

# Writing Across the Co-Curriculum

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This article builds on existing scholarship to further explore the potential of co-curricular collaborations and to advocate for co-curricular programs that utilize a peer-education based model as especially rich sites for WAC collaboration. By adopting Linkon and Pavesich's (2015) use of "affordance" and their accompanying gardening metaphor for WAC work, it explores how existing scholarship has understood labor in co-curricular collaborations and examines the affordances of peer-education based co-curricular programs. It then describes a collaboration between a WAC program and peer-education based co-curricular programs to demonstrate the potential and value of these kinds of collaborations for WAC programs and institutions at large. Overall, this article encourages WAC directors to identify and collaborate with co-curricular programs with affordances that allow for shared labor as a way to increase WAC visibility and sustainability.

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Scholars have long argued that writing across the curriculum (WAC) must work to expand the scope of collaboration beyond faculty and traditional academic departments to include other institutional academic, administrative, and support units (McLeod et al., 2001; Parks & Goldblatt, 2000; Walvoord, 1996). Taking up these calls, the Statement of WAC Principles and Practices (2014), developed by the International Network of WAC Programs and endorsed by the Conference on College Composition and Communication Executive Committee, identified "collaborat[ing] with other groups in the institution" as an important step for WAC directors so they can work to "integrate WAC into the fabric of an institution." It goes on to list nineteen possible units or programs that are "natural allies of WAC." Several of the potential collaborators listed, including writing centers, undergraduate research offices, student affairs, and libraries, provide co-curriculum at universities and colleges.

In broad terms, the co-curriculum refers to structured activities, programs, and learning experiences, such as academic support services, research intensive experiences, internships, service or community-based learning initiatives, and student organizations among others, that complement or are connected to the formal academic curriculum. Co-curricular experiences, many of which have been identified

as high-impact practices (Kuh, 2008), provide important alternative sites of learning where students often are the primary actors and even leaders in their education. As the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise (2007) has observed, "some of the most powerful learning in college occurs in activities undertaken as part of the co-curriculum, both on campus and through campus outreach to community partners" (p. 37). Research in writing studies that has examined co-curricular spaces further supports their value as alternative sites of rhetorical education and learning (e.g. Alexander & Jarratt, 2014; Hendrickson, 2016; Ruggles Gere, 1994).

Given the student learning and engagement that occurs in the co-curriculum, it seems a natural fit for WAC programs and initiatives that seek to infuse writing into daily teaching and learning practices. Additionally, the co-curriculum provides an excellent opportunity for WAC to encourage the transfer of writing knowledge and practices or what Yancey et al. (2018) has called the "writing-transfer-mindset" by asking students to write in multiple contexts and to reflect on the similarities and differences between writing in different contexts. Since they bridge multiple contexts, co-curricular programs and initiatives bring together students and faculty from across the disciplines as well as administration and staff from both academic and student affairs, making them prime sites for interdisciplinary and institutional collaborations.

Despite their potential, co-curricular collaborations receive relatively little attention in WAC research beyond those with service or community-based learning initiatives (Deans, 1997; Jolliffe, 2001; Parks & Goldblatt, 2000) and writing centers (Barnett & Blumner, 1999; Good & Barganier, 2013; Robinson & Hall, 2013). This article builds on existing scholarship to further explore the potential of co-curricular collaborations and to advocate for co-curricular programs that utilize a peer-education based model as especially rich sites for WAC collaboration. I adopt Linkon and Pavesich's (2015) use of "affordance" and their accompanying gardening analogy for WAC work to explore how existing scholarship has understood labor in co-curricular collaborations and to examine the affordances of peer-education based co-curricular programs. I then describe a collaboration between a WAC program and peer-education based co-curricular programs that has led to programmatic and institutional change to demonstrate the potential and value of these kinds of collaborations for WAC programs and institutions at large. Overall, this article encourages WAC directors to identify and collaborate with co-curricular programs that offer affordances that allow for shared labor as a way to increase WAC visibility and sustainability.

## **WAC and Co-Curricular Collaborations**

Recent WAC scholarship has moved beyond practical tips for program administration into theorizing about it with scholars applying different approaches to WAC

development and sustainability. While there is certainly overlap between approaches as they have similar aims and advocate for systematic attention to program administration and institutional change, each offers a different entry point and focus for thinking about administrative work. Cox, Galin, and Melzer (2018) have put forward a whole-systems approach in which WAC directors work with stakeholders to study an institution's social networks, systems, and capacity for resilience so that they can identify potential bottlenecks, leverage points, and stressors that impact and influence program development (p. 25).<sup>1</sup> This approach is especially useful for understanding how WAC directors can work within complex and dynamic systems to plan, develop, and launch programs. Sheffield (2018) has advocated for design thinking in which WAC directors develop creative solutions to common WAC problems from a user perspective. This approach is especially useful for understanding how WAC directors can address complex problems with out-of-the-box solutions. Linkon and Pavesich (2015) have proposed an affordance approach to demonstrate how WAC directors can cultivate their environments to create the conditions for institutional change. This approach, I suggest here, is especially useful for understanding (and determining the value of) WAC collaborations by grounding a WAC director's work within environmental affordances and highlighting the labor that WAC directors undertake as part of any collaboration.

As Linkon and Pavesich have pointed out, affordance in writing studies generally refers to the "pedagogical and communicative potentials of new media technologies,"<sup>2</sup> but the concept of affordance has been applied across many disciplines and also refers more broadly to pre-existing environmental structures, attributes, and resources that evolve over time in response to human interaction (p. 22). To operationalize their use of affordances, they adopted a gardening analogy that asks WAC directors to view themselves as gardeners of a sort, identifying rich institutional ground that can be tilled, fertilized, planted, and harvested over changing seasons. The affordance approach requires that WAC directors understand the pre-existing affordances in the contexts in which they work so that they can identify where best to direct their attention and efforts and plan accordingly. It also asks WAC directors to look for potential in pre-existing affordances and then work to develop and cultivate them into new ones.

Adopting this approach and analogy, Linkon and Pavesich have suggested, shifts the ways in which WPAs interact with others at their institutions from a focus on cultivating individual "champions" who *create* institutional change to a focus on cultivating environmental affordances that *enable* institutional change. As they put it, "the real job of the WPA is to create possibility rather than hierarchy and to remain mindful of the nature of agency" (p. 33). While Linkon and Pavesich do not directly address labor, the gardening analogy also highlights the role of labor in WAC

program administration in important ways. Gardening requires physical labor—one must prepare and till the land, test and fertilize the soil, plant and monitor the seeds, water and nurture the plants, harvest the produce, and begin again. This labor is ongoing, time consuming, and physically demanding with little immediate reward; instead, gardeners work, watch, wait, and trust that they will see the fruits of their labor. A WAC director's labor, while not usually physical, can be similarly described and separated into administrative and programmatic work among other kinds.<sup>3</sup> I use administrative labor here to refer to the work related to the day-to-day management of the WAC program, e.g. scheduling, training and supervising student workers, and record keeping; and I use programmatic labor to refer to the creation and delivery of WAC pedagogy and content, e.g. workshops, seminars, and consultations. This kind of attention to labor when applied to thinking about collaboration provides a way to think not just about a WAC director's work during collaborations but also about ways in which a WAC director can share in that work with others at their institution. In other words, WAC directors need not always engage in labor alone as sole gardeners on lone plots but as members of a gardening collective cultivating institutional landscapes for harvest.

Existing research on WAC and co-curricular collaborations has focused on service or community-based learning initiatives and writing centers. Both offer affordances that WAC directors can cultivate, but WAC directors share labor differently within each collaboration. Scholars have advocated for collaboration between WAC and service or community-based learning initiatives since both are writing-intensive and value educational reform (Deans, 1997; Jolliffe, 2001; Parks & Goldblatt, 2000). These affordances are pedagogical and ideological in nature, which, scholars have suggested, allow WAC specialists to support faculty teaching service or community-based learning courses or projects by facilitating the conscious and purposeful integration of writing and writing assignments (Deans, 1997; Jolliffe, 2001; Savini 2016). For example, Savini (2016) has detailed a WAC and civic engagement program partnership that resulted in a faculty writing retreat focused on civic engagement in which she, as a WAC specialist, supported faculty as they developed reflective writing prompts. When WAC directors collaborate with service or community-based learning initiatives, like this one, the partners appear to primarily share in the programmatic labor with each partner contributing their expertise to support faculty as they work to integrate writing and service or community-based learning into their teaching.

Scholarship on WAC and writing center collaborations reveals that these kinds of partnerships allow for a sharing of both programmatic and administrative labor because they offer additional kinds of affordances. Most scholars have agreed that WAC and writing center partnerships are useful and can be productive (Barnett &

Blumner, 1999; Barnett & Rosen, 1999; Childers et al., 2002; Gill, 1996; Mullin, 2001); some have offered cautions and concerns (Childers et al. 2002; Pemberton, 1995); and others have provided examples of successful collaborations (Barnett & Blumner, 1999; Good & Barganier, 2013; Robinson & Hall, 2013). WAC scholars who have found writing center collaborations to be successful do so in part because of the shared affordances between WAC and writing centers. While WAC traditionally focuses on faculty support and writing centers on student support, they share several affordances, as Mullin (2001) has noted: “they both draw from some of the same theories, engage in shared practices, and are similarly placed within the academic community (often not reporting to departments or working across traditional curricular lines)” (p. 184).

These affordances are ideological and practical in nature but also grounded in institutional structures, allowing WAC and writing center directors to share in both programmatic and administrative labor. For example, Good and Barangier (2013) have outlined their collaboration between the Writing in the Disciplines (WID) Internship Program that provides academic support for the WAC program and the Learning Center that provides writing support for all students at the university. Specifically, they examined how the WID interns and writing center tutors contribute to each other’s training and to faculty development sessions. Unlike in service or community-based learning collaborations where WAC appears to provide primarily programmatic support related to faculty development, WAC serves more as a central partner in writing center collaborations through the coordination and sharing of both administrative and programmatic labor. As Good and Barangier noted of their own collaboration, “As directors of the Learning Center and the WAC Program, we did not want to work at cross purposes. Rather, we each wanted to build on the unique strengths and offerings of our respective academic support programs, which required ongoing communication and deliberate collaboration” (p. 2).

Similar affordances and the potential for shared labor make co-curricular experiences a rich site for WAC collaborations. While existing WAC scholarship has focused on collaborations with service or community-based learning and writing centers, many universities and colleges support a host of other co-curricular activities as mentioned above. The co-curricular activities with the most potential for WAC collaborations will most likely vary from institution to institution depending on the environmental affordances; however, at UNC Charlotte, I have found that co-curricular programs that utilize peer education models, such as academic support services and peer mentorship, advising, and educator programs, provide a particularly rich site for WAC collaboration, especially for WAC programs that incorporate writing fellows.

The potential of peer education-based co-curricular programs for WAC collaboration is, most likely, not surprising given the attention paid to writing center collaborations in WAC scholarship. On most campuses, though, writing centers are one piece of a much larger student support network, and many of these programs offer affordances similar to those found in writing centers. Peer education-based co-curricular programs recruit and hire peer leaders and provide them with training and ongoing professional development that incorporates strategies from active learning, collaborative learning, and reflective practice. They mentor, supervise, and compensate students who work as peer leaders to tutor or mentor other students and, as such, are responsible for establishing or enforcing policies, expectations, responsibilities, and boundaries for peer leaders. They and their peer leaders need to be responsive to the curricular contexts to which they are connected or complement while carrying out their own independent work, and they must demonstrate their value through ongoing assessments of their programs to maintain institutional support and funding. This scope and depth of responsibility for directors of peer education-based co-curricular programs provides affordances with much potential for cultivation and growth. Moreover, these affordances lead to similar challenges and shared problems, such as policy development, training development and delivery, and communication with various audiences, that WAC specialists are uniquely situated to help peer education-based co-curricular programs address as a central working partner through shared administrative and programmatic labor.

In addition to offering affordances that allow for the sharing of labor, peer education-based co-curricular program collaborations provide WAC with several entry points to influence institutional practice and culture. Peer education-based programs provide the co-curriculum at two levels: they provide a co-curriculum experience for students in the form of peer mentoring and education, and they provide an additional and different co-curriculum experience for students who work as peer mentors and educators in the form of training and professional development. This allows WAC to potentially impact the writing knowledge and practices of two different student populations—those who utilize these kinds of services and those who work within them with, of course, some overlap between them. Additionally, peer education-based programs work with faculty and students from across the disciplines as well as administration and staff from across academic, student, and, at times, business affairs, increasing the reach and visibility of WAC beyond individual faculty in traditional academic units who participate in WAC work.

To summarize thus far, I have contended that co-curricular programs especially peer education-based co-curricular programs are rich sites for WAC collaboration in terms of affordances, labor, impact, and reach. While these collaborations have the potential to positively affect the visibility and reach of WAC at an institution, a

caution for WAC programs is that peer education-based programs are often directed by staff rather than faculty and are frequently connected to student success metrics that measure success in terms of grades, retention, and graduation. Those who direct these programs rarely if ever view success in such narrow terms, but those who grant funding for them might or, minimally, they look to those metrics to gauge student success. As such, WAC directors should be aware of the associations or assumptions that administration and faculty within an institution might make regarding WAC and peer education-based program collaborations and work to mitigate them as they are able, as is the case with any potential collaboration. With this caution in mind, I describe in the next section one such collaboration that has resulted in programmatic and institutional change to demonstrate the potential and value of these kinds of collaborations.

### **The Peer Leader Action Group**

The peer leader action group (PLAG) at UNC Charlotte is a grassroots group that brings together seventeen programs across academic and student affairs (a full list of the programs can be found at <https://uge.uncc.edu/peertopeerlearning>) with the goal to create collaborations between programs that employ and train peer mentors and tutors who primarily provide academic support. I detail here the history, structure, and some of the work of PLAG to demonstrate the ways in which I, as a WAC associate director, identified pre-existing affordances and shared in labor with peer education-based co-curricular programs to grow and cultivate those affordances. I do so not to provide an exact model that others must or even should follow, but to provide insight into how the affordance approach can work to identify, foster, and build institutional collaborations as well as to demonstrate the potential of co-curricular programs for WAC collaboration and the sharing of labor. Before doing so, let me briefly provide some institutional context for the WAC program and the PLAG collaboration given that affordances are intimately tied to the local environment.

UNC Charlotte is a large, public, urban research university that has experienced rapid enrollment growth within the past ten years. The student population is diverse and primarily local: thirty-nine percent of students report being from an under-represented group; forty-two percent of all new undergraduates are first-generation college students; forty-four percent of new undergraduate students are transfers; and ninety-three percent are from North Carolina (University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 2019). Several academic support services for students exist across the institution with some positioned in academic and student affairs at large (e.g. tutoring services, communication across the curriculum, and office of academic diversity and inclusion) and some positioned within the colleges (e.g. writing center, Belk College of Business peer advisors, education learning community peer mentors, and health

systems management peer advising). Additionally, some programs target specific undergraduate populations like transfer, at-risk, or first-year, first-time students and students within specific colleges or majors while others are open to the entire undergraduate student population. In general, upper administration strongly supports not only student support services but also on-campus student employment since many UNC Charlotte students must work. Both are viewed as important contributors to graduation and retention rates.

The communication across the curriculum (CxC) program at UNC Charlotte was established in 2009 and is housed in the office of undergraduate education, a university-wide unit in academic affairs that serves all undergraduate students through advising, student support services, coursework, and a wide variety of other student-centered initiatives. CxC is composed of an executive director who also serves as faculty, an associate director (me) who serves as staff, and one-two graduate students who support program work. The program has three main components: curriculum consultation, professional development, and the communication consultant program. The first two components center on facilitative work with departments and faculty to help them integrate communication across departmental curriculum and into individual teaching practice. The communication consultant program follows the writing fellows' model with primarily undergraduate students working with faculty and students in upper-division disciplinary writing- and/or oral-intensive courses and a sophomore-level general education course. In line with the writing fellows' model, consultants provide written and oral communication support for students in these courses inside and outside of class but also provide faculty with feedback and in-class assistance as they integrate communication into their courses and teaching. One of my primary CxC responsibilities is the communication consultant program as I, along with graduate student assistance, am responsible for the training, mentoring, and supervision of consultants, the support and development of faculty who participate in the program, and overall program administration in consultation with the executive director. Since I joined the CxC program 2016, the communication consultant program has tripled in size. On average, we support each semester sixty consultants who hold approximately two thousand individual or small group consultations, thirty-five to forty faculty members, and twenty to twenty-five courses across eighteen to twenty-two departments.

PLAG originated out of a shared affordance of peer leader training and professional development. When I joined the program, I identified, in consultation with the executive director, consultant training and professional development as an area of development. While I was aware of what training and professional development looked like for writing fellow programs at other institutions, I sought to identify what training and development structures worked at this particular institution. To do



so, I identified eleven programs that employed students in roles similar to communication consultants and had shared affordances in terms of structures and resources and then reached out to the directors (ten were staff and one was faculty) to schedule sit-down meetings. It is important to note here that most directors of these programs (including me) were staff, not faculty, and while WAC generally focuses its efforts on faculty and administration, looking to affordances rather than people led me to collaborating with a different population than is usual for WAC at the university. At these meetings, I was interested in learning about the following attributes of the programs: 1) the number of students working in the program, 2) the focus or purpose of the peer interactions, 3) the ways in which the students worked with their peers, 4) the hiring of students for these positions, 5) the training and professional development structure, content, and delivery for the peer educators, and 6) challenges or problems they encountered in their programs.

As I was collecting this information, it became clear to me that most programs employed a similar training and professional development structure for their peer leaders and were experiencing similar problems and challenges. For example, most programs provided some kind of in-person beginning of the semester training for all of their students but received pushback from returning students because much of the training focused on university policies and procedures for student employees that they learned the previous semester. With the focus on university policies and procedures, representatives from different offices, like legal, disability services, or the counseling center, were attending the trainings of several different programs and delivering the same material, often within the same few days. Directors also had reservations about this structure. They wanted training to be more interactive and scenario-based and less focused on information delivery and presentations.

Given the similar training and professional development structures and areas of concern regarding those structures, I saw potential for cultivation and growth within this particular affordance. Returning to Linkon and Pavesich's (2015) gardening analogy, the peer leader training and professional development soil, and specifically the beginning of the semester training plot, was especially well-suited to support collaboration between the programs. It contained the necessary nutrients of similar problems, concerns, and goals to grow our collaboration and focus our labor. Individually, no one program believed they could dedicate the labor needed to fully address the problems and challenges regarding the beginning of the semester training due to overall program workload. At the same time, by operating as individual gardeners cultivating our own isolated lots, we often were replicating each other's labor rather than sharing that labor. This is where I saw the potential for a gardening collective where we could pool our resources and share in the administrative labor in

particular to have a harvest that would benefit each of our individual programs while building a group identity.

The other program directors saw the potential (or at least were intrigued enough by the prospect) to meet in spring 2017 to discuss potential collaborations, and, thus, PLAG was formed. The sharing of labor has been at the forefront of our collaboration from the beginning. Since we are a grassroots group with no top-down charge or oversight and participation is optional, we operate as a collective that engages in shared decision-making and labor. We have a rotating coordinator role that serves a two-year term to facilitate the group as needed (leading discussion during meetings, negotiating priorities, assigning responsibilities, etc.) and to maintain momentum on projects (maintaining deadlines, sending reminders, and updating PLAG documents). However, all members must contribute to the labor of PLAG projects and discussions in some capacity. We generally meet twice a semester and commit to providing a welcoming and supportive environment, learning about each other's programs, and maintaining confidentiality. While we collaborate together on projects and share resources, all individual programs retain autonomy and primary responsibility for their peer leaders. In other words, while we operate as a gardening collective in our shared plots, we all still garden and maintain our own individual plots.

PLAG has had several robust harvests during its few years of existence, but I focus here on our first collaboration regarding the beginning of semester training because it laid the groundwork for later work and it is an ongoing collaborative effort. As mentioned above, I identified peer leader training as a starting point for group collaboration because my initial conversations with directors indicated that this area was the most immediate and pressing concern for most programs and, as such, was an especially rich affordance that our programs shared, but I also suspected (as an experienced gardener) that it could be cultivated into new affordances and collaborations. The other programs agreed, so we worked together to collectively define the problem we wanted to address with the beginning of the semester training (too much training time was spent on information delivery and not enough on active learning and interaction), brainstorm possible solutions, and research other models of training at the university. Based on this, we developed an asynchronous online peer leader training course on Canvas (our learning management system). On average, 250 peer leaders complete the course in the fall and 150 in the spring, although those numbers continue to rise as more programs join PLAG. We also maintain IRB approval to study data from the course.

The peer leader training course is intended to be completed by all of the peer leaders from our different programs prior to their individual program beginning of the semester training. The purpose of the course is to provide peer leaders with what PLAG members determined to be essential baseline knowledge for working

with their peers and to help peer leaders understand their role and its importance at the university. By doing so, we sought to free up time in our individual training that was previously dedicated to information delivery for more interactive and scenario-based activities. We also sought to create a group identity for peer leaders to raise the profile of peer-based education and our programs at UNC Charlotte. Ten topics serve as modules within the course including FERPA and confidentiality, discrimination and the ADA, Title IX and sexual harassment, campus safety, peer-to-peer communication, cultural diversity, campus referrals, self-care and wellness, and timecards—a healthy mix of procedural and theoretical knowledge. Each module contains a short video (five to eight minutes) and a three-question scenario-based quiz that peer leaders must pass to move onto the next module. The training ends with two self-reflective questions that engage peer leaders in a writing-to-learn activity and a survey that provides PLAG with user feedback. The reflective questions are as follows: 1) “Explain in at least a few sentences how this online training influenced your understanding of what it means to be a peer leader” and 2) “Describe at least two ways you will apply the information you learned from these modules to your work as a peer leader.”

Creating and maintaining the peer leader training course unsurprisingly required, and continues to require, a lot of administrative labor. Group members shared this labor among themselves and also with other units across campus. Each module had a lead developer who either developed the video or quiz on their own or worked with units across campus to develop the video and then created the quiz on their own. For instance, while the office for academic diversity and inclusion created the cultural diversity video, and I, on behalf of CxC, developed the peer-to-peer communication video with feedback from the executive director, other group members worked with our legal department to develop the FERPA and confidentiality, discrimination and the ADA, and Title IX and sexual harassment videos and with counseling services to develop the self-care and wellness video. Units outside of PLAG were happy to work with us to develop the videos, especially since it meant they no longer needed to address our groups individually. Beyond its immediate development, the course requires ongoing administrative labor in the form of yearly routine maintenance. We review all ten modules every spring/summer with group members volunteering to review one module and update with feedback from the appropriate units as needed. While we share maintenance of the peer leader training course, all programs are responsible for enrolling their peer leaders into the course and monitoring their completion.

The course also allowed for group members to share programmatic labor. As mentioned above, the office of diversity and inclusion and CxC were able to develop modules that furthered their programmatic aims. By developing the peer-to-peer

communication module, I was able to integrate WAC practices and philosophy as well as writing center practices into this co-curriculum, including active listening as well as practices of non-verbal and verbal feedback, that would be delivered to peer leaders across campus. I also advocated for inclusion of the two writing-to-learn self-reflective questions and crafted them with PLAG members' feedback. In short, I was able to integrate and cultivate WAC practices and philosophy into the co-curriculum provided to peer leaders across campus, thereby, hopefully, influencing the practices of peer leaders who provide different co-curricular activities at our university.

Student responses to the reflective questions have indicated that the peer-to-peer communication, campus referrals, and cultural diversity modules are among the most influential in helping peer leaders understand their role and in shaping their interactions with their peers. The following two examples are representative of the degree of thoughtfulness and engagement peer leaders continue to demonstrate in their responses to the reflective questions. In this first example, one peer leader remarked how the training expanded their understanding of their role beyond just academic support by drawing attention to communication skills:

Q1: After completing the online training it became more apparent that being a peer leader means more than simply assisting peers for educational purposes. Being a peer leader requires effective and respectful communication skills, the ability to recognize and support others with their problems, and to be effective in handling various types of situations. This training has greatly expanded my understanding of what it means to be a peer leader, and how to be an effective and successful one at that.

Q2: After the completion of these modules, I will be sure to apply the information I learned into my work as a peer leader. The first of this information will be how to conduct effective communication when working with my peers. I want to ensure that I am actively listening as well as using proper verbal and nonverbal communication skills to allow my peers to feel as though they are getting the most out of our time together. I will also use the knowledge I gained regarding how to execute effective referrals during the times that I cannot personally meet the needs of my peers.

In a second example, a peer leader observed how the training helped them see how their role is different from others at the university and the important role communication will play:

Q1: I found it to be extremely helpful that the modules offered scenarios peer leaders could find themselves in while working at UNC Charlotte and

solutions to navigate these scenarios. It provided good context for the type of role I will be performing on a regular basis and has given me an opportunity to think about the way in which I should communicate with peers who seek my help. It also drove home the point that peer leaders fulfill a distinct role of being one of the most accessible resources for students, which also helped frame the types of responsibilities one will need to be aware of.

Q2: I will apply this information by being more aware of my communication methods with others. A key facet of being an effective peer leader is to know how to properly engage with and communicate ideas and suggestions to those who come seeking help. Practicing active listening and being sensitive to a person's needs, directly or implied, is something that I will apply to my work as a peer leader. The other aspect to this, is using the information learned from these training modules on how to properly handle the diverse needs of students who attend UNC Charlotte. I will apply what I learned about referrals and suggesting resources as the one of the primary means to help students who may be struggling or unsure of what resources are available. I believe that this is crucial in understanding the responsibilities that peer leaders have and distinguishing the responsibilities of other staff and faculty.

In both of these examples, the peer-to-peer communication module seems to have provided the peer leaders with a more expansive understanding of their role that extends beyond information or academic skill delivery to forefront the importance of person-centered and process-based communication, shifting (perhaps as much as is possible with one short informational video) their understanding of learning to something that one receives to something that is created through active listening and responsive feedback. I imagine this will help to create, for the students these peer leaders work with, a different kind of, and most likely more productive, collaborative learning experience than they might have had otherwise. Additionally, these two peer leaders were not part of CxC so they were not going to be providing direct feedback or support to their peers on writing or oral communication, but they still appear to have gained at least some self-awareness of their own communication in this particular role, its potential effects on different audiences, and its importance to establishing collaborative peer relationships, all insights that may not have been gained without the presence of the peer-to-peer communication module and ones that they will carry into their individual program trainings.

Any one of our individual programs most likely could not have created the peer leader training course alone, at least not within our timeline, nor could any one of

us perform maintenance yearly. The training course is truly a collaborative product grounded in shared resources and labor. As I suspected, the course resulted in a shared harvest that benefited each of our individual programs, which allowed me as then PLAG coordinator to draw our attention and labor to other affordances that had longer growing seasons and less immediate benefits for our individual programs but rather aimed for larger cultural change at our university. For instance, to promote the value of peer education (and consequently our programs) in the institution at large, we created a shared mission statement for peer leaders, and each director created an individual mission statement for peer leaders in their program so that we could clearly articulate our shared identity but also the ways in which our peer leaders in our programs differed to prevent mission creep and territoriality. This led to the creation of guiding principles and best practices for peer leader programs that are published on our PLAG website. While these projects did not necessarily immediately benefit our individual programs, they helped us create a culture around peer education on our campus, broaden our reach on campus, and build visibility for our programs. Under guidance of a new coordinator, PLAG has continued to walk this line between the immediate needs of our programs and larger cultural change with the creation of a PLAG website and the development of shared recruitment events.

PLAG continues to labor together with no immediate end in sight. Group members have reported that their participation has improved the quality of their individual training, helped them address ongoing problems and challenges, and improved their administrative workload. They also report appreciating the support and feedback the group provides. CxC continues to be an active participant, allowing me to continue advocating for and integrating WAC practices and philosophy into the co-curriculum. Participation in PLAG has strengthened the communication consultant program both in terms of peer leader support and of allies who have become advocates of CxC. My administrative labor is made easier with the assistance of other PLAG members. It also simply is a lot more enjoyable as I now am able to tackle small and mundane as well complex and intriguing tasks and challenges with colleagues engaged in similar kinds of work. I believe that they benefit from my labor and from WAC as much as I benefit from their labor and the approaches they bring to the group, and I look forward to seeing how our newly cultivated but not yet nurtured affordances grow.

## **Conclusion**

As the peer leader action group demonstrates, co-curricular activities, especially those that integrate the peer-education based model, provide particularly fertile ground for WAC collaboration because they share some of the same environmental structures, attributes, and resources (affordances) and, as a result, encounter similar challenges

and problems that can be tackled through shared administrative and programmatic labor. I believe PLAG has been a success in large part because we identify productive environmental affordances on which to grow our collaborations and, equally important, we distribute and share in the labor of the work needed to nurture them. When we first met, I did not know if we shared enough ground to continue harvesting together beyond our initial collaboration, and I know that a change in institutional weather may halt our work together, but thankfully, the weather has been on our side and we continue to find ways in which our plots overlap and so our planning and labor has come to fruition over several seasons. We are all gardeners with individual plots, but we now look for how our plots overlap, creating shared lots that we can work together to make richer and more fruitful for all of us. I have proposed here that collaborations like these allow WAC to move beyond the curriculum and into the co-curriculum, strengthening WAC's presence, alliances, and reach and building toward long term sustainability.

Of course, not all WAC programs have a writing fellows component like CxC, so collaborations with other peer-education based co-curricular programs might not provide the most fertile soil at all institutions. This does not mean that other kinds of co-curricular programs and activities cannot provide equally fertile soil for WAC programs at other institutions. I encourage WAC directors to target co-curricular activities in their own institutions for collaboration after they have mapped out their pre-existing affordances, evaluated their potential for cultivation and growth, and identified ways in which labor (either or both administrative or programmatic) could be shared.

Even if a WAC director finds that co-curricular activities at their institution do not offer productive affordances, Linkon and Pavesich's (2015) affordance approach provides a useful lens through which WAC directors can view and evaluate the potential of all collaborations. The sheer number of collaborative opportunities that exist on any campus regardless of its size can be daunting for WAC directors as they work to identify collaborations that have the potential to be productive and avoid those that do not. By evaluating units based on their pre-existing affordances and their potential for cultivation, growth, and shared labor, WAC directors will be more likely to locate and engage in collaborations that help to sustain their programs rather than ones that drain their own time and energy or, at the very least, they will have a better idea of what they want their labor to look (and not look) like in that collaboration. Much like gardening, collaboration requires thought, planning, and hard work but also a bit of good luck.

## Notes

1. While the whole-system approach is generally focused on understanding the current institutional context to plan, launch, and develop a WAC program, Brad Peters (2019) has suggested that the approach also can be used to read an established WAC program's history to plan for future development.

2. See, for example, *Rhetorics and Technologies: New Directions in Writing and Communication* (2010); *From A to <A>: Keywords of Markup* (2010); and *Technological Ecologies and Sustainability* (2009).

3. While I address programmatic and administrative labor in this article, I want to acknowledge that WAC directors certainly perform more than two kinds of labor, including emotional and affective labor. I focus on administrative and programmatic in this article because they most closely align with the gardening analogy and they are the kinds of labor most often addressed in existing scholarship regarding WAC and co-curricular collaborations.

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