-on-one basis. If a faculty member needs extensive support, he or she works with the assistant director of the Sweetland Writing Center. For Vicinus, this individualized support maintains quality and introduces new faculty to WAC/WID concepts, without requiring faculty to attend yet another training event or seminar over the course of a busy term.

When I questioned Vicinus about the changes in curriculum that she had observed in the program, she reminded me that individual departments designed the writing courses. However, she did discuss refinements in the GSI training curriculum since 1990. Hamp-Lyons & McKenna (1990), while discussing many of the challenges GSIs faced in the classroom, and the benefits the GSIs gain from the exposure to writing instruction, do not explore the training of GSIs in depth (pp. 265-266). The main focus of GSI

training in 1990 was on the articulation of writing standards within the disciplines, as well as on learning about discourse conventions (Hamp-Lyons & McKenna, 1990, p. 266). Currently, GSIs are required to take a seven week class, which meets for two hours a week and is taught at the Sweetland Writing Center. The current training course emphasizes drafting and workshopping sample papers, and developing drafting skills, helping GSIs become better tutors and better writers. A persistent tension in the program is helping GSIs to manage time spent grading, time spent meeting with students to conference about writing, and time spent coordinating with their instructor. All of the above is covered in the seven week seminar, and so the focus is on practical aspects of writing instruction for a variety of disciplines. This focus on GSI training helps to support faculty teaching writing intensive courses who find it difficult to find time for training.

Hamp-Lyons and McKenna observed in 1990 that teaching and teacher training was not highly valued at a research institution (not factored in to tenure or promotion opportunities), and so often the "burden" of teaching writing actually fell to the GSIs. Moreover, GSIs in 1990 were reported to be challenged by working closely with faculty, and were often left to establish grading and writing criteria on their own. Hamp-Lyons and McKenna (1990) directly attribute this problem to the decentralized model on which the program is based. Some of these challenges still persist today. When I questioned Vicinus about the challenges for GSIs, she noted that, with over 100 Writing Intensive courses in any given semester, there are bound to be challenges for graduate students and faculty. The decentralized model that UM has embraced, as well as the longevity of their program, can create difficulties. Vicinus explained:

The downside of being fully institutionalized is that after thirty years there is not the same enthusiasm about carving out new space and fighting apathy: Everybody is on board, everybody realizes that it's important, everybody's department includes a description of the importance of writing as part of the major. It can be difficult to create fresh energy. This can happen after 30 years. (personal communication, January 11, 2008).

However, she believes that the benefits of a decentralized WAC system for the University of Michigan are greater than the drawbacks, both in 1990 and now.

For Vicinus, the UM program has been able to introduce WAC/WID as an important tool to a large number of faculty and students over 30 years. According to Vicinus, the program is universally valued by departments and administration, with Sweetland consistently maintaining control of the GSI training and funding. The University of Michigan WAC program, then and now, infiltrated the culture of a large Research I institution. However, as may be obvious in the above account, technology did not play a major role in the development of the Michigan University program as its history is articulated. When I asked Vicinus about how technology was being used in the program, she explained that because of the decentralized nature of the program, it was difficult to know how writing instruction was applying technology in individual courses (which, once approved, are only reviewed once every five years). Because the program is so thoroughly embedded in the university, with no official WAC title on the program, there is not a defined technology component. To understand how technology is operating with writing at UM would require a wholly different investigation than the one I am conducting. However, it seems important to note that, in the last twenty years, the UM program has been a success by its own standards without explicitly inviting technology into the instruction of writing.

## University of Chicago's Little Red Schoolhouse

"As the term is usually understood, there is no 'writing problem' at the University of Chicago" (Williams & Colomb, 1990, p. 84). Thus begins the 1990 account of the University of Chicago WAC program. Joseph Williams and Gregory Colomb (1990) wrote this *Programs that Work* chapter about the Little Red Schoolhouse (referred to in their chapter as "Schoolhouse," and likewise here), an innovative program designed to make sure that students emerging from the University of Chicago, regardless of their discipline,

were able to communicate clearly and professionally. Started in 1982-83, the Schoolhouse emerged from consultant work engaged in by writing faculty. Williams and Colomb (1990) observed that professionals, like faculty and upper level students, had trouble with "style and organization" (p. 86). More importantly, even professionals and faculty with excellent writing skills often lacked the ability to instruct those who struggled with writing. Thus, the Schoolhouse emerged as "remedial English for the advantaged student" (Williams & Colomb, 1990, p. 85), taught by a variety of faculty with the help of graduate assistants. The course consisted of a lecture day in which faculty would discuss various field-specific writing conventions and the construction of "reader-friendly prose" (Williams & Colomb, 1990, p. 89), and a workshop day in which small groups would discuss writing challenges, review essays (shared in advance), and discuss strategies for improvement with a trained graduate assistant. The course was reserved for upper level students to instruct those who had already begun to develop literacy in their chosen field (Williams & Colomb, 1990, pp. 87-89).

It is important to emphasize that because of the demand of the University of Chicago community the Schoolhouse increased from a single course to a WAC program. The Schoolhouse moved from a course to serving specific courses that emphasized how writing occurred in different disciplines, and trained and provided graduate students for these courses. By 1987-88 the Schoolhouse enrolled over 150 undergraduates (with demand for triple that number), 90 graduates from the school of business, 50 from the humanities and sciences, as well as other professionals and post doctorates from around the university (Williams & Colomb, 1990, p. 86). These courses, as reported in 1990, were exacting, challenging, and sought after by students. Interviewing the current head of the writing program, Lawrence McEnerney (personal communication, January 18, 2008), twenty years later, I learn the Schoolhouse is still going strong. Indeed, the Schoolhouse is stronger; according to McEnerney, it has grown in the last twenty years in response to constant demand, from faculty and students of all levels, for writing instruction and support.

Perhaps the most significant shift in the Schoolhouse's recent history is the expansion in the student population it serves. At its peak the Schoolhouse served about 200 advanced undergraduate students per year, though now slightly less. Part of this is a shift in the overall curriculum offered at the University of Chicago; the amount of writing instruction students receive when they enter the university has increased, making the undergraduate course less vital. However, Schoolhouse offerings for the Humanities Writing Intern program have increased from serving about 30-35 sections per year with graduate student writing support to 200 sections of the Humanities core sequence. Advanced graduate writing courses taught by trained faculty have doubled (from approximately 100 to 200 students taking the course each year), as well as continuing to serve the Graduate School of Business, and adding specialty graduate courses (like writing for publication). The Schoolhouse has maintained its involvement in providing tutors for the Art History Writing Intern program, and has been able to begin a program with trained graduate writing support for the Spanish writing program. The Schoolhouse continues to provide writing tutors for undergraduates and graduate students, and has added courses such as, Writing Description, Writing Argument, Writing Law, Writing Biography, Writing Styles, and Writing under Censorship. McEnerney asserts that the Schoolhouse is not currently meeting student demand for its offerings, and while the Schoolhouse staff has increased, there is more that could be done.

McEnerney explained how the Schoolhouse has worked to stay responsive to changes in the overall needs of the University of Chicago. For example, McEnerney points to a shift in focus to graduate students; "The graduate course has more students largely because the Master's programs have been expanded and revised. Chicago now has general Master's program in Social Sciences and the Humanities, and many of the students in these programs are eager for writing support" (personal communication, January 18, 2008). Although the University of Chicago's Little Red Schoolhouse has shifted some of its focus and expanded offerings and staff, it has stayed consistent with the theoretical concepts that were explained in the *Programs that Work* article. As students and professionals begin to gain literacy in a discourse community, they face different writing challenges than those attempting to learn the academic tone in general. As a centralized

program for graduates, advanced undergraduates, and faculty, the Schoolhouse creates an important space of negotiation of writing in the disciplines at the University of Chicago. The Schoolhouse acts as a model for understanding writing on a variety of levels, and helps to articulate what teaching writing means across the curriculum. As Williams and Colomb wrote in 1990, "The Schoolhouse is where the Writing Program articulates their teaching both downward toward the first- and second-year courses and upward toward the graduate and professional schools" (p. 88). The program has always focused on the professionalization of various disciplines through writing. McEnerney articulated this emphasis by explaining, "We're best positioned to help writers who have more expert knowledge: faculty and graduate students. We have to adapt our methods when we work with first-year students, but we hope that they benefit from our experience with the challenges that, if they don't have at the moment, they are likely to have soon" (personal communication, January 18, 2008).

The Schoolhouse serves a population of writers who desire writing support and who can see the benefit of writing instruction. As one junior-senior student quoted in the 1990 article wrote on a class evaluation: "Take the class. Admittedly you will work your butt off and admittedly you will postpone your social life for the next ten weeks, but what you get from the class is definitely worth it" (Williams & Colomb, 1990, p. 91). These types of evaluations, from students not required to take a writing course, are bound to infect faculty with a desire to continue with instruction. The Schoolhouse still uses student evaluations as its main form of assessment, although they look to enrolment numbers as an unofficial guide to how they are doing. Part of the Schoolhouse's success has been responding to disciplinary and student needs. Looking to the future, McEnerney indicated that this evolving approach to writing might include more use of technology and alternative modes:

For our program, the most important changes underway are the changes in the kind of communications that experts need to command. As more kinds of expertise are communicated in ways other than traditional writing, then our methods will have to change or become obsolete. (personal communication, January 18, 2008)

While McEnerney noted that technology has facilitated communication, and has helped writers be able to workshop and share work more efficiently in the class, technology has yet to be actively invited into the curriculum. The website for the Schoolhouse provides some downloadable materials, and class descriptions, but little else. However, McEnerney recognizes that the ways various disciplines are beginning to use new modes of communication, and this will dictate the type of WAC/WID services universities will be expected to offer. However, while technology is looming in the future of the Schoolhouse, it has not yet played a major role in the expansion of this program.

## **The George Mason University WAC/WID Program**

In 1990, George Mason reported a rapidly increasing student population. At that time, the student population, mostly suburban and urban (95% of which commuted to campus), sat at 19,000 and was projected to grow to 30,000 by 1995 (Thaiss et al., 1990, pp. 221- 222). At that time, the faculty to student ratio was 1:25. In the midst of changing populations, the need for increased faculty, and all of the challenges that come with institutional growth, Christopher Thaiss wrote about an already thriving WAC program at George Mason in *Programs that Work*. In 1978 Christopher Thaiss and Don Gallehr received a small grant to begin holding weekend workshops for faculty development in writing, and in 1980-81 they received a larger grant to hold a summer institute for faculty that laid the groundwork for a permanent WAC program. In 1982-83 the University began PAGE (Plan for Alternative General Education), which extended the training of faculty in general. Many of the PAGE courses centered on using writing in a variety of disciplines as a teaching tool, and writing faculty taught instructors from a variety of disciplines how to evaluate written work. In *Programs that Work*, Thaiss et al. (1990) identified "needs" of the program as establishing a

concrete way to communicate with GMU faculty and acquiring more release time for the coordination of the GMU WAC program (p. 227).

When I interviewed Terry Myers Zawacki (personal communication, January 24, 2008), this winter she told me the George Mason WAC program faces challenges, and is still meeting these challenges with innovative solutions. The current population of George Mason is 30,000 students, with an improved faculty ratio of 16:1. Additionally, there has been a large turnover of faculty, with some of the mainstay faculty who supported the WAC program retiring. Currently, there is a significant number of faculty that need to be introduced to writing across the curriculum and taught to teach a writing intensive course. The student population has also changed, with an increasing population of immigrant students and international students and non-native speakers. GMU is among the most diverse universities in the nation where just under 50% of the student population are minorities (including many international and first generation students) (GMU Factbook, Enrollment, 2), increasing the pressure currently placed on the composition program, the writing intensive courses, and the writing center. However, while these challenges are new to the WAC program at GMU, some of the challenges are ones that WAC has been facing since its inception.

George Mason has been moving towards becoming a Research I institution, giving more resources to the graduate population. The drawback of this is that junior faculty are now being required to have a book, or an equivalent number of articles, in their field to receive tenure. This emphasis on scholarship has made it more of a challenge to persuade faculty to teach a sometimes time-intensive writing focused course. Zawacki reports: "The challenge is to reach faculty in general so that we can do faculty development activities that recognize their efforts. In particular to recognize junior faculty that are working hard on how to teach with writing" (personal communication, January 24, 2008). Interestingly, and perhaps predictably for those who have been in the field over the last twenty years, this is not a new concern. Chris Thaiss articulated similar challenges in 1990: "Nevertheless, GMU remains genuinely committed to undergraduate teaching, despite the hazards of large class size and underexperienced, undersupervised faculty—plus tightening 'publish or perish' pressure on tenure-track teachers" (p. 222). Taken together with new student populations, these changes offer significant challenges to the program, and GMU's program has found innovative ways to meet these tests.

George Mason's WAC/WID website (<http://wac.gmu.edu/>) has extensive resources, having been built almost directly after Programs that Work was published, and continuing to be updated. When I asked Zawacki about how she saw technology supporting the George Mason WAC program, she was able to inform me of several developments, iterations and applications of technology. When the George Mason program was initially being developed by Chris Thaiss, the internet was (clearly) not yet being widely used. So, like many programs, GMU's WAC program developed a newsletter. "It was called Writing at Center, without the '@' sign that we use now" (personal communication, January 24, 2008). The newsletter, then as now, was a joint effort between the writing center and the WAC/WID program. While the newsletter is now available in digital form, Zawacki pointed out that a print version is still made available at the recommendation [insistence] of her WAC committee. The paper copy, a six-page document with various writing resources, is distributed with a three-hole-punch along the side. This encourages faculty members to keep parts, or all, of the newsletter for future use. The online version of the newsletter is more extended, allowing for longer versions of various articles and links to additional support materials. The electronic version also allows the newsletter to be distributed to the whole university faculty through university-wide electronic announcements. But this is only one small part of the WAC program's extensive use of the web.

Zawacki reported that the website now is one of the most valuable ways to support programs. As the internet became more widely accessed, Thaiss put together the first George Mason WAC website using "rudimentary tools," and also personally wrote all content for the website. In 1998, when Zawacki took over as director of both the WAC/WID and the writing center programs, the site needed extensive redesign, additional content and updating. In 1999, the new website went up, with materials written by both Zawacki and Thaiss. Zawacki emphasized the extensive revision that the site has experienced. The main focus of the GMU WAC



website's most recent updating and revision work is the assessment section ([http://wac.gmu.edu/assessing/assessing\\_wac.php](http://wac.gmu.edu/assessing/assessing_wac.php)). Zawacki pointed to this section as one of the most valuable and sought after areas (specifically on the section on assessing student writing) of the website, and one which is currently receiving national recognition (for additional information please see <http://www.wpacouncil.org/GeorgeMason>). Zawacki explained that the web-based materials are constantly under development to keep the website up-to-date and relevant. For example, in response to state-level mandates for increased assessment of all levels of education, Zawacki was working on documents for the University Assessment Office when she realized that the general learning outcomes she was articulating for writing intensive courses had not been explicitly discussed before. Zawacki drew my attention to the description on the site that defines what WAC/WID is, what it means to have a writing intensive course, and what the requirements are. However, she noted, "There is nothing there that says why we believe in it [WAC] and what the general learning goals are" (personal communication, January 24, 2008). Zawacki felt that it was vital to articulate these goals (a current project) because the site is a document that presents the program to audiences both internally and externally.

Zawacki is always aware that the program's website has multiple audiences; offering materials to GMU faculty, acting as model for other programs, and an information source for administration. Zawacki reports getting an average of one email a week about how the WAC/WID program is run. Many of those queries are about assessment of student work, though other questions are often about how to assess what constitutes a writing intensive requirement. Traffic on the site in part comes from being a consistent source of good WAC information over a long period of time. Because the website predates the WAC Clearinghouse, it maintains an evolving list of WAC programs, which programs still ask to be included in. Christopher Thaiss and Sue McLeod started the National WAC network /International Network of WAC Programs, and it was originally housed at the GMU website. While it is now housed with the WAC Clearinghouse, GMU still maintains links to it to aid internet travelers (Zawacki, personal communication, January 24, 2008). All told, the GMU site is a model for the way that a website can be used in a variety of ways to keep a program growing and communicating with a wider community of WAC/WID programs.

I asked Zawacki if she had noticed any large trends in WAC over the last twenty years. She named three movements that felt the most vital to her and were worth watching in the future. First, Zawacki emphasized the effect of diversity on programs, and the challenges that come with this. She asked me how many of the programs from Programs that Work explicitly talked about an international student population, or diversity at all? There is a growing awareness of who WAC programs serve, and how vital it is for students, from different disciplines and global regions, to be able to communicate clearly. Second, Zawacki pointed to the pressure for assessment (which she is working to meet with The Writing Assessment Initiative and accompanying materials on the GMU site) and being able to "prove" that our students are, indeed, competent writers by the time they graduate. Zawacki has noticed that often other universities will allow the Assessment Office to develop and carry out mandated assessments of student writing; for her, this is a mistake. Assessing one's own writing program and the competence of college writers can be a vital tool for program development and growth. Lastly, Zawacki again reiterated the importance that communication technology has had for the field, especially websites for disseminating materials and information and representing one's program, professional listservs for communication with other professionals, and the WAC Clearinghouse, which provides a large amount of resources and international connections. George Mason has been able to use technology to its fullest in these ways, and will continue to embrace new modes of communication to share WAC with a new generation of faculty and administrators.

## Reflection

Interviewing the administrators of these three programs has been enlightening in many ways, but has raised more questions for this researcher than they answered. For example, Vicinus and the University of Michigan show that a program can succeed in becoming deeply entrenched in university culture; how can

we use this imbedded nature to investigate the faculty's use of writing technology in their classrooms and disciplines? If we did, would we find faculty using new modes of communication, or would we discover any explicit discussion of how technology alters the genres students are working to master? McEnerney brings up an excellent point when he directs us to the future of communication and the types of communication education that will be necessary for our graduates to be considered "literate" in the work place. Will the Little Red Schoolhouse of the future be teaching visual rhetorics, PowerPoint etiquette and web communication 101? Are students receiving this information elsewhere in the university? Finally, Zawacki uses the website to share resources and make connections around the world, changing how she is able to work in the WAC field. Does this mean that technology changes the kind of knowledge we produce, and type of communities we are able to develop? Terry Zawacki mentioned that she and Christopher Thaiss, while researching for their most recent book, *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*, asked instructors how they used technology in their classroom. Most reported that they use word processing to support student writing, but little else. Is this a concern?

While the discussion on technology, literacy, and its impact on WAC has been wide, the programs above are all successful with very different levels of technological use. The idea of technology and how it is radically changing WAC programs is not the first shift noted by these directors. This implies that, to date, technology has been an addition to programs, but has not become a corner stone of development for their continued success. A possible explanation for the limited incorporation of technology in these WAC programs might be that the current level of computer use meets the needs of their university disciplines. There has been much conversation about technology in the classroom, but little in the way of how technology changes the way disciplines are creating knowledge. While WAC is quick to investigate emergent resources that could benefit our students, larger disciplinary bodies may have been less articulate in their interrogation of new media within their fields. While web-based journals are slowly being recognized as valid modes of discipline building, they are *remediations* (Bolter & Grusin, 2000) of print based media. For many disciplines, a web based journal is still not considered with the same tenure weight as a print publication. It is little wonder that WAC is less concerned with new modes of writing when the message from an institutional level tells us its value is tenuous at best. If the academy as a whole were to consider valid the non-linear, hyperlink filled, collaborative nature of new media, WAC would not pause to change how we talk about, teach, and use technology. A new media shift asks us not only to use technology in the classroom, but to contemplate the way writing with technology makes available new modes of understanding and new ways of writing to learn (Wysocki, Johnson-Eilola, Selfe & Sirc, 2004). If there is no pressure from the disciplines to change writing in this way, is it worth the time and resources to pursue it?

Charles Bazerman (2007) in "WAC for Cyborgs: Discursive Thought in Information Rich Environments," points out that the complexity of the information we need to be processing, and teaching students to process and synthesize, is increasing. We exist in a data rich reality, and students with "little prior relevant experience have to understand the following":

The purposes of consulting data: The relevant contexts for their inquiry: Access to the data: Planning a methodical inquiry: The logics of the data and data systems, including complex models that produce secondary data: The forms in which data are represented: Manipulation and analysis of the data: The human meaning of the data: The patterns and concepts that suggest interpretation of the data: the role that knowledge takes within their lives. (p. 102)

All of our students are facing these techno-literacy challenges. In order to coherently operate in the academy, students extract data from a variety of texts, and we then ask them to express what they extract and synthesize from data in writing. But the sea of data students are fishing from is overwhelming, and very different from the preferred genre of the academy: the traditional linear paper. It is possible that we are not taking into account the complex student act of not only gathering information, but taking it from a dynamic context and putting it into a static form. It is clear that, while the academy might be still working on

accepting publishing and researching on the web, the wider world is rapidly changing the meaning of texts. Challenging ourselves not only to use new tools to write, but changing the writing we ask for and practice writing in our disciplines, is a daunting task. WAC, as a community that bridges disciplinary divides and communication styles, is faced with the question of whether it is more productive to be reactive to the demands of the university, or proactive in introducing our disciplines to the changes in global communication. We have seen that a program can be stable and successful, well developed and dynamic without inviting new media into their program. However, in starting this conversation actively WAC could influence the relevant knowledge making skills of both our students and our fields. Writing Across the Curriculum programs have been tested by 40 years of continued existence, and have successfully negotiated a variety of localized university environments, growing and changing to meet needs and make a strong global community. We are well positioned to continue to be innovative and positively impact writing in the university, and I will be curious to see, when we reflect twenty years from now, how we did this.

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