
Information literacy and Writing across the Curriculum: sharing the vision

James K. Elmborg

The author

James K. Elmborg is Assistant Professor at the School of Library and Information Science, Main Library, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, USA.

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Abstract

Points out the similarities and differences between library instruction and writing instruction in the higher education curriculum. Notes that information literacy librarians can learn from the experiences of composition instructors regarding curricular revision and reform. Suggests that one of the keys to information literacy reaching its potential is to find common ground with programs like Writing across the Curriculum.

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Introduction

As movements in higher education, both library instruction and writing instruction have struggled to find their appropriate place in the college curriculum. Because of the many similarities in their missions and visions, these two general education initiatives share a set of problems and questions that have recurred regularly over the past 100 years, almost the entire history of the curriculum, as we know it (Russell, 1991; Salony, 1995). Both have struggled with questions of responsibility. Who should teach undergraduates to write and do research? Should it be the disciplinary faculty as part of an integrated approach to the discipline? Or should it be specialists, like composition teachers and librarians? Both fields have dealt with questions of remediation. Should colleges and universities be responsible for teaching “basic” skills, like writing and library skills? Or are these skills more appropriate to the K-12 classroom? And ultimately, there have been questions of accountability. Who should be held responsible when students arrive at college without the ability to do college level writing and research? These questions set the grounds for the debate regarding both library instruction and composition instruction for the first three-quarters of the twentieth century and they remain pertinent in discussions today.

Both writing instruction and library instruction entered the modern age at roughly the same time for roughly the same reasons. As non-traditional students entered the open-admissions colleges of the late 1960s, new strategies for teaching evolved to address their needs. Writing instruction and library instruction both entered the modern era when they began to accept the challenge to teach skills that college faculty had always assumed (rightly or wrongly) to be the responsibility of the lower grades. As teachers with little status, teaching a subject considered remedial by many senior faculty, both writing instructors and library instructors in the early days were considered second-class professionals doing a job that involved “paying dues” before being allowed to move into more prestigious positions, either as teachers of literature or senior reference librarian/bibliographers.



Similar as their histories are, there are significant differences between how writing instruction and library instruction have evolved over the past 25 years. Writing programs developed in the context of English departments, and a steady stream of teaching assistants taught composition to fund their literary PhD work. Libraries had no such stream of graduate students and no PhD degrees to grant. Freshman composition courses found their way into the curriculum by having a departmental home in English willing to sponsor them. Library instruction had no such academic home and no tradition of offering courses on which academic credit could build. By the 1980s, composition and rhetoric began to emerge as a research specialty within English departments, in large part because the market for literary PhDs had become saturated, while jobs were available for teaching writing and administering writing programs. Graduate students began to study writing as an academic subject and to develop sophisticated theories of writing. Students began to specialize in composition theory rather than literary studies and, on graduation, many of these students found ready employment as composition specialists.

While rooted in the same fundamental causes (the need to teach general education literacies to undergraduates), library instruction and writing instruction were subject to different pressures and evolved at different rates. Pushed along by the advantages of a departmental home and degree-granting status, writing programs revolutionized English studies. Without these advantages, library instruction was involved in more basic battles of academic credibility. Boisse and Webster (1987) said of library instruction, "Even today, user education all too frequently receives more lip-service than actual support. In too many colleges and universities it remains a stepchild both in terms of its place within the organizational structure and in terms of the level of financial support it receives" (Boisse and Webster, 1987). In summary, by the middle 1980s, while library instruction languished as a "stepchild" of the library, composition and rhetoric had established itself as a fully formed discipline. Writing programs were well on the way toward an entire curriculum – e.g. freshman

composition required of all students; Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) to teach writing in the academic disciplines; and writing centers to support the work of all writers at all levels (including graduate students and faculty). Such programmatic coherence only very recently has been considered even remotely possible for the library and its curriculum. There are still questions about whether such coherence can be achieved and about whether the writing model is a viable one for library instruction to follow.

Information literacy is now, roughly speaking, where writing programs were 15 years ago. Librarians have made strong inroads in developing programs for the freshman year. Questions are emerging about the writing center model in the library. Currently, there is great interest in information literacy in the academic majors. A recent survey of discipline-specific information literacy courses on the Web showed nearly 100 such courses in various disciplines taught by librarians with "research" or "library skills" as the focus (Manuel, 2002). Undoubtedly, this tally represents a mere fraction of the courses being offered or under development. As libraries begin to think about how best to teach such courses, the WAC movement can provide important lessons based on years of pioneering experience. Whether WAC is a partner, a model, or simply an institutional friend, it can teach information literacy a great deal about being successful in working in the disciplines.

Historical overview

According to David Russell's history, WAC as a coherent movement came into its own in the 1970s (Russell, 1991).

The open admissions movements of the 1960s brought unprecedented numbers of women and minority students to colleges that had been dominated previously by white males of the privileged class. Many of these new students were academically unprepared for the rigors of the academic world, even when they clearly possessed the talent and energy to succeed. In searching for a way to respond to this influx of students, WAC looked to the work of John Dewey, who saw education through the lens of community. The job of school was to

create a “micro-democracy” within which students would come to understand their interdependence. As he noted in *The School and Society*, “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted on, it destroys our democracy.” (Dewey, 1990a). Dewey (1990a) saw school as a microcosm of society, a laboratory for the study of democratic processes. A democratic society requires that schools be founded on democratic principles, he argued, and he set up his laboratory school at The University of Chicago in order to study democratic education in action (Dewey, 1990b). His vision informed the origins of WAC to the extent that Elaine Maimon, one of the founders of the WAC movement, called Dewey “the ‘presiding ghost’ in her early efforts” (Russell, 1991).

Coincident with the influx of non-traditional students in the 1970s, a line of scholarship had been maturing toward what became known as “student-centered pedagogies.” Britton (1970) and Emig (1977) were influential proponents of these theories within the writing community, and they were crucial to the development of WAC pedagogy. Emig (1977) argued that “writing represents a unique mode of learning – not merely valuable, but unique” (Emig, 1977, p. 122). Britton’s *Language and Learning* (1970) provided an extended analysis of the way language development was intertwined with learning development (Britton, 1970). Both authors focused attention on the role of writing in the learning processes of students. In order to teach students to write, they argued, teachers need to focus on writing as part of the overall development of learners, rather than on a narrow, prescriptive (and culturally biased) sense of what constitutes quality writing. The role of writing in the larger process of learning has become central to writing theory. Writing is understood both as a way to learn (as a heuristic) and as a way of demonstrating knowledge (a way to assess what students know). McLeod (2001) is emphatic in claiming “it is an error to see writing to learn and writing to communicate as somehow in conflict with each other . . . (They are) two complementary, even synergistic, approaches to Writing across the Curriculum” (McLeod, 2001). In other

words, writing is both product and process – a fact central to the way writing should be taught. Russell (1991) traces the philosophical roots of this idea to Dewey’s belief that educated students must develop along two parallel lines. On the one hand, they need to write to develop critical thinking skills and language skills. On the other hand, they need to learn to express concrete knowledge as it has been articulated in academic disciplines (Russell, 1991). Writing must be taught, therefore, as both the development of critical thinking and language skills and the development of the ability to articulate disciplinary knowledge as “content.”

This two-pronged definition might also apply to information literacy in the disciplines. The role of the library in the learning process is not well understood, yet all researchers know that trial-and-error searching in online indexes and exploring the stacks can be potent learning experiences in and of themselves – “modes of learning,” to use Emig’s (1977) phrase. The library is replete with what Rheingold (2000) calls “tools for thought” – tools that students can use as vehicles for discovery and growth (Rheingold, 2000). Building such engagement into library instruction can help to emphasize the heuristics of research, its essentially developmental nature. Looking at the library in this way might also cause librarians to reorganize tools and facilities to encourage learning: this activity would be an interesting and productive exercise in and of itself. Conversely, librarians seem to understand, and perhaps overestimate, the importance of information literacy in creating an academic product. An information-literate student should, indeed, produce better academic work. Whether that goal is more important than what the student learns in the process is something the profession might need to explore further.

Teaching language

The rise of library instruction parallels the rise of writing instruction, and the two share many of the same concerns. There are crucial differences, however. As the above history suggests, WAC has, from the beginning, been founded on educational theory. As a movement with a departmental home in English, the first

step toward credibility was to establish writing as an academic subject with a theory base. Perhaps because of their different histories, library instruction has taken a different path, developing working programs first and moving to theory after the fact. Oberman (1984) describes an early encounter with one of the leading figures in bibliographic instruction. This unnamed person, on hearing that Oberman (1984) was planning a book of essays on instructional theory, asked, "Why do we need theory in our instructional programs?" (Oberman, 1984). Writing almost 20 years ago, she considered the anecdote significant enough to use it to introduce her chapter on the importance of theory for the future of library instruction.

Even today, lingering doubts about the importance of educational theory continue to hinder professional development within the library instruction community. A search of the online discussion list BI-L (the primary list for the discussion of instructional issues in academic libraries until it ceased operation and re-emerged as ILI-L) shows that, during the calendar year of 2001, out of 1,251 total messages sent to the list, the term "pedagogy" was used only nine times. After eliminating uses of the term in job advertisements and conference announcements, there remain four actual posts that use this key instructional term. One writer uses the term twice in the same message (bringing the total number of messages to three), and one writer uses it disparagingly. Searches on other key instructional terms showed similar neglect of current theoretical language. Learning theory has long been part of the professional literature. Unfortunately, the daily language used by many librarians in talking about information literacy lacks the critical dimension it needs to work with WAC. While it is dangerous to generalize, it seems safe to say that, in many information literacy programs, instrumental thinking predominates over the theoretical. In other words, practical problems receive significantly more attention than theoretical ones, and when theoretical imperatives are in conflict with problems of expediency, expediency tends to win the day. This situation may be difficult to change, given the library's pragmatic orientation and its history of operating on the intellectual outskirts

of academia, but the lessons of WAC suggest that change is important.

In contrast, one of WAC's strengths, according to its practitioners, is that it has integrated a multitude of theoretical perspectives into a dynamic theory of writing. Many of these perspectives could be employed just as effectively to understand information literacy. McLeod describes the many approaches used in WAC scholarship. These include: cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, post-structuralist theories, constructivist theories, and sociological and anthropological theories (McLeod, 2001). Among the most interesting of these lines of research for information literacy is "Critical pedagogy," based on constructivism, post-structuralist theory, and anthropology. Writers like Freire (1970) have framed pedagogy as a way for students to claim control of their own education and, thereby, as a means for working toward social equality (Freire, 1970). Villanueva (2001), following Freire's (1970) line of thinking, has persuasively argued that WAC should be "not only a way of learning but also a way of fostering critical consciousness, more than a means of problem solving but also a means of problem posing" (Villanueva, 2001). LeCourt (1996) has argued that WAC needs to do more than simply teach students to be successful writers within the disciplines. She claims that any teaching must also encourage students to question what they are taught and how their thoughts and beliefs will be shaped by the learning they do. Disciplinary knowledge is powerful knowledge and, when students are taught to think within a discipline, they should understand what they are "becoming" through the transformation that occurs (LeCourt, 1996). Feminist pedagogy argues that education is still essentially structured around masculine learning styles. Gardner (1999) has argued that people are intelligent in multiple ways (Gardner, 1999). According to Gardner (1999), traditional teaching rewards primarily verbal and numeric skill at the expense of other kinds of intelligence less valued by our economic system. When used as a way to enforce existing power structures, these critics collectively argue, education can become a powerful tool to enforce standardized thinking

and quell individualism – precisely the opposite of what “critical thinking” implies.

McLeod (2001) argues that, amid the sweeping changes facing higher education, WAC will flourish because it “focuses on writing as an essential component of critical thinking and problem solving, key elements in a liberal education” (McLeod, 2001). Shapiro and Hughes (1996) make a similar argument in their influential “Information literacy as a liberal art . . .” when they suggest that teaching students how to find, evaluate, and use information should be an essential part of a liberal education (Shapiro and Hughes, 1996). As librarians seek to move into the disciplines, this argument can be important, but it may need to be articulated more fully. WAC can provide information literacy with ways of making that argument, and of thinking and talking more broadly about teaching, especially in finding ways to resolve the increasingly irrelevant theory-practice divide by placing the student at the center of the educational process. WAC has embraced what Freire (1970) calls “praxis” – language and action merged into theoretically informed practice. WAC practitioners, coming as they do from language study, are very sensitive to the rhetoric of teaching and learning. In order to work with WAC and other instructional programs on campus, information literacy will need to begin to find the language to articulate key theoretical positions, and all librarians who work in information literacy need to be willing to articulate their own philosophies in the context of those positions.

Writing and research as processes

WAC, like all writing programs, has been heavily shaped by teaching of the writing process – a shift in focus from teaching writing as a product to teaching writing as a process through which writers work toward the articulation of their ideas.

Kuhlthau’s (1993) work in defining the research process is well-known in information literacy circles (Kuhlthau, 1993). The relationship between the research process and the writing process is much less understood. The writing process has been the centering

theme in college writing instruction since the 1970s. It suggests that, as writers move toward articulation of their ideas, they move through several cognitive modes, which are generally understood to be brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. Far from a linear process, these modes are fluid and recursive. Students are often actively brainstorming even in the final stages of drafting, and they generally revise their ideas in the brainstorming process. Detractors have criticized the writing process movement, suggesting that the sequencing of stages is simplistic or that process has become more important than product. Such critics have not, in general, spent sufficient time understanding the complexities of writing theory. In fact, over the past 25 years, the writing process has been refined into a very sophisticated understanding of the ways that “real” writers write. Writing process theory has grown into maturity, and it has many potential applications to information literacy.

Teaching writing as a process means that teachers must switch the emphasis away from the mechanics of writing toward the facilitation of an unfolding process. For most students, the research process exists in the context of the larger process of writing. When the search process is defined as an isolated, discrete process built around finding and evaluating information, it is easy to lose sight of the way students experience the larger development of ideas that takes place in the college writing process, the way searching and finding function in the process of composing. John C. Bean argues that the “problem with traditional writing instruction is that it leads to a view of writing as a set of isolated skills unconnected to an authentic desire to converse with interested readers about real ideas” (Bean, 2001). When taught through skills (spelling, grammar, punctuation, outlining, etc.), writing becomes detached from the production of meaning in which students can invest and about which they can care. This detachment breeds cynicism and a view of writing as busy-work.

There is similar danger in current information literacy practice. There is a “grammar” of information, and many librarians devote precious instructional time to teaching subject-searching versus keyword-searching; Boolean connectors; complex nested search statements;

or the intricacies of the Library of Congress Classification System. Like sentence-level grammar, these are isolated skills that separate research from the making of meaning. That is not to say that these concepts are not important, but rather that, as ways of encouraging students to see the importance of the library in the development of their ideas, they are not compelling or even interesting. According to Bean (2001), the problem with many writing classrooms is that “we have eliminated . . . the rich, creative source of ideas and substituted instead a sterile order that leaves us obsessed with correctness, neatness, and propriety.” In doing so, we teach students that writing is a “joyless activity, an opportunity mainly for displaying errors for teachers to red-pencil” (Bean, 2001). Bean (2001) concludes that the “social cost is incalculable; when writing gets separated from what the writer really thinks, the experience of ‘really thinking’ can be quickly lost from the curriculum” (Bean, 2001).

Librarians know that searching an electronic index can be an exciting experience. Brainstorming terminology, generating search terms, putting those terms into the index, retrieving records that stimulate and sharpen a question, and then brainstorming new terms: these activities stimulate what Bean (2001) calls “real thinking.” Information literacy can be a vibrant and interesting subject if it emphasizes this process of searching and researching. To help students appreciate this fact, librarians can work to understand and articulate their own searching and researching processes. They can teach by focusing on the moments in that process that excite them as professional searchers: the thrill of the chase, the intellectual excitement of the ideas as they take order in the mind, and the discovery of underlying structures in the systems that facilitate their work. They can watch for moments in the research process that need to be understood and explained. Bean suggests that the “writing-across-the-curriculum movement is rooted in a radical revisioning of what it means to be a writer” (Bean, 2001). Information literacy should be rooted in a similar radical revisioning of what it means to be a college researcher. Moving the focus from product to process is key to that revisioning.

Discourse communities

WAC views academic disciplines as “discourse communities,” each with its own set of assumptions about how knowledge is produced. As inexperienced writers attempt to enter academic disciplines, they must learn to participate in a world of already articulated ideas – ideas that have been articulated by specialists in the respective fields. They need to learn to research and write like the specialists who inhabit these communities. WAC theory views academic departments as social units, each with its own set of conventions that signal membership. Academic departments are different in obvious ways. Each one dresses, talks, and plays differently from the others. These surface differences are only the tip of the iceberg. Academic disciplines also have unique research methodologies, accept different kinds of proof, and prefer different kinds of writing. These “rules” or “codes” that make for success in academic majors are often invisible to outsiders, especially to those who have little experience with academic environments. WAC works to articulate the rules and codes that make for success in the disciplines, so they can be made explicit to students.

Bruffee (1999) defines three kinds of ways that academic disciplines negotiate their identities: “Negotiation among members of a community of knowledgeable peers, negotiation at the boundaries among knowledge communities, and negotiations at the boundaries between knowledge communities and outsiders who want to join them” (Bruffee, 1999). The articulation of the disciplines is understood, in Bruffee’s (1999) scheme, to emerge from these kinds of negotiations. Roughly speaking, the first kind of negotiation describes the conversation that occurs among specialists in a discipline. Professors determine, in discussions among themselves, what is known and why they think they know it. In the second kind of negotiation, the discipline represents itself to other disciplines and negotiates meaning by “translating the language of each community into the language of the other” (Bruffee, 1999). The third kind of translation is most important for WAC. It suggests that teaching is the process of negotiating between the knowledge community

of the discipline and novices who want to join that community. This approach to teaching is much different from traditional models of teaching. In the traditional model, teachers fill their own minds with all there is to know about the discipline. They then organize and present that material as a coherent subject that students are expected to represent back to them in exams or papers. Bruffee (1999) proposes an alternative teaching method based on collaborative learning. In this approach, teaching is “helping students converse with increasing facility in the language of the communities they want to join.” The job involves “creating social conditions in which students can become reacculturated into those communities” (Bruffee, 1999).

Undergraduates rarely understand that knowledge is dialogic – that it is negotiated in the discussions, disputes and disagreements of specialists. One of the early researchers in the area of student development suggested that learning this lesson was the single overarching task of the undergraduate (Perry, 1970). Incoming students tend to see knowledge as monologic – even monolithic, a thing to be learned whole. They tend to want facts they can memorize and structures they can study. WAC aims to teach students to approach their academic work differently. They are encouraged to find a voice within the discipline, and to use writing to explore and refine that voice. In addition to learning the content of their discipline, students are encouraged to consciously participate in their own learning development. They are encouraged to be critical thinkers and analysts of their own growth. As college graduates, they must emerge able to participate in the process of creating new knowledge, whether that knowledge is used on the job, in their personal lives, or in pursuit of their social commitments. WAC is designed to encourage development toward that end.

Bean (2001) notes that “the view of academic life implied by Writing across the Curriculum . . . means joining a conversation of persons who are, in important ways, fundamentally disagreeing” (Bean, 2001). Disagreements in the disciplines are structured by conventions and ways of arguing that are accepted by the members of those disciplines. The mastery of these conventions indicates disciplinary

understanding. When students declare their academic majors, they are expected to absorb and emulate the conventions of their field. The process of learning is viewed by WAC as the process of moving from one community to another. As students mature, they move from simple communities with few unsophisticated rules toward more complex communities with more sophisticated codes. As novices attempting to move into academic cultures with increasingly complex codes, students often fail to see or understand the conventions that operate to mark advanced practitioners. According to WAC theory, learning the codes of disciplinary discourse is crucial to their success.

A number of librarians working in information literacy across the disciplines have provided groundwork for understanding how disciplines construct their knowledge and have begun to work to initiate students into departmental discourse communities. Grafstein (2002) notes that “discourse of particular disciplines . . . has important implications for the ability to acquire and synthesize new information within a discipline Disciplines have different epistemological structures, and . . . the research process is not identical across disciplines” (Grafstein, 2002). In describing the SUNY Plattsburg program, List (1995) describes the ways library research is conducted by different academic fields. She notes the special styles of researchers in the humanities, social sciences, and the empirical sciences, and she outlines course objectives based on those needs. Bell and Benedicto (1998) provide a similar overview of their work in the disciplines at The University of Oregon (Bell and Benedicto, 1998). Each of these authors provides examples of the kinds of questions asked in the respective disciplines and of the challenges students face in attempting to respond. Work in the academic disciplines leads naturally toward the questions posed by Bruffee (1999), questions of disciplinary authority and how arguments are constructed. In evaluating the success of the disciplinary model, questions are “open-ended, either asking for students’ opinions or giving student exploration and innovation, and . . . librarians are able to introduce students to the idea that no single approach to information research is applicable

to every research problem. Such assignments encourage critical thinking by allowing students to use any of a variety of approaches to the questions” (List, 1995). In other words, students are encouraged to experiment with the disciplinary conventions, to use the library’s “tools for thought” to help them understand and work within those conventions.

The biggest challenge for academic librarians as they move into information literacy across the curriculum might well be their own assumption that they lack the subject expertise to teach. If librarians adopt Bruffee’s (1999) view of knowledge, they can see themselves as learners along with their students. Their shared goal is to understand the community of practice in the academic disciplines. Librarians can learn the habits and customs of the disciplines and can thereby help students to learn and work in the communities they are attempting to join. This role does not demand that librarians possess foundational knowledge of the discipline, only that they be active in their efforts to understand the disciplines as constructed communities. Subject bibliographers, who often resist teaching in freshman-level information literacy programs, might be very valuable allies in helping instructional librarians understand disciplinary conventions. Foregrounding these disciplinary conventions as conventions so students can understand how knowledge is produced in those disciplines is the first and most important conceptual task in WAC.

WAC works by workshop

WAC works by workshops and all successful WAC programs are initiated and sustained through workshops sponsored and conducted by faculty invested in the program. Having existed since the mid-1970s, these workshops have published guidelines and best practices. The most notable of these are McLeod and Soven’s *WAC: A Guide to Program Development* (McLeod and Soven, 1992) and Fulwiler and Young’s *Programs that Work* (Fulwiler and Young, 1990). *WAC for the New Millennium* (McLeod, 2001) is a forward-looking guide to WAC program development. John Bean’s *Engaging Ideas* (Bean, 2001) is often

recommended to disciplinary faculty as a reader for supporting ongoing faculty work in WAC. For specific tips on running workshops and creating activities, these books should be consulted. WAC workshops have many functions. They create a community dedicated to the teaching of writing. They provide ongoing support for faculty to develop skills in teaching writing. They raise awareness in the academic community about the importance of writing in the learning process. Since information literacy shares many of these goals, it makes sense for librarians to collaborate with WAC in the workshop process or, if WAC workshops do not exist on campus, to use the WAC model for information literacy’s ends.

In general, proponents of WAC insist that workshops be organized around goals shaped by teaching faculty. This approach is pragmatic – designed to elicit investment in the program from faculty who have to support it. If asked, most faculty will say they would like to improve the quality of their students’ work. Some (not all) would be willing to spend time and effort to find ways to improve student performance and, by implication, their own teaching. These faculty are likely candidates for a WAC workshop. WAC workshops should be framed as explorations into problems and solutions. This means that WAC workshops, rather than advocating particular ends, must create intellectual space for faculty to grow into their own understanding of writing and its role in their classes. Workshops model a collaborative process of growth that must proceed in line with the general constructivist principles outlined in the WAC theory above.

For this reason, WAC workshops should be grass-roots movements. Disciplinary faculty need to identify the questions to be posed and must answer them in their own ways. WAC has rejected standardization in favor of local control. Walvoord (1992) proposes that WAC workshops employ a “faculty dialogue model.” In this model, initiators of the workshop recruit faculty who show interest in the aims of WAC. Walvoord (1992) suggests that the development of the WAC program should demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Initiators move as quickly as possible to include, in a workshop setting that encourages dialogue, a range of faculty

colleagues from various disciplines as well as teaching assistants, students and others who will be affected. These people have a chance to shape and to own the program from the beginning. Initiators are careful to share power and ownership

- The dialogue starts from needs and concerns that the faculty perceives and to which the faculty is willing to dedicate time and effort.
- Initiators, even if they have training (in the subject), do not view themselves as the only “experts” or as the teachers of the group but as colleagues in a mutual exchange where everyone learns and everyone contributes.
- Changes in such areas as curriculum, school-wide assessment, and writing centers arise from the dialogue. They usually happen after, and as a result of, the initial workshop(s).
- Administrators enter as participants in the dialogue, with their own kinds of insight. They also function as facilitators and as providers (of) resources for the program. They should not be seen as dictators who select WAC participants or decide the features of the program (Walvoord, 1992).

The role of WAC is to engender systemic change in the way faculty perceive writing and their teaching of it. “Initiators” are responsible for organizing the process and facilitating discussions. They help faculty find the questions around which the workshops are built. Initiators may or may not actually “run” the workshops.

Walvoord cautions against three common errors made in the planning of workshops. They are the “conversion model,” the “training model,” and the “problem-solution model.” The “conversion model” sets out to create transformation in faculty members. They will come to the WAC workshop and be “born again” and will, consequently, give up their old and sinful teaching styles. In the “training model,” the workshop is perceived as a way to train faculty in new styles without allowing them the space or time to grow into whatever change they may choose for themselves. “The problem-solution model” is one in which the workshop is proposed as a fix to a specific campus problem. Once the workshop has been

held, faculty and administration will expect the problem to go away. When it does not, they will be disappointed and consider the workshop a failure. As Walvoord notes, “We could have WAC workshops for every faculty on every campus every year until the end of the world, because teachers always can be helped by dialogue with colleagues; always need to keep up with new research and theory about writing, thinking, and learning; and always need help in observing and learning what methods work best in their own classrooms” (Walvoord, 1992).

With luck, patience, and hard work, the WAC program will grow under the direction of a WAC committee made up of faculty who seek such involvement. If initial workshops are successful in stimulating interest, subsequent workshops can broaden the base of interest and give rise to services that will support WAC initiatives. These services traditionally include writing centers and peer tutoring programs. When WAC reaches curricular maturity, classes in the disciplines may be designated as “writing-intensive” courses, and these courses may be a requirement of students for graduation. Writing tutors may be linked to these classes, or discussion groups may be linked with the goal of becoming learning groups built around writing. Increasingly, writing programs are turning to portfolio assessment for all students as a way of evaluating the success of WAC. Currently, a number of programs based on student learning on campuses are gaining prominence. These include learning communities, service learning programs, writing courses linked to lectures. A new movement, “Electronic communication across the curriculum,” has used WAC theory to explore the specialized production of electronic media (Reiss and Young, 2001). In many institutions, information literacy librarians are already collaborating with these programs, a fact that provides added incentive for everyone to identify and understand their shared goals and theories.

There are a number of sources for activities that can be used in a WAC workshop. They often center on writing assignments and how to make them genuine learning experiences, rather than “dummy runs,” as James Britton has called them. The majority of these activities are designed to stimulate faculty to think about

their discipline's assumptions and what makes for good teaching in that discipline. The advantage of a WAC workshop is, among other things, the camaraderie that can develop across disciplinary lines. Many faculty never have the opportunity to talk seriously and in depth about their teaching. Having become so acculturated to their disciplines, many will have forgotten how much they assume others know about what they do. They also may have forgotten how much they enjoy teaching. WAC workshops typically try to engender conversation among faculty members by asking them to articulate to one another what their disciplines assume about authority, proof, and research methodology. The ultimate goal of the WAC workshop is to encourage faculty to understand their expectations more fully, and to develop strategies for helping students meet those expectations. These are worthy goals for information literacy workshops, as well.

Collaboration with faculty is a long-standing theme in the library literature, and librarians often express frustration with the difficulty of working with faculty as peers. The WAC model provides a structure for faculty relationships that would seem to provide solutions for academic librarians who seek to work with teaching faculty on meaningful projects. Rather than emphasize inequities in academic status, the WAC model encourages the flattening of hierarchy and the open give-and-take of ideas. All stakeholders are invited to WAC workshops, from distinguished professors to graduate students and staff. This flattening of hierarchy moves both upward and downward and all participants need to proceed carefully, ensuring they afford the same respect to all participants that they want from their institutional "superiors." WAC proceeds from democratic motives. In that spirit, librarians should also take care not to be perceived as "using" the workshop to improve their own political position on campus. Rather than focus on how the workshop might increase the visibility of the library or provide it with political clout, librarians who organize or participate in cross-curricular workshops should focus on student learning. That focus will be likely to win political converts to the library's cause and result in increased visibility and political influence on campus.

Early adopters of Information Literacy across the Disciplines suggest that, in moving their

programs into the disciplines, they face the problem of scalability. Bell and Benedicto (1998) identify this fear and ask, "If we were to see enrollments increase substantially, would we be in a position to handle it?" (Bell and Benedicto, 1998). List (1995) notes that "The most severe problems associated with the (disciplinary) sections involve time" (List, 1995). She describes the efforts of librarians to teach the course while continuing their work with collection development, liaison work, and governance. As librarians study the WAC model, they will note that, in general, composition faculty do not teach the writing-in-the-major courses. These classes are taught by faculty in the respective disciplines. WAC provides the structure and support for faculty, to help them be effective in teaching writing, and it provides frequent workshops for them to grow as teachers. WAC is a faculty development program that advocates that teachers investigate new styles and methods. This conscious choice to make the teaching of upper-level writing the responsibility of disciplinary faculty is also a strategic response to the historic tendency of faculty to blame bad writing on the English department. By making disciplinary writing the responsibility of faculty in those fields, WAC attempts to create partnerships that will make the teaching of writing the responsibility of the entire institution. While local customs vary, information literacy librarians may want to consider their desire to "own" information literacy as a subject. Pursuing the WAC model makes the entire institution responsible for information literacy and keeps the library from becoming the scapegoat for students who do inadequate research.

Assessment

WAC has resisted national standards in favor of local control. In other words, WAC programs, while assuming that a great deal of what they do is universal, focus on the particular campus climate within which they exist. They generate data about that climate and the performance of student learning as it pertains to local goals, and they feed those data back into the institution to provide ways of improving the program and the institution. In his overview of assessment in WAC, Condon (2001) describes the perils of

evaluating a program like WAC in the current climate of assessment. He notes, "As long as we fall for the positivists' notion that the way to measure a complex construct is to reduce it to its simplest components and then measure each of those independently of the others, we will be unable to measure a construct as complicated as writing" (Condon, 2001). Positivist thinking has been quite strong in discussion of information literacy assessment up to this writing. The *Information Literacy Competency Standards*[1] have been the focus of much of the effort to develop assessment tools, and many of these tools use the Competency Standards to establish national benchmarks for assessment. In fact, the Standards themselves caution against such use. In the section on "Using the Standards," librarians are warned that the outcomes should "serve as guidelines for faculty, librarians, and others in developing local methods for measuring student learning in the context of an institution's unique mission." In language that could describe a WAC workshop, the assessment section of the Standards closes this way:

Faculty, librarians, and others will find that discussing assessment methods collaboratively is a very productive exercise in planning a systematic, comprehensive information literacy program. This assessment program should reach all students, pinpoint areas for further program development, and consolidate learning goals already achieved. It also should make explicit to the institution's constituencies how information literacy contributes to producing educated students and citizens[1].

Clearly, the original intention of the Competency Standards was to facilitate local discussion around information literacy. In fact, the use of these standards in a WAC-style workshop to achieve consensus around local goals for information literacy would be quite compatible with the processes used in such workshops. As Condon (2001) argues:

All good assessment, like all politics, is local. The constructivist paradigm takes advantage of access to local contexts – to curriculum, faculty, administrators, students, institutional values, etc. – in order to increase the evaluation's usefulness by increasing its relevance to the local context. Positivist methodologies tend to distance evaluation from the local context not only by employing outside experts to perform the evaluation, but also by using standard methodologies rather than developing methods

that fit the context of the program being evaluated. The results are often disastrous (Condon, 2001).

As of this writing, several academic libraries are taking the lead in developing national standardized instruments for the testing of information literacy competency. One such program boasts that its information literacy assessment tool:

- Is standardized
- Contains items not specific to a particular institution or library
- Is easily administered
- Has been proven valid and reliable[2].

The need for assessment is a reality, but librarians need to consider carefully the implications of adopting such an instrument, both in terms of their own goals and in terms of how their relationships with others on campus will be affected. Librarians expect the American Library Association and the Association of College and Research Libraries to develop standards and best practices documents, but such an approach is antithetical to WAC and its philosophy of local empowerment. Adopting nationally produced quantitative assessment instruments will almost surely impede information literacy's efforts to collaborate with WAC programs. According to WAC thinking, assessment can be positive when it is the result of local processes and clarifies local values and its goals. When assessment is positive it can be used to improve teaching and learning. When assessment goes bad, it can become a heavy-handed tool to certify the competency (and, by implication, the incompetency) of teachers or students, often based on very simplistic or culturally biased definitions of competency.

Assessment is clearly a complex issue with many implications for the future of information literacy. As information literacy specialists, librarians at the local level have the responsibility to approach assessment wisely. Lessons WAC has learned about the power of assessment might serve information literacy well. Librarians can take responsibility for negotiating with local stakeholders to articulate local standards, and the history of WAC and the procedures advocated by the information competency standards suggest they should prefer that option, rather than subscribe to nationally developed, quantitative instruments.

Conclusion

Information literacy has been slow to develop in academic libraries, in large part because of institutional factors beyond the control of the library. There are now many political currents of the time in favor of revising the curriculum to make the development of such student-centered programs easier. WAC has been a leader in these efforts to revise and reform the curriculum. One of the keys to information literacy reaching its potential might be its ability to find common ground with programs like WAC. In order to understand the implications of partnerships with WAC programs, libraries need to understand WAC's history, the philosophies that are shared by its practitioners, and how its practices are shaped by those philosophies. It is only natural that some of what works for WAC will not work for the library. Decisions of that nature will continue to be negotiated on the local level. Still, many of the lessons learned by WAC can help information literacy see new directions and methods that have worked for getting there. As librarians continue to develop information literacy as an intellectual and instructional movement, WAC provides a rich theoretical model for how to move into the disciplines. In choosing to work with WAC, the library embraces an ambitious, idealistic agenda that looks beyond the walls of the library, and, indeed, beyond the walls of the disciplines toward the creation of a more integrated, student-centered curriculum.

Notes

- 1 *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, available at: www.ala.org/acrl/ilintro.html#useofst
- 2 SAILS Project at Kent State University, available at: www.library.kent.edu/sails/projdescription.html

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