

## INTRODUCTION.

# COMPLICATING WAC IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

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The Fifteenth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference, which was postponed until August 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided an opportunity to celebrate 50 years of WAC. As noted in this collection's call for submissions, "The Fifteenth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference offers a space for us to come together as a community to consider the complex and complicated histories of WAC and the potential evolutions of the field." The conference was a time to collectively reflect on the past so that we could envision WAC's future. It did bring us together, on Whova rather than in Fort Collins, Colorado, but what visions of the future did this conference imagine? How much change—as people, an organization, a discipline, a world community—have we enacted or innovated since Barbara Walvoord hosted the first WAC seminar at Central College during the 1969–1970 academic year? This is a crucial question especially as WAC seeks to sustain itself in meaningful ways that impact not only our college campuses but our communities, and higher education at large.

As we (the editors) attended conference sessions—gathering in a virtual community, but never once meeting in person—and as we read through subsequent submissions to this edited collection, we began to recognize that the impact of the last few years has brought these lofty goals of the conference into question. At least, the pandemic has demonstrated how truly complex and complicated WAC work is. Al Harahap noted as much during the final plenary on envisioning the future of WAC, during which he offered this disclaimer: "What we are charged

to talk about, the future of WAC, is a huge cross to bear” (Harahap, Navarro, & Russell, 2021). His words deserve our thoughtful attention as higher education continues to experience challenges related to student enrollment, institutional closures, budget cuts sparked by a global pandemic, and major shifts to the ways in which writing is taught across the curriculum globally. These realities create an increased exigency to amplify the field by forwarding tropes toward a better future for WAC and leading a movement that exemplifies greater access, equity, inclusion, and justice.

COVID-19 initiated a massive and consequential pause *and* shift that reverberated around the world—not just in our individual homes and daily practices, but in our collective organizations and academic institutions. We also note that due to the pandemic’s global impact, the international WAC community experienced a pause and shift in many different ways and in various educational situations. Anecdotally, WAC coordinators were called on to help think through the sudden gymnastics faculty were asked to perform: What did we know about using discussion boards to assess disciplinary content? How do we manage the writing in our classes now that we’re fully virtual, or HyFlex, or hybrid? How do we accommodate or account for students without access to the internet or who don’t have a space to work at home or who are attending class via their mobile phone in their car or at their workplace? How do we support students who are caring for sick loved ones or who are sick themselves? How do we support faculty in online writing instruction in often uncertain educational situations?

As experts in writing across different contexts, many WAC coordinators (and writing instructors more broadly) found themselves positioned as the go-to person—the “access point”—for writing across modalities in *addition to* the curriculum. These challenges highlighted just how much labor often falls on WAC practitioners within institutions, without clear lines of support or successors. During IWAC’s final plenary (see a revised version of this talk in Chapter 17), Alisa Russell challenged us to think about this labor and access by asking:

Where are the access points for upcoming WAC scholars like graduate students? Where are the access points for scholars in different disciplines like those in adjacent or even non-adjacent fields who are doing this work right outside of writing studies, for faculty at our own institutions, for students at our institutions? Where are the thresholds, the crossover points, the paths in? Are they visible? Are they intentional? Are they equitable? (Harahap, Navarro, & Russell, 2021)

Woven into the complexity of 2020 was the simultaneous social unrest in response to the deaths of Elijah McClain, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Daniel

Prude, George Floyd, Andre Hill, and too many others to name here. Indeed, Floyd was murdered and the protests ignited just a week before the IWAC conference was originally scheduled to begin. Rather than traveling to Fort Collins, some of us were quarantining in our homes as others of us marched in the streets. As we moved through 2020, we also witnessed a contested U.S. presidential election, as well as an insurrection at the nation's capital that threatened the very foundations of our democracy. Amid this political unrest, we experienced the consequences of the ever-growing global environmental breakdown: Wildfires and hurricanes displaced many, while drought and extreme heat called the notion of "sustainability" and how best to tackle climate change into question. Business as usual simply seemed like a bad business model, ushering in a period of contemplation of not where we *would like* to go as WAC practitioners, but where we *needed* to go. How well *did* our approaches work in a virtual space? Whose languages and ways of creating knowledge are *still* not being represented, despite all that research has shown? Are we transforming as a field fast enough?

We share the preceding circumstances to situate the Fifteenth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference within the broader social and environmental contexts in which we were operating and *continue* to operate. The unprecedented conditions of rupture and change that we find ourselves in—climate, social, pandemic—are clearly calling for innovation. But to what degree is WAC capable of, invested in, or committed to the mobilization of innovation? Christopher Thaiss spoke to this, to some extent, in his opening plenary when he observed: "There is no sustainability without adaptability" (Rutz & Thaiss, 2021). The conditions are such that we can't *not* adapt and innovate in the face of all this change. Yet, while change may be inevitable, encountering so much change at once can be paralyzing, and the process of enacting sustainable, effective change can be slow.

Despite these challenges and demands on our cognitive energy, we were at last able to gather online in August 2021 to talk and think through ideas related to "Celebrating Successes, Recognizing Challenges, and Inviting Critique and Innovation." The conference theme emerged as a call to bring together within the same space an acknowledgement of the successes over 50 years and the need to address the challenges that lie ahead. With a global pandemic on the near horizon, the IWAC advisory board had no idea the challenges that would shape the programmatic and classroom conditions related to how speakers and attendees would engage conversations of successes, challenges, critique, and innovation. The advisory board also had no idea how much innovation and challenge would be reflected in the logistical and material aspects of this conference. In many ways, this brave new world we found ourselves in was more accessible because of the pandemic. People could attend the conference without worry of location,

safety, or cost of traveling, or the myriad issues that must be juggled to attend in-person conferences. The conference organizers even reduced registration fees to reflect the virtual nature of the conference. Moreover, the Fifteenth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference emerged as the most diverse IWAC in terms of attendance. Institutionally, for example, we saw around 26 percent of attendees representing both 2- and 4-year Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), most of which were Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions (eHSIs). We note that Colorado State University—the conference host—became an eHSI in 2019.

Out of 475 attendees, 128 came from an MSI context within the United States, including HSIs, eHSIs, Asian American Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and Tribal Colleges or Universities (TCUs). Drawing on the work of writing studies scholars at HBCUs, we recognize the need for more representation of MSIs—including resources to support WAC professionals from MSIs at conferences, summer institutes, and other events (Jackson, Jackson, & Tafari, 2019, p. 207). We apply this to WAC especially as we continue to examine how we support students and faculty through equitable and inclusive approaches. This need for increased representation comes at a time when higher education scholars note that “Minority-Serving Institutions have become an increasingly important part of American higher education, especially as a gateway to higher education for many traditionally underrepresented students across our country” (Conrad & Gasman, 2017, p. 1). Additionally, approximately 48 attendees joined the conference from a wide range of colleges and universities across the globe. Because many attendees were speakers, these numbers were reflected in the presentations and plenary sessions that helped shape critical conversations about the past, present, and future of WAC related to access, equity, inclusion, and justice.

We highlight MSIs as context for what we observed, particularly in the second plenary session hosted by Pamela Flash and Teresa Redd (2021): the call to better support the needs of diverse student populations who engage various modes of writing across the curriculum. While supporting the needs of diverse student populations is not exclusive to WAC practitioners at MSIs, institutional diversity at IWAC is a reminder of what Sue H. McLeod (2000) found in her 1987 national survey of WAC programs: There is a strong investment in WAC among these colleges and universities. We point to McLeod’s survey to show that WAC’s presence in MSIs is not new. In fact, it is linked to our history in ways that reveal that we must continue to advocate for access, equity, inclusion, and justice within our policies and practices. As Flash and Redd (2021) found through their survey of conference attendees, supporting the success of a diversity of students across the disciplines is crucial to WAC’s future.

We further noticed this interest at the global level given how public universities in some countries have expanded free or reduced tuition, which has increased access to education for students beyond a select few. For example, in the final plenary session, Federico Navarro mentioned that the once “nontraditional” students at his university in Chile are now, in fact, the largest group of students enrolled in Chilean universities (Harahap, Navarro, & Russell, 2021). Navarro added that, very often, their universities, their faculty, and their pedagogies of writing seem at odds with current realities in higher education. As the field of WAC continues to ask questions of what it means to support access, equity, inclusion, and justice, especially in the changing conditions of higher education, we recall just how relevant Al Harahap’s heuristic, also discussed in Chapter 17, is to WAC scholars at all institutions (Figure 1).

Does my \_\_\_\_\_ look, sound, and read like my \_\_\_\_\_?

center

program

department

conference

organization

journal editorial

journal authorship

WAC/WID initiative

student population

city/town

region/state

nation

the world

*Figure 1. Heuristic in Deciding Readiness to Do Linguistic Equity Work with Colleagues (Harahap, Navarro, & Russell, 2021).*

Another highlight of the conference was the ability to recognize, in real time, the contributions to WAC from individuals across the globe. For the first time in IWAC’s history, an awards ceremony was hosted in collaboration with the Association for Writing Across the Curriculum (AWAC), honoring scholarship in the field and scholars who have made critical contributions to WAC as a movement, pedagogy, and curriculum. Twenty-eight scholars were recognized, celebrating the successes of the last 50 years. Furthermore, this was the first IWAC with two multilingual sessions led by WAC scholars, including one session on installing a writing culture across the curriculum with insights from scholars in Brazil, Peru, and Colombia (Navarro et al., 2021a). The second multilingual session focused on writing engagement, self-regulation, and family support in educational communities with scholars from Chile, Colombia, and Argentina (Navarro et al., 2021b). These sessions, sponsored by the Asociación Latinoamericana de Estudios de la Escritura en Educación Superior (ALES), are just two examples of WAC functioning as a connector in building conversations

between international WAC scholars and those who draw insight from these sessions given where their programs are located and their campus demographics (Harahap, Navarro, & Russell, 2021). As students, teachers, and colleges and universities are more globally connected, we know that international WAC scholarship is even more crucial to the progress of the discipline. By engaging with WAC scholars around the world, we can rethink how our practices might better engage students and teachers through the various writing cultures that we build on our college campuses.

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This proceedings documents some of the many conversations that were shared at the conference in August 2021. While contributors were asked to revise their initial presentations to account for the shift in genre (e.g., from a presentation to a chapter), we (the editors) were conscious that this collection is meant to be a *proceedings*, a record of some of the conversations that actually took place. As we read through the submissions to our call, we noted an array of voices and perspectives on WAC that originally took the form of panels, workshops, and roundtables, and three distinct themes began to emerge in these conversations: faculty development, pedagogical considerations, and institutional concerns. These three themes help us think about WAC in practice during times of rapid change—the challenges and innovations of working with faculty across disciplinary spaces, the practical applications of writing instruction within the classroom, and the larger systemic considerations that must be navigated in successfully building, maintaining, and adapting programs into the future.

In the first section focused on faculty development, we see six chapters that explore finding common ground through methodological, epistemological, and conceptual approaches to WAC. The authors of these chapters address such questions as: What can be accomplished with and without a stand-alone WAC program? How might integrating WAC into the vertical curriculum open other opportunities for engaging with faculty? What are the benefits and challenges to having multiple stakeholders involved in program design and implementation? The chapters in this section provide us with innovative models for creating WAC programs, as well as for assessing the impact of WAC programs on faculty development.

The second section in this collection extends these considerations to our immediate instructional spaces, be they classrooms or writing centers. What does WAC pedagogy look like when we incorporate heavy reflective and creative writing into our classrooms, for example? The approaches discussed in some of the chapters in this section come at the same time that other WAC researchers, such as Justin Nicholes (2022), analyze writing and the experiences of students

describing unexpected yet meaningful creative writing approaches within their science and other research-focused coursework. Through Nicholes's work, we have seen Creative Writing Across the Curriculum (CWAC) emerge as a meaningful literacy framework to engage writers across disciplines, languages, and identities. Other chapters in this section discuss pedagogical implications beyond the traditional, face-to-face classroom, shifting our attention to writing centers and online spaces, where topics of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) require different ways of thinking about and assessing student writing and engagement.

The six chapters in the third section invite us to turn our attention outward to larger global and institutional considerations. The section opens with historical discussions of program building and professionalization, then shifts to WAC as it is enacted in two different international contexts. These chapters remind us that there is much to learn both about how this work can be performed, as well as our assumptions while *doing* this work. This final section concludes with reflections on where WAC has been and where it could be (and needs to be) if we are to be strategic in shaping cultures of writing on our college campuses.

Although not all chapters in this proceedings are directly related to DEIJ, we believe that scholarship on antiracism and access is crucial as WAC practitioners address these issues in our classrooms, our programs, and our institutions, as well as more generally as a field. Such scholarship is critical as we identify what to address in our programs (e.g., workshop topics for faculty development), in addition to how we do it (e.g., being intentional about whose expertise we invite to workshops, including the support we provide them and the partnerships we build and/or strengthen on our college campuses). In the second plenary session focused on where WAC is now at 50, Flash and Redd (2021) reported that “78 percent of [Fifteenth International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference] attendees felt that the most urgent question or work of WAC’s scholar practitioners is how can we best implement antiracist policies and practices.” Hara-hap later referenced this statistic in the closing plenary session on diversifying, professionalizing, and renovating WAC, adding that knowing how to advocate for students’ right to their own language (CCCC, 1974) specifically calls for WAC to be aware of linguistic difference (Cox, 2014; Matsuda, 2001; Zawacki, 2010), antiracist writing assessment (Inoue & Poe, 2012), and linguistic justice (Baker-Bell, 2020). These are critical administrative and pedagogical concerns that shape our work today and into the future.

In some chapters within this proceedings, authors examine issues of equity and social justice by drawing on work focused on antiracism both within and beyond the field of rhetoric and composition. As we continue to integrate antiracist scholarship in our research and in future IWAC proceedings, we know



that we all can do more. For example, we hope for an increase in antiracist scholarship that not only supports WAC research but that consistently (re)frames and guides the work we do in examining how language shapes worldviews both locally and globally. We believe that this approach to developing antiracist policies and practices through WAC programs and initiatives is paramount as we look to the future of the field. This, of course, requires that we revisit, as Staci Perryman-Clark states in her 2022 CCCC CFP, what our discipline historically and presently means by equity and inclusion. That is, how do we really know our pedagogical and disciplinary practices are equitable? What is our responsibility in advocating for policies and practices that expand who we want to address and reach? We know that foundational questions such as these—questions that motivate WAC in recognizing the challenges we face and the role for critique and innovation in moving the field forward—will be active at IWAC 2023 in Clemson, South Carolina.

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