THE BALANCING ACT:
CREATING NEW ACADEMIC SUPPORT IN WRITING WHILE HONORING THE OLD

Jennifer Good
Auburn University at Montgomery
jgood@aum.edu

Susan Barganier
Auburn University at Montgomery
sbargani@aum.edu

In 2009, our university launched a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program in response to an accreditation core requirement to focus a university-wide initiative on student learning, often referred to as the Quality Enhancement Plan. The campus committee that envisioned and documented this plan, which fortifies students' writing skills in their future professions and disciplines, requires all undergraduate students to complete five writing-intensive courses, including the two courses in the composition sequence and two program-required, content-area courses in their major prior to graduation.

This influx of discipline-specific writing-intensive courses strained the existing resources available through the university's only academic support service, the Learning Center (the university's writing center). Because Learning Center tutors have always strived to meet the needs of students in the two courses of the composition series, the Director of the Learning Center and I, as the Director of the WAC Program, realized that the new academic support program associated with the WAC Program would have to emphasize writing growth in upper division content-specific courses. To meet the needs of all undergraduates at our university as they progressed through the WAC Program, we knew it was imperative to focus on developing discipline-specific writing skills. We were determined to build upon the work and growth in writing that tutors already provided through the Learning Center without causing unnecessary competition between the academic support programs.

Because discipline-based definitions of good writing vary according to the writing's context, purpose, and audience, the thinking and writing skills necessary to produce effective writing in a discipline vary as well. Communication and thinking skills are often taught through indirect modeling to provide acculturation into a professional community (Carter); we recognized that we needed to make the most of strong veteran undergraduate writers who instructors already identified as members of their discipline-specific communities and who could model expected writing skills with other students. Like the instructional strategies related to the teaching of general writing

skills that tutors in the Learning Center have honed, we believed that the academic support required to assist emerging writers in content areas could possibly differ too. Appropriate support for a writer may be difficult for the course instructor to provide (Chanock), depending on the student's academic background and instructional needs. Thus, in order to meet these content-specific expectations in writing, such as understandings of audience, tone, style, or appropriate content selection, the Learning Center Director and I developed the Writing in the Disciplines (WID) internship program, as we valued that definitions of effective writing vary per discipline.

The WID internship program exists as the academic support component of the WAC Program, and as such, it is housed within the Office of the Provost and Academic Affairs. WID interns work only with designated content-area writing-intensive classes, and each intern is matched to a particular course by major. In contrast, the Learning Center is housed in the Student Affairs division of the university, and although the Learning Center tutors work with students from any university course on an appointment basis, the majority of their work focuses on support in composition and English courses. Whereas Learning Center tutors provide feedback through traditional writing conferences, WID interns' tasks vary. In addition to tutoring, WID interns provide workshops, both during and outside of scheduled class time, and organize peer review sessions. WID interns seek and compile resources and materials to support writing instruction for the faculty in their designated areas (e.g., notes on discipline-specific style guides, samples of various writing genres, etc.), review writing assignment instructions, and engage in assessment norming sessions.

Both writing tutors in the Learning Center and WID interns work approximately ten hours per week; however, the type of work completed during those ten hours varies greatly. A writing tutor with the Learning Center follows an invariant/constant weekly schedule, whereas a WID intern's workday includes more variety in activities and responsibilities. For instance, in addition to attending their own courses toward

completion of their undergraduate degree, WID interns typically spend approximately two hours per day completing the following tasks: sending e-mails that include time management, writing process, or assignment-specific writing tips to all students in their designated courses; working in individual tutoring sessions as designated faculty and/or students in their assigned courses request; preparing workshop handouts and materials for group sessions; and meeting with designated faculty members to discuss upcoming writing assignments or co-review the current performance of students in their courses. Although both a WID intern and a writing tutor work the same number of hours per week, the WID intern's daily responsibilities demonstrate a wider range of tasks, looking quite different from those of the writing tutors who are expected to show up at regularly assigned times and work with individual students, providing feedback on potentially unfamiliar assignments.

How did this unique form of assistance develop? The WID internship program borrows its practices from many philosophical tenets. We blended theories and research regarding traditional tutors (Barnett & Rosen), writing fellows programs (Pemberton), and supplemental instruction theory (Blanc, DeBuhr, & Martin) to create the WID internship program. Like writing fellows programs, the WID internship program draws from the belief that the WID interns who have completed content-based courses can contextualize the discipline-specific support to other students (Pemberton). Zawacki asserts that writing fellows, when matched with content-area faculty, can change the culture of teaching and learning in a writing-intensive course, thus improving students' writing achievement. To embed content knowledge and discipline-specific focus within writing support, the WID internship program also borrows from tenets of supplemental instruction, which uses undergraduate peers who have succeeded in a course in order to provide "quality instruction in the reading, writing, and thinking skills necessary for content mastery" (Blanc, DeBuhr & Martin 82). Supplemental instruction provides a mechanism that allows for an upper division student to provide aid in learning strategies and course content simultaneously (Ning & Downing). Through the WID internship, we wanted to maintain the best of the tutoring pedagogy while also expanding our definition of academic support to contextualized and discipline-specific experiences by allowing students to interact with peers who were knowledgeable about content and assignment expectations.

As the literature regarding supplemental instruction suggests, a WAC-trained faculty member can nominate students who have successfully completed a writing-intensive content-area course to become a WID intern. Faculty members are requested to base their nominations on both content knowledge in the student's major and proficiency in discipline-specific writing skills. Academic achievement and upper-division status are also considered, and those students who meet all criteria are asked to complete an application and interview. When candidates progress through the WID intern application and selection process, we prefer to assign them to the specific course and faculty member who nominated them.

Considerations: Collaboration over Competition

With the formation of the WID internship to support the WAC program, honoring the skills and experience of the Learning Center's tutors became imperative. As directors of the Learning Center and the WAC Program, we did not want to work at cross purposes. Rather, we each wanted to build on the unique strengths and offerings of our respective academic support programs, which required ongoing communication and deliberate collaboration between the two of us to initiate the WID internship program's development and design.

We faced several obstacles that could have diminished each program's success. For instance, the WAC Program (which includes the WID internship) and the Learning Center are housed in completely different administrative areas of the campus. The WAC Program is housed in Academic Affairs, whereas the Learning Center is housed in Student Affairs. Many Writing Centers are housed within English Departments only (Threatt); as such, our Learning Center tutors are primarily English and English Education students or professionals. When considering expanding support into courses outside of the English department for the WAC Program, we benefitted from the help of strong undergraduate writers who were non-English majors. In addition to the physical separation of the buildings, collaboration on travel, research, and training that required university funding had to be approved through two separate hierarchical administrative lines.

Another consideration during program development focused on the potential competition that could occur between the interns and the tutors; rather than set our programs against each other, we hoped to establish an appreciation for each program's distinct strengths and skills. For instance, the Learning

Center writing tutors possess experience in forming relationships quickly—within a half-hour tutoring session—with tutees. They also have expertise in writing pedagogy and English language conventions that WID interns may lack. In contrast, WID interns possess a level of content-area expertise and the program's emphasis on communicating directly and frequently with faculty administering writing-intensive courses, due to the structure of assigning interns to specific faculty and courses. These benefits needed to be explored, explained, and respected among personnel in each academic support program.

In addition to helping the WID interns and Learning Center tutors understand their unique roles and academic support offerings, we communicated these same distinct programmatic purposes and benefits to the faculty members who teach writing-intensive courses. Because the WID internship program was developed to ease the workload of the Learning Center tutors, the faculty needed to accept this new form of academic support as viable and beneficial to improving student learning. Yet when conflicting course schedules arose between the WID interns and students in their designated writing-intensive courses, the faculty members needed to feel confident sending their students to the Learning Center. Most importantly, we publicized and assured faculty members that both academic support programs, funded by the university, were options for their students, and that both enhanced the WAC Program's student learning goals. Thus, it was essential to embed and interweave opportunities for the interaction and sharing of expertise among the WID interns, Learning Center tutors, and faculty members in order to increase the WAC Program's probability of success. The points of collaboration and program intersection are provided and referenced as a possible model for other university administrators to follow when developing academic support for a university-wide WAC Program.

Collaboration

The WAC Program's and the Learning Center's staffs collaborate from the first screening of WID intern candidates. Writing-intensive faculty nominate WID intern candidates, and if a student who already serves as a tutor in the Learning Center is nominated, the student has the choice to pursue either the WID internship or continue as a Learning Center tutor. We selected from different pools of applicants for each program. In one case, a WID intern candidate who already tutored for the Learning Center indicated that she felt more comfortable with a traditional and structured tutoring environment as compared to the more open-ended, self-paced work environment of the WID internship. WAC staff and the Learning Center Director participate together in screening WID intern applications and interviewing final candidates.

Collaboration between the Learning Center's and WAC Program's staffs continues throughout all phases of WID intern preparation and program participation. Specifically, the WID intern training calls upon the Learning Center tutors' writing expertise. Because training for the writing tutors had been established prior to the university's WAC Program, it made more sense for us to build upon this training. Prior to the WAC Program, writing tutors were trained via a series of workshops that continued throughout the semester and that covered topics regarding tutoring responsibilities, FERPA, tutoring policies and a handbook with tutoring tips and strategies. The establishment of the WAC Program necessitated minor changes in writing tutor training. Most notably, with the introduction of the WAC Program, the Learning Center Director required tutors to come back to campus prior to the opening of the semester for a day to complete "Get to Know the Tutors" sessions followed by a "Wrap It Up" session at the semester's end. Thus, she formalized definite beginning and end points to the tutors' ongoing training. In addition, she would not allow tutors to facilitate sessions alone until they had observed at least eight hours (16 different half-hour tutoring sessions) with veteran tutors. Because of the already established training program and structure provided to the writing tutors, they became essential facilitators of portions of WID intern training, which we first offered in the fall of 2011 with our pilot program.

WID interns' training begins in late summer of each academic year and consists of five sessions; members of the Learning Center staff facilitate two of the five sessions. During the second session, the Learning Center Director provides an overview of available open resources, from books to websites, that will help the WID interns better understand tutoring techniques, writing theory and pedagogy—areas they have never studied despite their strong content knowledge. During the fourth session, tutors from the Learning Center provide WID interns with mock tutorials, role playing the part of some of the difficult students they have encountered in their experiences, ranging from students who expect tutors to edit papers to students who are reticent and hesitant to engage in a writing conference. The tutors also pose additional questions and problem scenarios to the WID interns to discuss the best methods of support and successful tutoring techniques, and they conclude

with an open Q&A session. In essence, these sessions give WID interns an understanding of general definitions of good writing, as opposed to the discipline-specific expectations they later glean from experience in their majors and interactions with content-area faculty. The Learning Center tutors expose the WID interns to real-world tutoring dilemmas and solutions so they have sound pedagogical approaches to providing feedback in individual writing conferences.

During the year, the WID interns' training becomes ongoing and job-embedded. For example, during their first semester, WID interns must observe two hours (four half-hour sessions) of tutoring provided by the Learning Center. These observations continue to hone their feedback skills for their own writing sessions with students in their designated courses. Unlike the required observation sessions for the writing tutors prior to solo tutoring sessions, the WID interns complete observations and actual tutoring sessions simultaneously during their first semester of the WID internship as their schedules permit. The Learning Center tutors and WID interns share techniques and pedagogical choices at the end of each observation. If WID interns require more general knowledge or information on topics ranging from FERPA and confidentiality issues, to interacting with varying personality types, to a better understanding of style guides, the WID interns have the option to attend Learning Center training. These training interactions provide general foundations of tutoring pedagogy and allow for relationships to form between the Learning Center tutors and the WID interns.

In order to help the faculty members teaching writing-intensive courses understand possible avenues of academic support offered at the university, both the Learning Center tutors and WID interns become actively involved in faculty development sessions. The faculty training is divided into two distinct parts. The first segment consists of four 3-hour sessions prior to writing-intensive instruction, and during one session, the Learning Center director provides information about resources, such as the WAC Clearinghouse and Purdue's Online Writing Lab, which are readily available through the Center's website. Rather than simply showing the links, the director emphasizes the integration of these resources into course instruction, just as she emphasizes them to the WID interns during their training. After her presentation, the Learning Center tutors provide an actual tutoring session, giving feedback on a written product to an authentic tutee, for the faculty members. The discussion following the actual tutoring session focuses on the use of techniques to support revision

and higher-order concerns in writing, such as purpose, content, and organization, as opposed to emphasis on editing and lower-order concerns, such as grammar and mechanics. The faculty members see the theory discussed in training enacted in practice during the tutoring session.

The second segment of faculty training consists of an additional six sessions during the faculty member's first semester of writing-intensive instruction. This is when the WID interns become involved in the faculty professional development program. Because the second segment of training is provided in a hybrid format, with four sessions completed online, the WID interns first meet their designated faculty prior to training, during an orientation. This orientation affords an informal opportunity for faculty and WID interns to discuss course goals, content, writing expectations of students, and the role of the WID intern, and it provides the first opportunity to discuss discipline-specific writing expectations with designated content-area faculty members. They also agree upon meeting times to talk about the alignment of course objectives to specific writing assignments and the stylistic expectations appropriate to their discipline. During the semester, faculty members ask WID interns for assistance in seeking writing resources, discussing writing assignments, critiquing the clarity of their expectations for the assignments, and engaging in assessment norming activities to ensure that the WID interns are providing students with feedback meeting the expectations of the faculty members during individual writing conferences.

Conclusions and Additional Points of Intersection with Resources

The points of collaboration and intersection between the WAC Program and the Learning Center do not end with WID intern selection nor with intern and faculty training. For instance, finances are shared between the two programs, in that Learning Center tutors are paid for the time they dedicate in WID intern and faculty training through the WAC Program budget. Monies are transferred between budgets to support the Learning Center staff for their allocated work time. Also, when the WID internship was initially being developed, the WAC Program helped to support the Learning Center by providing partial funding for tutors until the WID internship program was able to ease the load and student demand for academic support on the campus.

Space has also been a consideration. As with many universities, the physical facilities are in high demand, and office and tutoring space are stretched thin at this

institution. The university administration provided office space for the full-time WAC Program staff; however, they did not include consideration for the space needs of the WID interns. Hence, to answer that need, the Learning Center, housed in the library, shares individual tutoring space with the WID interns. Because the university's library is perceived symbolically as the hub of the university's academic mission, the provision of library space for WID interns is both central and convenient.

Finally, the two unit directors deliberately collaborate on most academic support areas that connect their operations. For instance, the Learning Center director serves as an ex-officio member of the WAC Committee, which is chaired by the WAC director. The WAC director has also served on search committees for Learning Center staff, such as the selection of a Learning Center program coordinator, and the WAC director has served on *ad hoc* space allocation and design committees. The two directors understand that the success of each program is somewhat dependent upon their interactions, and the ability to provide varied, quality academic support enhances the WAC Program, the university's quality enhancement plan.

Collaboration doesn't always happen naturally. Sometimes, it has to be deliberate and planned. In order to enhance the university's mission to improve writing skills among all undergraduate students on campus, the Learning Center and WAC Program staff communicate, collaborate, and share. Rather than creating a competitive environment between the existing academic support for writing and the newly created academic support for content-area writing-intensive courses, we minimized competition and honored our unique contributions. It is through the fostering of ideas that successful academic programs and the support needed to sustain the WAC Program can occur, and only with the help of the Learning Center could this university-wide program flourish.

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