

FOREWORD

Michael Carter

North Carolina State University

The writing-enriched curriculum (WEC) has had a significant impact on writing in university settings, a model that has been adapted at multiple schools in the US and abroad. So I may be pardoned if I tried to claim that WEC had its origin in 1997 at my own university, NC State. At least that's what I wrote when I originally began this foreword. But I quickly realized that this claim was both an overstatement and an understatement, an overstatement in that it gave the impression that there was from the beginning an intentional goal in mind and an understatement in that others soon brought their own ideas and experiences with writing that converged in the underlying principles that drive approaches to the writing-enriched curriculum.

My own experience began with one of the most mundane actions of the academy, empaneling a task force. Our Council on Undergraduate Education (CUE) had a problem. A few years earlier, it had established General Education Requirements that included the stipulation that in addition to the two semesters of first-year writing and an additional advanced writing or speaking course, undergraduates were to be assigned writing in their majors, at least two papers. Not surprisingly, this requirement was difficult to define and certainly to enforce; thus, there being no agreement as to what counted as a *paper*, pretty much anything went, if it went at all. The charge of a new task force, the Writing Work Group, was to clarify the ambiguities of the two-paper requirement and to propose a way to evaluate its effectiveness across the campus.

Skipping over the two years of deliberations, in spring 1997 the task force submitted its report to CUE. Instead of continuing to wrangle with the issue of two papers in the majors, we proposed that the university commit to a program in writing across the curriculum (WAC). This proposal reflected the mainstream of composition at that time: a centralized university program emphasizing designated writing-intensive courses in each major and training of faculty teaching those courses. It mainly followed the WAC program at the University of Missouri, which was considered a model at the time.

Upon approval of the proposal by CUE, we began to consider the next steps of implementation. But that effort soon came to an abrupt halt—the rejection of our proposal by the university's deans' council, comprised of the provost and deans of the colleges. We were stunned, especially those of us, like me, who were

too lowly in the university hierarchy at that time to be aware there even was a deans' council. And what, we asked each other, did they know about teaching writing?

In place of our proposal, the deans' council stipulated that any new program must meet three demands. First, it should include speaking in addition to writing. Yes, we could incorporate speaking, but we had no expertise on campus in the field of speaking across the curriculum. Second, instead of a centralized oversight and guidance by experts in the field, responsibility for writing and speaking in the majors was given to deans and department heads to enforce. This decentralization eliminated the possibility of the WAC program we had proposed. And third, to assure that deans and department heads would indeed take responsibility for writing and speaking in their curricula, the efficacy of these programs was to be evaluated through outcomes-based assessment.

Outcomes-based assessment? This was a completely new term for us. Obviously, the focus was on outcomes, but outcomes from what? And what exactly were we expected to assess? There was no direction at all from the university administration. Today, of course, outcomes assessment permeates the academy, largely because it is required of our regional accrediting agencies. But at that time, at least for us, we did not know what to make of it.

Somehow, and I really don't remember how, it fell to me to undertake the task of implementing this unwanted program. I had the summer of 1997 to figure it out. And though I didn't yet know exactly what an outcome was or how it could be produced, I realized that what I would be asking of faculty was revolutionary, and they were unlikely to be happy about it. First, the primary unit of measure for the assessment process must be the program: computer science, history, psychology, chemical engineering, business, etc. If assessment were to be meaningful in terms of improvement, then it was the program that was to be improved. This contrasted sharply with the primary measures at the time, the individual faculty member and his or her courses. The sources of data for those evaluations were mainly end-of-term student course evaluations and peer reviews of faculty teaching, typically applied to third-year reviews, promotion, and tenure. I knew that the tectonic shift to evaluating programs would be a serious challenge.

Second, if the program were to be the primary unit of measure, what was to be measured? The answer, of course, was the outcome, what came out of a process, in this case student learning. But this also required a dramatic adjustment on the part of faculty very much comfortable with curricula that relied on inputs, not outcomes. By inputs, I mean prescribing a set of required and elective courses and perhaps certain other learning experiences and simply assuming a result, viable knowledge and skills. Under the new system, however, faculty

would be required to measure the extent to which their programs enabled students to meet designated learning outcomes.

As I faced the approaching fall semester, I was confronted with the reality that outcomes assessment would demand a mammoth effort on the part of faculty. I couldn't simply expect them to create program outcomes and measures of outcomes on their own, especially since at that point I didn't even know what outcomes would look like or how they would be generated. So I decided to make a five-year plan in which I would work with faculty department by department in all nine colleges with undergraduate students. Because there was no hiding from faculty the fact that this was a top-down requirement from university administrators, I needed the backing of college and departmental administrators. Thus, before I would meet with faculty groups from each college, I planned to meet first with the dean and then department heads to explain what I was doing and why, trying to establish what good will I could. Then for each department I would arrange to work with members of the Curriculum and Instruction Committees, responsible for undergraduate education.

Inescapably, the day came for me to meet with my first group of faculty. I didn't have a plan because I had no idea what to expect. And I was concerned with how faculty from my largely science and technical university would respond to me, a young associate professor, completely unknown to them, and from the English department no less. After introductions, I opened with the only justification I had for my presence there: the provost required them to do outcomes assessment. For the scheduled 90 minutes, the first hour was given over to their sturdy and implacable resistance. The provost has no right to make us do this. He was only going to use these outcomes as an excuse to cut our budgets. What if we don't want to do outcomes assessment? Who's going to make us? What evidence was there that our program needs improvement? What if we just made up information about our program? How would anybody know? Who says this is going to work at all? Can you give us examples of how this has worked at other universities? And on and on.

I am faculty, too, and had attended enough of my own department meetings not to be terribly surprised at their reaction. Finally, after an hour of this, I said, "OK. We have a half-hour left. Just humor me for the rest of our time and tell me about your program." The tenor of the meeting suddenly changed. For them, I became this *tabula rasa* in their department eager to learn about a program they were clearly quite proud of. I scribbled notes as fast as I could hoping for some insight later. Afterward, I discovered that there was enough information there for what amounted to proto-outcomes. When we met again, I read them what I had found, and that set off a productive discussion shaping and then generating more outcomes. And, critically, I came to understand that

learning outcomes were what students should be able to do that demonstrated their learning but also at the same time as a way of learning itself.

As I worked with more departments, I found a pattern emerging. Nearly all the initial meetings were dominated by resistance. I learned that faculty needed to establish their opposition; they wanted to be heard, to feel that they had been understood. And I would give them sufficient space for that. Once that point had been reached, I would ask about their programs and, based on a list of open-ended questions, started taking notes. Then I applied experience I had in coding interviews, generating what I called objectives, the broad learning goals students were expected to achieve, and then operational definitions of outcomes for each category. This meant that the next time I met with a faculty group I could show them learning outcomes that reflected an understanding of their programs and revise as necessary (Carter, 2002).

In my deep dive into the wide reach of departments across my university, I learned that the writing of faculty and students was intimately disciplinary. The writing in my own discipline, rhetoric and writing, became visible to me only in contrast to the other ways of writing I encountered. I was particularly struck by the faculty of the Departments of History and Mathematics. They each readily acknowledged that it was highly unlikely that their students would become professional historians or mathematicians. The goals of the faculty, then, were to shape students' ways of thinking as modes of problem solving appropriate to history or to mathematics, described in their program outcomes (Carter, 2007).

Once we realized that outcomes assessment was becoming established on our campus, it was time for some administrative structure. We convinced the provost to fund a Campus Writing and Speaking Program (CWSP). And we constituted a Campus Writing and Speaking Board comprised mostly of faculty. Over the following year, Chris Anson, who had been offered the position of Director of the CWSP but had to delay his move from the University of Minnesota for a year, travelled frequently to NC State to work with faculty as I continued as interim director. During that year, he was able to participate in an *ex officio* capacity in the search for an assistant director who would bring expertise in oral communication across the curriculum. That search attracted Deanna Dannels, a new Ph.D. who had focused her dissertation research on speaking in the engineering and other curricula at the University of Utah. Chris and Deanna arrived in the summer of 1999 and began to establish a well-respected program extending our outcomes work by assisting departments with implementation and assessment and shaping an institutional culture of writing, while I continued to evangelize outcomes assessment on campus.

I completed my five years of working with faculty in the colleges in the 2002-2003 academic year. By that time, I had become involved with a broad university

committee implementing outcomes assessment across the university, grounded in the understanding that what students produce through their writing and speaking is how we can judge learning. In 2004 I began working with our graduate school in outcomes assessment of graduate programs. And NC State sponsored its first Undergraduate Assessment Symposium in 2007, attracting faculty from around the US and beyond. I presented a workshop entitled Program Assessment 101: A Beginner's Guide, which became a staple in the annual symposia, later sponsored by Meredith College of Raleigh. Outcomes assessment had caught on, accrediting agencies requiring it, so lots of faculty came to get the basics that they could take back to their colleges and universities. In 2007, after Pamela Flash at the University of Minnesota had received funding to develop and model what she called a writing-enriched curriculum, she invited Chris Anson and me to visit and talk to members of the WEC Advisory Committee about our work. So it turns out that the provost and deans who had blocked our original plan must have known what they were talking about after all.

In retrospect, though we certainly were not aware of it at the time, we were part of a much longer history in the United States of gathering data to test advanced learning and accountability, dating back to World War I (Shavelson, 2007, 2010). Within this broad scope of time, the key innovation at the root of WEC is the focus on writing outcomes in disciplinary programs generated, managed, and tested by faculty in those programs. WEC is now surely one of, if not the, most robust models for integrating writing in the disciplines. In the following pages, scholars offer a wide range of exciting perspectives on this model, opening and broadening its potential for teaching and learning.

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