

# Statement of WAC Principles and Practices

This Statement was endorsed by the International Network of WAC Programs (INWAC) in February 2014 and CCCC Executive Committee in December 2014.

## Part One: Introduction

As one of the longest running educational reform movements in higher education in the US, Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) has prospered in a variety of educational settings, from elementary and secondary education to community colleges, liberal arts colleges and research universities<sup>1</sup>.

In its most general sense, WAC refers to the notion that writing should be an integral part of the learning process throughout a student's education, not merely in required writing courses but across the entire curriculum. Further, it is based on the premise that writing is highly situated and tied to a field's discourse and ways of knowing, and therefore writing in the disciplines (WID) is most effectively guided by those with expertise in that discipline. WAC also recognizes that students come to the classroom with a wide range of literacy, linguistic, technological, and educational experiences, but that all students can learn to become more proficient writers.

WAC<sup>2</sup> as an initiative can be transformative for learning, teaching, and research. For students, WAC promotes engaged student learning, critical thinking, and greater facility with written communication across rhetorical situations. For teachers, WAC promotes thoughtful pedagogy and curriculum design as well as community among faculty that transcends disciplinary boundaries. For researchers in writing studies and across the disciplines, WAC promotes cross-disciplinary scholarship on teaching and learning, as well as scholarship on the values and ways of thinking in the disciplines and the ways those ideas and actions are communicated in writing.

For faculty and administrators seeking to build a WAC program, and for WAC program leaders new to WAC, this statement is intended as a distillation of fundamental principles and best practices based on some forty years of experience and research by professionals in the WAC field in the US.

We urge institutions committed to building an effective and sustainable WAC program to recognize the following principles:

- Writing is a highly complex and situated activity that cannot be mastered in a single course but is learned over a lifetime.
- WAC is not a “quick fix,” but an initiative that requires sustained conversations among faculty

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<sup>1</sup> While this Statement focuses on WAC in the US, we wish to acknowledge that the US WAC movement has roots in British theory and research, and that WAC is also a robust international movement, as evidenced in presentations at conferences, e.g. Writing Research Across Borders, and the increasing number of publications focused on WAC globally.

<sup>2</sup> WAC initiatives can go under other names – Writing in the Disciplines (WID), Communication across the Curriculum (CAC), Language across the Curriculum (LAC) – as well as be incorporated into other programs – such as a Writing Center, Office of Teaching and Learning, or Undergraduate Research.

that extend beyond a single workshop or consultation.

- Though often a faculty-led initiative, WAC programs require administrative support, such as course releases for program leadership, a standing budget, and support for professional development.

## Part Two: Goals and Practices of WAC Program Development

### TYPICAL GOALS OF US WAC PROGRAMS

WAC programs develop for various reasons and may take many different forms. WAC programs sometimes emerge organically from interactions between the writing center and faculty across campus; they can also begin from the top down when educational institutions wish to strengthen their academic rigor, or the impetus might stem from accreditation agencies, alumni, or donors. While the reasons for beginning a WAC program often shape the objectives, as well as the structure of the program, many WAC programs share at least some of the following goals:

- **To sustain the writing of students across their academic careers.** While likely not the only objective, the desire to increase the amount and frequency of student writing, as well as offer students more sustained instruction in writing, in more courses, spread out over their academic careers, is foundational to WAC programs.
- **To increase student engagement with learning.** Results from the National Survey of Student Engagement show significant correlation between extensive writing and both higher order thinking and integrative learning (NSSE 2008 Results), affirming a long-held tenet of WAC that increased attention and support for student writing lead to further engagement with course content and increased retention.
- **To increase student writing proficiency.** Writers become more proficient as they write across a wide range of rhetorical situations, genres, purposes, and discourse communities, and compose using a range of media. WAC programs strive to create opportunities for this range of writing experiences across a student's academic career.
- **To create a campus culture that supports writing.** WAC programs often seek to promote a cultural shift on campus in how writing is perceived and valued, and thus may sponsor speaker series, faculty writing retreats, and platforms that highlight student writing such as writing awards, student conferences, or venues for publishing student work.
- **To create a community of faculty around teaching and student writing.** WAC seeks to break down the silos that can divide disciplines by creating common ground through its focus on teaching and learning, often accomplished through cross-disciplinary faculty development programming.

### LEADERSHIP OF SUCCESSFUL AND SUSTAINABLE WAC PROGRAMS

Successful and sustainable WAC program leadership is often guided by the following principles and practices:

- Structurally, the program director reports to an administrator (or administrators) beyond the

level of a single department. The institutional location of WAC can vary (i.e., it may be housed in a writing center, academic affairs, in a teaching and learning center), but it is important that it is recognized as having cross-campus responsibilities.

- The program director has adequate release time from teaching to develop and administer program components and for professional development.
- The program director has a grounding in WAC research, theory, and assessment.
- The program director has an understanding of the local context, including: student educational, literacy, and language backgrounds; faculty values and goals; institutional values and goals; the value of pedagogy and of the scholarship of teaching and learning in the tenure and promotion process; conditions for part-time and non-tenure track faculty and for graduate student instructors and teaching assistants; and the character and traditions of the campus.
- The program director works with a cross-disciplinary faculty team or committee that acts as an advisory board for the director and has policy-making status.
- The success and sustainability of the WAC program does not hang on the personality and charisma of the director or a committee's membership, but through curricular elements. The curricular elements, which may be required or elective, instantiate the importance of writing across disciplines. These curricular elements may include: writing-intensive courses, writing enhanced curriculum, departmental writing plans, linked courses, and a writing fellows program.
- There is a plan in place for succession of leadership, in order to develop continuity.

## Suggested Timeline for Program Development

Program development depends on local context and available resources. However, there are a few typical initial steps important for program directors when launching a successful and sustainable WAC program.

1. **Learn the lay of the land:** Before launching a program, find out if any WAC initiatives preceded the current initiative and discover what other professional development is already occurring on campus.
2. **Recognize the expertise that already exists on campus and build on it:** On most campuses, proponents of student writing can be found in every department. These faculty may have been part of an earlier WAC effort or may have developed WAC-like pedagogies on their own. These faculty may be invited to join one of the groups described below or be featured at a WAC workshop.
3. **Create an interdisciplinary group of committed faculty:** This group, which may take the form of a task force, advisory group, committee, or network, can work together to create a plan for assessing the needs of the campus and designing a curricular structure and faculty development plan to meet those needs. Once the WAC program is launched, this group can serve as a steering committee and create a succession plan for rotating membership and staggered terms.
4. **Learn from experienced WAC program directors, researchers, and scholars:** A hallmark feature of the WAC community is its generosity. To reach out to the many mentors in the wider

WAC community, post a question to the WAC listserv (see Part 5) or attend one of the conferences listed in Part 5. Consider attending one of these conferences with administrators and faculty from across the disciplines at your institution.

5. **Learn from existing scholarship on WAC program administration.** WAC scholarship exists on approaches to launching and sustaining WAC programs, on specific types of WAC initiatives, on student writing development in specific disciplines, on faculty development, and other issues pertinent to WAC. See the bibliography in Part 5 for specific resources.
6. **Build in assessment from the beginning.** Assessment can be as simple as a quick feedback form handed out at the end of a workshop or as extensive as a faculty needs assessment. Assessment is crucial for documenting a WAC program's impact and value. See Part 4 for more details.
7. **Collaborate with other groups in the institution.** These collaborations, which integrate WAC into the fabric of the institution, may focus on faculty development, institutional research, and program assessment, among other initiatives. Programs that are natural allies of WAC include:
  - Writing Center
  - Academic disciplines
  - Deans for undergraduate education
  - Faculty affairs
  - First-year Writing Program
  - General education
  - Graduate education
  - Preparing future faculty program
  - Library
  - National Writing Project
  - Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)
  - English as a Second Language program
  - Undergraduate Research office
  - Student affairs
  - Teaching and Learning office
  - Teaching and Technology office
  - Speaking across the curriculum initiative
  - Quantitative reasoning across the curriculum initiative
  - Departmental TA training programs
8. **Advertise your WAC program's successes.** Promoting the accomplishments of departments, faculty, and individual students is essential to the growth of WAC programs and for university recognition. National Day on Writing events, recognition ceremonies, interdisciplinary student journals, WAC program newsletters, a WAC website, student showcases, and other such events and venues help promote and sustain WAC programs. Another venue for highlighting your program's successes is through publication. Partner with a colleague in another field to research writing-related pedagogy in that field, partner with other faculty development colleagues to reflect on a faculty development initiative, or collaborate with faculty and/or administrators to write grants and publish the results of your efforts. The journals *Across the Disciplines* and the *WAC Journal*, as well as journals published in other fields, are important venues for this work.

### Part Three: Principles and Practices for WAC Pedagogy

At the heart of WAC programs is a commitment to the development of student writing. Students may carry into the classroom the expectation that all writing will look like what they learned in a high school English course or a first-year college composition course. Therefore, in every course, students need to be

taught explicitly about the writing expectations for that course and mentored throughout the writing process. In the context of learning about the writing expectations for the course, students may also learn about the expectations for writing in the discipline.

While WAC recognizes that writing instruction is shaped to meet the needs of different contexts and disciplines, WAC practices are generally based on the following shared principles around teaching with writing in courses across the curriculum:

- **Writing as rhetorical:** Texts are dynamic and respond to the goals of the writer(s), goals of the reader(s), and the wider rhetorical context, which may include culture, language, genre conventions, and other texts. In order to write effectively, students need to think rhetorically, understanding that all aspects of writing -- from voice, to organization, to stylistic conventions -- are affected by the rhetorical situation. Practices that assist students in developing rhetorical thinking include: genre analysis (comparative analysis of multiple examples of a type of text), rhetorical analysis of a text (examining arguments in disciplinary texts to learn the rhetorical patterns of argument in a given discipline), and peer review.
- **Writing as a process:** For high-stakes writing (writing that will be graded), the writing process is long and complex, with the writer revising in response to developing ideas, reader feedback, and a deeper understanding of the rhetorical situation. Scaffolding students' writing processes often leads to student writing that displays an increase in the depth of thought, awareness of audience, and attention to style and editing. Practices that assist students in developing an effective writing process include: class discussion of writing as a process, peer review of early drafts, teacher feedback to early (ungraded) drafts, and the assignment of reflective cover letters turned in with final drafts that detail the writer's process.
- **Writing as a mode of learning:** Writing has long been recognized as enhancing the learning process. Writing makes thinking visible, allowing learners to reflect on their ideas. Further, writing facilitates connections between new information and learned information, and among areas of knowledge across multiple domains. In practice, writing-to-learn (WTL) activities are informal, ungraded, and designed to focus on a particular learning outcome. WTL activities include double-entry (or dialectic) journals, freewriting, observation journals, reading responses, online class blogs, and class wikis.
- **Learning to Write:** Effective writers are those who have learned to write across a variety of rhetorical situations, for a variety of audiences, and for a variety of purposes. Learning-to-write assignments are often higher-stakes assignments that require the writer to write with attention to the conventions of a rhetorical context (i.e. within the genre and discourse conventions of a specific community) and to move through a multi-draft writing process. Learning-to-write (LTW) assignments include academic genres (i.e. research reports, argumentative essays, analyses, annotated bibliographies) as well as civic genres (i.e. letters to the editor, proposals, reviews, blogs).

## Part Four: Principles and Practices for Assessment

As described above, writing is assigned and taught across the curriculum to accomplish different cognitive, sociolinguistic, and rhetorical learning goals. As such, student writing is highly situated,

varying greatly according to teachers' goals, course and program goals, and disciplinary genres and activity systems. Assessments of student writing are likewise situated and varied according to the goals and reasons for the assessment. Thus no one rubric or standardized test can effectively measure students' writing competence and/or writing development in college.

Rather, assessments of student writers and writing should be undertaken at the local and/or programmatic level by those who have a stake in the results, including, depending upon the goals for writing assessment, faculty teaching with writing in their courses, faculty in the major, and/or program administrators. In all cases, the writing being assessed and the methods of assessment should be aligned with assignment and course goals, programmatic goals, and goals for students as writers in the discipline, across the curriculum, and in professions they are being prepared to enter.

While calls for accountability at the institutional, state, and national level may drive writing assessment, the central and overarching goal of all good assessment is to enhance student learning in the course, the major, and the college curriculum. As those most responsible for teaching and developing courses and curriculum, faculty have the biggest stake in designing and implementing writing assessments that will not only demonstrate students have achieved the writing goals for the course and the program but that will also lead to improvements in students' learning experiences around writing.

At the course level, then, good writing assessment attends to specific, situated, and articulated assignment and course learning goals for students. At the program level, good writing assessment can help to establish greater coherence among the learning and writing goals and outcomes for students across the curriculum of the major. Assessment of student writing may be embedded in a department's program review, using one or a combination of the methods described below or others developed in concert with faculty and administrators. At the institutional level, programmatic writing goals and outcomes can be aligned with more general goals for student writers, such as those articulated in the Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing (<http://wpacouncil.org/files/framework-for-success-postsecondary-writing.pdf>), to develop an institution-wide outcomes-based writing assessment plan, one that is not based on static notions of form and correctness but that accounts for the full rhetorical, discursive, knowledge-making complexity of the writing being assessed.

In sum, assessments of student writing should recognize this complexity as framed by and situated within course and programmatic goals and the rhetorical contexts in which the writing occurs. Further, assessments should be conducted with an awareness of students' development as writers over time and with multiple opportunities for practice in meaningful contexts.

#### **METHODS FOR PROGRAMMATIC WRITING ASSESSMENT:**

- **Program portfolios:** Portfolios provide a longitudinal view of a student's trajectory as a writer over the course of a program. Typically, electronic portfolios provide students with space to collect samples of writing over time and write reflectively about their own learning and development, while providing faculty and administrators with a showcase of student work and learning. Portfolios may be created for different contexts: e.g., for individual courses, a departmental major, or a student's entire academic program. Faculty in the program should be involved in portfolio assessment, with results leading to course changes and enhancements around the ways that writing is taught and assigned and course and curricular outcomes for writing and learning.

- **Embedded, discipline-based writing assessment:** The goal of embedded writing assessment, by whatever process is employed, is to engage faculty and program directors in discussion about their rhetorical values and goals for student writers. In this method, faculty from the same department are brought together to discuss and assess a randomly selected sample of student papers written in response to the same or similar assignments. The papers may be assessed through a holistic procedure wherein the faculty compare papers to develop a scoring rubric and to calibrate their subsequent assessments. Through conversations about student writing in context, faculty may also engage in a dynamic criteria mapping process (see Broad et al., 2009).
- **Student surveys and focus groups:** These tools are powerful for learning about students' changing perceptions of themselves as writers and perceptions of their experiences with writing. For a national survey on student writing, see the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). NSSE allows institutions to add questions about writing that address institutional learning and writing goals.
- **Faculty surveys and focus groups:** These tools can be used to assess faculty's changing perceptions, understanding, and valuing of student writing, as well as methods used across campus for assigning and mentoring writing. The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) also allows institutions to add individual questions around faculty goals for and perceptions of student writing.

## WAC PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Methods for WAC program assessment are necessarily varied and responsive to institutional needs and demands. Moreover, no single assessment method can give programs all of the information they may need to demonstrate and improve their effectiveness. Once goals, objectives, and a locus for assessing the program have been determined, programs can draw on data from a combination of any of the writing assessment measures described above to assess their own effectiveness and programmatic reach. Other methods may include engaging faculty in conversations around student writing outcomes to develop assignments and assessment procedures that can then be combined across programs, and/or conducting case studies, surveys, and interviews to investigate questions around improving, enhancing, and sustaining the program.

## Part Five: Resources

### ONLINE RESOURCES

- *The WAC Clearinghouse* (<https://wac.colostate.edu>): Launched in 1997, the WAC Clearinghouse provides information about WAC pedagogies and programs, open access to WAC-related electronic journals and books, and information about the International WAC Board of Consultants.
- *CompPile* (<https://wac.colostate.edu/comppile/>): Launched in 2001, CompPile is an open-access bibliographic database, providing listings of work published in composition and rhetoric since 1939.
- *WAC-L* (<http://www.lsoft.com/scripts/wl.exe?SL1=WAC-L&H=LISTSERV.ILLINOIS.EDU>): This listserv is a quick way to get in touch with WAC scholars and administrators for advice.

- *WPA-L* (<http://wpacouncil.org/wpa-l>): Though not specific to WAC, this listserv is a great resource, as it brings together the wider writing studies community.

## JOURNALS

- *Across the Disciplines* (<https://wac.colostate.edu/atd/>), “a refereed journal devoted to language, learning, and academic writing, publishes articles relevant to writing and writing pedagogy in all their intellectual, political, social, and technological complexity.”
- *The WAC Journal* (<https://wac.colostate.edu/journal/>), “a national peer-reviewed journal on writing across the curriculum.” Published by Clemson University, [Parlor Press](#), and [the WAC Clearinghouse](#), “*The WAC Journal* is an annual collection of articles by educators about their WAC ideas and WAC experiences. It is a journal of practical ideas and pertinent theory.”
- *Double Helix: A Journal of Critical Thinking and Writing*, (<https://wac.colostate.edu/double-helix/>), “Double Helix is an international, open-access journal founded on the principle that writing is the essential tool for developing critical thinking skills and disciplinary expertise.”

## CONFERENCES IN THE US

- International WAC Conference, held biennially in late May or early June
- Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), held annually in March
- Critical Thinking and Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, held biennially at Quinnipiac University, Hamden, CT
- Writing Research Across Borders (WRAB), held biennially either in the US or at an international location
- Northern California Writing across the Curriculum Conference (NorCal), held annually in January in Northern California
- Writing Program Administrators (WPA) Conference, held annually in summer
- Professional and Organizational Development (POD) conference, held annually in October

## ORGANIZATIONS BASED IN THE US

- International Network of WAC Programs, meets annually at the Conference for College Composition and Communication (CCCC)
- Northeast Writing Across the Curriculum Consortium (NEWACC)
- Consortium for Critical Reading, Writing, and Thinking (Metro New York City)
- International Writing Centers Association (IWCA)
- Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA)
- Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC)
- National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE, umbrella organization of CCCC)



## ORGANIZATIONS THAT CROSS BORDERS

- Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL, based in Australia)
- *Association Internationale pour la Recherche en Didactique du Français* (AIRDF)
- Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW)
- European Association for Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW)
- European Writing Centers Association (EWCA)
- International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research (ISAWR)
- Middle East - North Africa Writing Centers Alliance (MENAWCA)

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## **RESOURCES TO SHARE WITH FACULTY ACROSS THE CURRICULUM**

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## About this Statement

This Statement, which was endorsed by the International Network of WAC Programs (INWAC) in February 2014, was developed by an Ad Hoc Committee composed of members of INWAC. This committee included:

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