
Reviewed by Linda S. Bergmann, Purdue University

When I first encountered WAC for the New Millennium in the fall of 2001, it seemed, as it still does, a comprehensive survey of the state of the movement. The editors have assembled contributions from distinguished compositionists associated with Writing Across the Curriculum and produced a substantial review of the field. In the first chapter, summarizing the contributions, Susan McLeod and Eric Miraglia reiterate the concepts that tie together the disparate ideas and initiatives that constitute WAC and describe how enduring WAC programs collaborate with other pedagogical initiatives and adapt to needs and resources of specific institutions. They identify WAC as a movement—a loosely-bound collection of programs, practices, and ideas—offering positive experiences for students and better understanding for scholars of how writing functions in various disciplinary situations.

This collection demonstrates how deeply-rooted WAC has become since the 1970s and 1980s. In those days, Writing Across the Curriculum, described in Art Young and Toby Fulwiler’s Writing Across the Disciplines: Research into Practice (1986) and embodied in workshops by teachers like Elaine Maimon (who wrote the introduction to this book), embraced a body of ideas and practices that brought active, participatory, collaborative learning into courses traditionally organized simply to transmit information. Writing Across the Disciplines shows WAC being invented through trials and errors in crossing disciplinary boundaries. By 1990, there were enough programs to warrant Fulwiler and Young’s Programs that Work: Models and Methods for Writing Across the Curriculum (1990), which served as inspiration and roadmap for new WAC programs throughout the 1990s. With the publication of David Russell’s Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870—1990: A Curricular History in 1991, WAC acquired a history and a more defined and identifiable presence in the profession, a presence nurtured by WAC conferences, the journal Language and Learning Across the Disciplines, and the emergence of benchmark programs for imitation.

A decade later, WAC for the New Millennium demonstrates how WAC has matured as a discipline, developed a body of practices, lore, research, and theory, and connected with other academic movements. The essays consider how WAC...
sustains and recreates itself by collaboration with other educational movements and initiatives, works through and with other university programs, and impacts research into and theorization of the nature and function of writing. However, these essays also suggest that although WAC was once an offshoot of composition theory trying to gain acceptance in disciplines outside English, it is now contested and problematized by compositionists. This collection also reflects on WAC’s future, anticipating and addressing problems deriving from its emergence into the academic mainstream. Although these essays invoke the strength and potential of WAC, because they reflect experiences of program administrators, they are infused with the realism earned through years of working in a movement that cuts across and sometimes threatens to undermine the university structure. The writers have clearly read drafts of each other’s contributions and frequently cross-reference them; while occasionally these efforts seem strained, the overall effect is a coherence unusual in collections like this, making it particularly thought-provoking for teachers and students new to the field.

In the first chapter, McLeod and Miraglia reiterate a commonplace of WAC attributed to Barbara Walvoord: that WAC is a movement recreated and sustained by working with other ideas and initiatives at particular institutions. WAC appeals to people in all fields who are willing to bypass disciplinary boundaries and adopt new ways of thinking and working, and this collaboration keeps it going despite financial exigencies. The next chapters include considerations of WAC and assessment by William Condon, WAC and computer technology by Donna Reiss and Art Young, WAC and service learning by David Joliffe, WAC and learning communities by Terry Zawacki and Ashley Williams, and WAC and ESL by Ann Johns. In chapter 7, “The Politics of Literacy Across the Curriculum,” Victor Villanueva expresses doubts about WAC, grappling with its “assimilationist” nature, and arguing that WAC may teach students to adjust to conventional academic expectations and reproduce the existing (racist) social consensus. Villanueva reiterates the most serious criticisms WAC has drawn over the years: that WAC lets control of definitions of writing and effective pedagogy slip away from compositionists, exacerbates the vocationalism and corporatization of the university, and valorizes the reproduction of existing knowledge rather than questioning, resisting, or changing it. Against these criticisms, Villanueva proposes jaiberia, or “subversive complicity,” as a desirable outcome of WAC.

Other contributors acknowledge similar dangers. Condon considers program assessment a hedge against outside control as well as a vehicle for collaboration, and Reiss and Young warn that while Electronic Communication Across the Curriculum (ECAC) enhances collaboration, peer interaction, diversity, and portfolio development, it arouses new concerns: “issues of access, of the faculty reward system, of copyright and intellectual property, and of academic freedom” (75). The contributors who relate WAC to other institutional structures—Joan Mullin on WAC and writing centers, Margot Soven on WAC and curriculum-based peer tutors, and Martha Townsend on WAC and writing intensive courses—also take a
critical and nuanced stance toward projects and possibilities for interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching and learning writing. Although they have clearly created “programs that work,” their representations are complicated by personal knowledge of what happens to ideas—for better and worse—when put into practice.

This collection shows that WAC has clearly moved beyond the first “oh wow!” stages and reflects critically on its successes and failures. For example, Joliffe proposes using WAC to reconsider genres of writing assigned in service learning courses, arguing that journals and reflective essays are insufficient to articulate the systemic aspects of social problems. Drawing on Russell’s research in activity theory, Joliffe proposes teaching and practicing genres that will help students understand and “appropriate” professional genres and initiate professional activity in a field. Also taking a critical stance, Mullin, Soven, and Townsend express the wariness of experienced program directors, and Soven and Townsend explicitly address the “pitfalls” of their respective programs, while describing policies and practices that promote their success.

In the last two chapters Russell and Thaiss reconsider the research underlying WAC. Russell reviews a considerable body of qualitative research into writing practices at various stages of professional and personal development. Starting with studies of workplace writing, and moving “backward” into school writing—from the professional writing learned in graduate school and internships, through writing in undergraduate majors, back to writing in general education—he provides a structure for understanding the research supporting WAC. He argues against a simplified approach to teaching or understanding writing, asserting that “[t]he qualitative studies point faculty and program directors beyond the search for universal or autonomous approaches toward much more messy—and human—factors” (261). Russell rejects the opposition between personal and professional, self and work, that drives most criticisms of WAC, concluding that when writing is taught as part of the larger social activity of a discipline, it fosters not only professional growth, but also personal development.

In the final chapter, Thaiss reviews WAC theory, considering both consistent and modified principles and practices, as he ties together the other essays in the collection. Closely analyzing “writing,” “across,” and “curriculum,” he complicates each term and shows their evolution over time. Thaiss laments the loss of connection between transactional and expressive writing and theories of writing, and considers how the growth of electronic genres of communication has changed our understanding of writing. He reminds us that the course—a teacher and a group of students—is the location that generates most college writing and offers the most meaningful location for studying it.

*WAC for the New Millennium* is clearly an important book, both as summary of where WAC has been and statement of its maturity as a movement. The essays show a movement that has connected with other important movements in higher education, established various kinds of institutional presence, and built a body of research and theory that supports and modifies its practices. Most of the
contributors, speculating about the future of WAC, anticipate continued improvement initiated by reflective practice and the interplay of theory, research, and application. I would like to be optimistic about that future because of the intellectual vigor WAC embodies and this collection reflects. The new millennium, however, has reduced universities’ budgets and increased pressure for simple-minded accountability. In newspapers, on discussion lists, and in conversations with friends and colleagues, I hear about too many programs cut back, eliminated, or reduced to formulas that cannot provide the rich intellectual experience of making and communicating meaning through writing. I would like to see this book as a milestone for Writing Across the Curriculum, but admit to the lurking fear that it could be its tombstone.

West Lafayette, IN


Reviewed by Kathleen J. Ryan, West Virginia University

Laura Micciche has argued recently that “edited collections have and continue to contribute to the development of composition studies in important ways” (102). Certainly, this is true for the advancement of Writing Program Administration (WPA). Collections like Kitchen Cooks, Plate Twirlers and Troubadours (1999); The Writing Program Administrator’s Resource (2002); The Allyn and Bacon Sourcebook for Writing Program Administrators (2001); The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher (1999); and The Writing Program Administrator as Theorist (2002) legitimize WPA as scholarly work and articulate central issues. Like these texts, Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices reinforces Writing Program Administration as scholarly inquiry; specifically, the collection takes up an important WPA concern, the professional development of teaching assistants. According to Stephen Wilhoit, TA development has only received significant attention in the last thirty years (17), and Betty Pytlik and Sarah Liggett’s collection is an important contribution to this dialogue. New and experienced WPAs, as well as graduate students holding administrative roles or taking WPA courses, will find this text an invaluable resource as they purposefully shape local TA development and reflect on those activities in national and disciplinary contexts. This edited collection serves as an important site of dialogic reflection and invention for current and future WPAs.

Preparing College Teachers of Writing, which assumes teaching is more than recipe-following and learning to teach is an ongoing process, seeks to con-