

FOREWORD.

# WAC TODAY: DIVERSITY AND RESILIENCE

**Mya Poe**

Northeastern University

In their 1992 collection, *Writing, Teaching, and Learning in the Disciplines*, Anne Herrington and Charles Moran began their introduction by noting that “movements such as writing in the disciplines have histories: at some point they were not; at another point they were; and somehow there was a progress from not-being to being” (p. 3). In framing WAC as a historical development, Herrington and Moran suggest multiple possible histories of WAC’s origins; they asked Nancy Martin and David R. Russell to compare different histories of WAC—Martin’s British history of WAC (1992) and Russell’s U.S. history of WAC (1992). For Russell, the difference in history was in the “social and institutional forces that shaped” the WAC movements in the UK and U.S. (p. 4). Martin located those forces as the mid-twentieth century U.S. desire for “adequate standards of written language” and the British conversation about educational content necessary for the new clientele of school students (p. 4).

Russell’s and Martin’s comments 27 years ago are instructive in the context of this collection. *Diverse Approaches to Teaching, Learning, and Writing Across the Curriculum: IWAC at 25* suggests that the U.S. debate about “adequate standards of written language” has come full circle. Rather than working toward “adequate standards of written language” or even the idea that WAC helps students become compliant community members, WAC researchers today are resisting the notion that there is a single standard by which all students should write or that community membership is a one-way venture into an academic community or the workplace. Instead, WAC researchers today are thinking about expanded trajectories for literate action—trajectories that invite diverse identities and languaging practices.

In short, while WAC has been incredibly resilient over the last two decades, it is now that diversity is really beginning to shape the field.

It’s been a long time coming. When I was a graduate student in the late 1990s and reading the Herrington and Moran collection, I thought of it as a window into the world of WAC. I was enamored by their inclusion of Bonnie Spanier’s chapter “Encountering the Biological Sciences: Ideology, Language, and Learning.” Spanier, who held a Ph.D. in microbiology and molecular genet-

ics from Harvard and was a professor of women's studies at SUNY Albany, was committed to making "feminism and science work together for social change and evidence-based medicine" (Spanier, n.d.). Her chapter in the Herrington and Moran collection put forth a bold vision for WAC:

writing-across-the-curriculum projects that address ideology in the discourse and practice of science are potentially transformative and may help to alleviate the exclusion of women and people of color from the scientific professions, the crisis in scientific literacy in the United States, and the vast gulf between scientific experts and the public in issues of science and society. (p. 193)

Spanier's feminist vision of science, one that acknowledged its Western, racialized history, was exciting. I scrawled notes over every inch of Spanier's chapter. This is what I wanted WAC to do!

But little would come of Spanier's vision, despite the occasional critique such as those by LeCourt (1996), Villanueva (2001), or Hall Kells (2007). WAC remained seemingly unchangeable when it came to critical theory, second-language research, and approaches to culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014). But things have begun to change with offerings like Michelle Cox's (2010) WPA-CompPile research bibliographies on WAC-WID and second language writers, Michelle Cox and Terry Myer Zawacki's (2011) special issue in *Across the Disciplines* on second language writing and their subsequent collection, *WAC and Second-Language Writers: Research Towards Linguistically and Culturally Inclusive Programs and Practices* (Zawacki & Cox, 2013), which brought internationalization and second-language writing research to the field. Chris Anson's "Black Holes: Writing Across the Curriculum, Assessment, and the Gravitational Invisibility of Race" in *Race and Writing Assessment*, and Frankie Condon and Vershawn Ashanti Young's (2016) *Performing Antiracist Pedagogy in Rhetoric, Writing, and Communication*, which was an expansion of their 2013 *Across the Disciplines* special issue on Anti-Racist Activism: Teaching Rhetoric and Writing, brought attention to race and racism.

And here we are today. *Diverse Approaches to Teaching, Learning, and Writing Across the Curriculum: IWAC at 25* is a peer-reviewed collection edited by women—women who not just bring expertise in linguistics, student writing development, and feminist rhetoric to WAC work but who also bring a commitment to making higher education more inclusive. Spanier would be pleased.

From early chapters in *Diverse Approaches to Teaching, Learning, and Writing Across the Curriculum: IWAC at 25* that narrate the formation of the field and the professional organizations that serve faculty and graduate students to later chapters

that take up anti-racism and culturally sustaining approaches, the contributors in this collection foreground inclusivity. For example, the three-part goals of energizing, demystifying, and connecting for WAC-GO place access at the center of the organization that serves new members of the community.

WAC is about people making texts together, not studying texts in isolation, and forming meaningful collaborations has long been central to successful WAC programs. Today, in the diverse, global world of higher education, WAC collaborations can be even more expansive as they respond to language policy changes in locations such as Hong Kong. In expanding these horizons, the potential is enormous. For example, as Marcela Hebbard and Yanina Hernández write, becoming *transfronterizo* collaborators “demands learning to traverse across disciplinary and linguistic borders in order to develop...*transborder thinking*, the intellectual openness that considers that perspectives and methods in one’s discipline have come from and/or been influenced by perspectives and methods outside one’s discipline.” In doing so, discussions about adequate standards for writing that fueled WAC long ago now become discussions about negotiation, perspective, and change.

The final chapters of *Diverse Approaches to Teaching, Learning, and Writing Across the Curriculum: IWAC at 25* in *Attending to the Human Element: Anti-racism, Emotional Labor, and Personal Connection in the Teaching of Writing* leave a large footprint for the future of the field. Here, we do not see a focus solely on the changing demographics of U.S. higher education. Instead, we see authors wrestling with changing the deep structures of inequality that have long fueled U.S. higher education (and higher education globally). From Neisha-Anne Green and Frankie Condon’s powerful epistolary on the effects of racism to Shannon Madden and Sandra L. Tarabochia’s research on the emotional labor involved in mentoring, contributors document the many ways that cultural and social forces shape disciplinary knowledge-making practices. When we ignore racism, emotion, and culture, WAC remains complicit in a cycle of disempowerment. The contributors offer us hope. They explain how to make assignments culturally sustainable and meaningful to students. Such approaches ask us not to simply teach students disciplinary genres or discourses but to ask broader questions such as: What would it mean to teach students how to use grant writing skills for preservation of their own communities? How might students tap into knowledge about their communities to bring people together to talk about topics such as water quality? Such “expansive framing” puts students’ interests and passions for the subject matter at the center of disciplinary language learning (Kareem, this volume).

*Diverse Approaches to Teaching, Learning, and Writing Across the Curriculum: IWAC at 25* is proof that WAC has remained resilient over the last 25 years, but it also profoundly changing. With those changes, new histories—with new perspectives—remain yet to be written.

## REFERENCES

- Condon, F., & Young, V. A. (Eds.). (2016). *Performing antiracist pedagogy in rhetoric, writing, and communication*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/atd/antiracist/>
- Cox, M. (2010). WAC-WID and second language writers, WPA-CompPile research bibliographies, No. 8. *WPA-CompPile Research Bibliographies*. <https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/compile/wpa/Cox.pdf>
- Cox, M., & Zawacki, T. M. (Eds.). (2011). WAC and second language writing: Cross-field research, theory, and program development [Special Issue.] *Across the Disciplines*, 8(4). <https://wac.colostate.edu/atd/special/ell/>
- Herrington, A. & Moran, C. (Eds.). (1992). *Writing, teaching, and learning in the disciplines*. Modern Language Association.
- Kells, M. H. (2007). Writing across communities: Deliberation and the discursive possibilities of WAC. *Reflections: A Journal of Writing, Service-Learning, and Community Literacy*, 6(1), 87-109.
- Kells, M. H. (2012). Welcome to Babylon: Junior writing program administrators and writing across communities at the University of New Mexico. *Composition Forum*, 25.
- LeCourt, D. (1996). WAC as critical pedagogy: The third stage? *JAC*, 16(3), 389-405.
- Martin, N. (1992). Language across the curriculum: Where it began and what it promises. In A. Herrington and C. Moran (Eds.), *Writing, teaching, and learning in the disciplines* (pp. 6-21). Modern Language Association.
- Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 85-100.
- Russell, D. (1992). American origins of the writing-across-the-curriculum movement. In A. Herrington and C. Moran (Eds.), *Writing, teaching, and learning in the disciplines* (pp. 22-44). Modern Language Association.
- Spanier, B. (n.d.) *Bonnie Spanier*. Retrieved 22 February 2020 from <http://bonniespanier.blogspot.com/p/about.html>
- Spanier, B. (1992). Encountering the biological sciences: Ideology, language, and learning. In A. Herrington and C. Moran (Eds.), *Writing, teaching, and learning in the disciplines* (pp. 193-212). Modern Language Association.
- Villanueva, V. (2001). The politics of literacy across the curriculum. In S. McLeod, E. Miraglia, M. Soven, & C. Thaiss (Eds.), *WAC for the new millennium* (pp. 165-178). National Council of Teachers of English.
- Zawacki, T. M., & Cox, M. (Eds.). (2013). *WAC and second-language writers: Research towards linguistically and culturally inclusive programs and practices*. The WAC Clearinghouse; University Press of Colorado. <https://wac.colostate.edu/books/perspectives/12/>