



## FOREWORD

ELAINE P. MAIMON  
*Arizona State University West*

The signs are positive that WAC has staying power. *WAC for the New Millennium* itself testifies that the National Council of Teachers of English believes that writing across the curriculum has a future as well as a past. The first chapter, Susan McLeod and Eric Miraglia's "Writing Across the Curriculum in a Time of Change," gets at the heart of the matter. Like every educational reform movement, WAC has developed within the paradox of the academy, the simultaneous commitment to conservatism (the preservation of knowledge) and to radicalism (the generation of new knowledge). WAC's staying power as an educational reform movement is based on its resilience in resolving this paradox.

In addition to resolving the paradox inherent in the mission of higher education, leaders of the WAC movement have also navigated well through a key administrative paradox, or Lesson Six, to paraphrase Michael Fullan and Matt Miles's "Eight Basic Lessons for the New Paradigm of Change": Neither Centralization nor Decentralization Works Alone (both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary) (see Chapter 1 of this volume). My own academic career allows me to reflect on WAC from the bottom up and from the top down. As Joni Mitchell might say, I've looked at WAC from both sides now.

I can date my own work in writing across the curriculum to 1974, when as a very junior faculty member at Beaver College (I was on part-time appointment) I was made director of first-year composition and simultaneously the flash point for faculty complaints about student writing. To my innocent and much younger eyes, it seemed neither sensible nor fair to hold only one department—English—responsible for students' progress in something

so complex and various as writing. If it took a village to educate a child, it certainly took a university to educate a writer.

In those early days, I was frequently astonished by allegations that the idea of university-wide responsibility for writing was nothing more than a fad. How could something fundamental be called a fad? As I reflect on those early days from my current vantage point of campus leadership at Arizona State University West, I see that writing across the curriculum has deep roots in long-standing principles of the academy; yet the act of reminding people of those roots necessitates strategies for change. The early leaders of writing across the curriculum—Harriet Sheridan, Toby Fulwiler, Art Young, Barbara Walvoord, Christopher Thaiss, Charles Moran, Anne Herrington, Susan McLeod, Margot Soven—understood that fulfilling the promise of the academy's traditions requires strategies for renewal and change. Moreover, the early leaders exercised a student-centered pragmatism, reflecting the virtues of common sense.

It simply made sense, for example, to develop faculty writing workshops. Yet creating this special nonhierarchical space within the university for exchanging ideas about everything from educational values to writing style proved to be revolutionary. Who would have thought? As Michael Fullan, who is cited in McLeod and Miraglia's essay, pointed out two decades later, effective change depends on work done at the local level—with individual teachers on their pedagogic practice, in collaborative workshop settings.

It also made sense to emphasize connections. E. M. Forster's guiding principle, "Only connect," was a motto of the early WAC movement. Connections across disciplines, among faculty members, and among students were fundamental to learning. Even etymologically a university expressed wholeness, unity among fragments. We saw ourselves as bridge builders, and as such we discovered numerous chasms—between disciplines, between colleagues, between students and professors, between the academy and the community.

The paradox of tradition and change became a special puzzle to me in 1976, when I discovered the disconnects within accepted public definitions of writing. I was developing a major grant proposal for submission to the National Endowment for the Hu-

## Foreword

manities (NEH) to fund faculty writing workshops at Beaver College. NEH program officers told me that reviewers might not understand that college writing was related to rhetoric—one of the most ancient and fundamental of the humanities. Writing instead was thought to be a “skill” and therefore not under the mandate of NEH. Here was another chasm, this one between writing as a technology (like typing?) and writing as an essential component of discovering and generating ideas. It was a great day for bridge building when, in 1977, NEH funded not only the Beaver College program but also the National Writing Project, which has done so much to bring writing across the curriculum to K–12 institutions.

The very fact that writing across the curriculum resolves paradoxes of tradition and change has led to misinterpretation and false dichotomies. Those of us who were early leaders of writing across the curriculum, in our reading of James Britton, James Kinneavy, Edward P. J. Corbett, and Mina Shaughnessy, did not see an opposition between expressivism and social construction. Expressivism—writing to learn—was integrally related to learning to write. Yet, as writing across the curriculum moved from practice to theory, some theorizers in the 1980s and 1990s focused on only half the paradox, emphasizing the traditional, socially constructed features of the movement. Now, in this new century and new millennium, we are clearing the air and reasserting the interconnections between expressivism and social construction, tradition and change. This volume is a landmark step in that direction.

*WAC for the New Millennium* also reminds us that the educational reform movements most frequently discussed as the twenty-first century begins have their roots in writing across the curriculum. WAC programs moved the sage from the stage by advising instructors to guide from the side. “Course clusters,” as we called them at Beaver College in 1977, established linkages among courses—e.g., Nineteenth-Century British Literature; Nineteenth-Century British History; Evolution—through reading and writing assignments, in this case on Charles Darwin. Faculty members and students formed *ur*-learning communities. Collaborative learning and peer tutoring were essential to establishing the student-to-student connections necessary to writing

## Foreword

across the curriculum. Writing as problem solving; writing as critical thinking; writing within pragmatic contexts rather than in five-paragraph themes; writing as a way to individualize instruction for a multicultural and multilingual student body—all of these ideas were part of the earliest writing-across-the-curriculum programs.

In 1991, when I read David R. Russell's *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870–1990: A Curricular History*, I was both discouraged and encouraged—discouraged because so many educational reform movements had passed from the scene and encouraged because it was clear that writing across the curriculum had emerged from a fascinating history of precursors and that it demonstrated evidence of resilience. I feel even more encouraged today. Russell's historical perspective has a certain linearity, and we may, as the first essay in this volume points out, require a paradigm of change modeled on chaos theory. (I have become a stronger adherent of chaos theory since becoming a campus provost.) McLeod and Miraglia paraphrase James Gleick to explain that “chaos in a scientific sense is not disorder, but a process by which complexities interact and coalesce into periodic patterns which are unknowable in advance.” This postmodern paradigm of change encompasses paradox. Writing across the curriculum is a complex set of ideas that have stimulated change at the local, classroom level, from grade school through grad school. As the new century moves along, we might even say that writing across the curriculum occurs at the point where chaos meets common sense.