Executive Summary

This research project examines exemplar writing programs at three colleges: Longview College, Montgomery College, and Vancouver Island University (Malaspina University-College). Each of these WACWID programs is directed by a full-time coordinator, and offers support to each college’s academic activities in three forms. Firstly, these programs directly provide ongoing faculty development in the integration across the disciplines of effective writing-to-learn and learning-to-write activities. Secondly, they support the development of curricular innovations in writing instruction, in the form of writing intensive courses, peer tutoring programs, and supplemental lab, for example. They also support curricular innovation through collaboration with programs and departments on program writing objectives, course and assignment design and assessment tools. Thirdly, each college’s WACWID program is affiliated with or housed in a Writing Centre whose mission makes it a place of exchange between professionals, students, and faculty, and whose resources and institutional profile give it a central role in valorizing writing throughout the college.

Dawson could potentially benefit from the creation of a WACWID program, adapting from these exemplar programs some of the specific practices in each of these domains. These profiles indicate that WACWID programs provide a nexus for the generation of cross-disciplinary initiatives that support writing. They do so in an ongoing manner, ensuring that the results of local initiatives are communicated widely and can be built upon by others.
I. Introduction

These profiles of WAC programs at other institutions form the first of two parts of the research project mandated by Senate in June 2008. The initial objectives of the project involved consulting both the current research in writing instruction, as well as institutional documents and resource people from various colleges and universities. The first domain, that of the scholarship of WAC, is wide and deep. Considering the needs of Senate, I determined that an effective first step would be to focus on the second domain, the institutional, and examine what several different WAC programs look like in practice. Beginning with the local and particular has in turn allowed me to review the WAC research literature more selectively, guided by a clearer sense of Dawson’s needs by way of comparison with a few other schools with similar profiles. The literature review component of this project is nearing completion and will be presented in Fall 2009. Specific recommendations linked to this report and to the Student Writing Committee’s mandate will be presented at that point.

II. Objectives

Each of the following profiles gives Senators a sense of what a WAC/WID program looks like on the ground. The objective is to stimulate comparisons with our own institutional setting, and discussion of aspects of these programs that could be adapted successfully according to our needs.

III. Methodology

The three exemplar colleges are comparable to Dawson in size and educational mission. Each serves between five and ten thousand full-time students, and each offers both pre-university and professional programs. I steered away from four-year universities because of their relative size, their comprehensive mission and their entirely different budgetary means. This is not to say that there isn’t much to learn from writing programs at universities; there is. It is simply a recognition that scale matters, and that the most realistic idea we can gather of what WAC/WID would look like at Dawson can be gleaned from two-year colleges in the U.S. and university-colleges in Canada.

The selection of Longview College, VIU-Malaspina and Montgomery College was guided by feedback I received from the WAC Clearinghouse / International WAC Network based at Colorado State University. Sue McLeod of UC Santa Barbara was especially helpful in putting me in touch with Dale Wik, the Coordinator of the Writing Centre at VIU-Malaspina.

I reviewed a range of institutional documents from each college, sourced from the webpages of the WAC/WID programs themselves and also from the public databases of each college. I supplemented this information with detailed interviews with the coordinator of each program. Each profile consists of a brief history of the college’s
engagement with WAC; an overview of the prominent features of the program in its current form; and a discussion that highlights aspects that I felt were especially pertinent for us.

IV. Program Profiles

a) Longview College – Kansas City, Missouri

Background

Longview is a two-year college located in Kansas City, Missouri. It is one of five Metropolitan Community College campuses. The Longview campus serves approximately 7,000 students, 60% of whom are university transfer candidates and 40% of whom are enrolled in career programs.

The WAC program at Longview began in 1986, in part motivated by a district-wide Task Force on Educational Excellence which identified writing instruction as one area in need of innovative approaches. The report asserted that truly effective writing instruction must involve a distributed responsibility for writing across all departments. Later, between 1995 and 1999, Longview conducted a systematic assessment of the communication skills of all incoming students (GENCAT, or General Education Communications Assessment Tool). This assessment indicated that 75% of Longview’s students were entering college with skills sets that qualified them as functionally literate, but also as “inexperienced or non-proficient writers” (Proposal Longview 2001) in view of the kinds of writing tasks typical of college-level courses. GENCAT in turn led to a proposal by the WAC program to develop Writing Intensive courses in Gen Ed and to institute a Writing Intensive graduation requirement for their Arts Associate transfer students. Gen Ed at Longview is constituted by a menu of course options offered by more than twenty departments from five different academic divisions. A Longview student’s Gen Ed requirements are comparable in number and coverage of disciplines to a Cegep student’s Core plus Complementary course requirements. GENCAT was also the origin of a parallel initiative to evaluate the writing abilities of Longview students in an ongoing manner. Writing PAGE (Writing Proficiency Assessment in General Education) collects and assesses representative student writing portfolios as one means of providing data to the college on the performance of its Gen Ed program.

WAC workshops at Longview have been supported continuously from 1986 to the present, with the result that the program is deeply embedded within the teaching culture of the college. The commitment of the college and its faculty to this program has drawn national attention. Longview was selected as one of four TIME/Princeton “US Colleges of the Year” in 2001 on the basis of its WAC program. It was the first two-year college to be recognized in this manner.
Longview Program Structure

Focus of program: Faculty Development / General Education Writing Intensive courses / Student Writing Fellows

Staff: Full-Time WAC Coordinator

Features:

A. Workshops for Faculty

- introduction to basic WAC theories and strategies in a 3-day summer workshop setting, open to all faculty, and required for those faculty applying to teach WI courses
- periodic workshops during the semester to discuss best practices, interact with guest speakers, follow-up to on-line forum prompts ("What Works Forums")
- group travel to conferences

WAC has traditionally been driven by faculty meeting with faculty, and since 1986 the Longview WAC Coordinator has been responsible for this mode of diffusing ideas and generating interest in the effective use of writing-to-learn activities. Those teachers who apply and are accepted to teach a WI course receive a $100-a-day stipend to attend the 3-day summer workshop. These teachers also receive the equivalent of a one-course release in those semesters in which they are teaching the WI sections. This is in consideration of the time needed to effectively respond to student writing at various stages of development, as well as manage a time-consuming revision of the materials and instructional approaches for the course. (Note that the course load at US two-year colleges is typically 4/4 or 5/5, with class sizes of 20-30 students).

The WAC Coordinator also keeps faculty updated on professional development opportunities outside of the college, and periodically organizes group attendance at conferences.

B. Individual Faculty Consultations with Full-time WAC Coordinator

- introduction to WAC theories and resources via WAC Coordinator
- course writing projects developed collaboratively with Coordinator
- feedback provided on existing assignments and instructional approaches
- coaching provided for evaluation of student writing
- custom-designed class presentations and workshops

The WAC Coordinator is the point person for ad hoc consultations with any faculty desiring support where student writing is concerned. The WAC Coordinator’s position has been a full-time position since 1988, funded by the Arts and Humanities division of Longview. The director, Mary McMullen-Light, has occupied the Coordinator’s position since the inception of the program.
C. Writing Intensive Courses

- graduation requirement of one WI General Education course for Arts Associate transfer students (students heading for 4-year institutions)
- WI provides lower student-teacher ratio (class cap of 28)
- focuses on using a variety of kinds of writing as tools for learning
- permits more opportunity for instructor feedback on student work in drafts of projects and informal writing; additional class support provided by Student Writing Fellows (peer tutors attached to classes)
- encourages students to value revision by indicating how revision is part of the learning process
- provides support to faculty in the form of release so faculty can develop and adjust pedagogies, and confer with colleagues and the Coordinator
- faculty qualify to teach WI courses by completing summer WAC workshops

As noted earlier, the development of the WI approach at Longview responded to the GENCAT assessment conclusions. The view of the WAC committee was that a systemic integration of Writing Across the Curriculum into General Education was merited in view of the assessment results; that research supported the WI format as an effective instructional tool for improving writing and critical thinking; and that the WI structure and graduation requirement would insulate the gains of the program from vagaries of funding and changes in administration.

Faculty participation in the WI program has been on a strictly voluntary basis. This is a crucial facet of the legitimacy of WI at Longview; faculty are not forced to teach WI courses. They identify themselves through an application to the WAC Committee as interested in integrating more effective writing instruction into a course they are already giving. The first WI courses in the pilot session of 2001 were given by the members of the WAC committee themselves, who taught in Biology, Music, Psychology, Speech, Math, and English, and involvement has spread on this voluntary basis to include faculty from all the divisions of the college – including some departments/programs where the Arts Associate WI graduation requirement does not apply. Indeed, students from career programs without the WI requirement are free to enroll in WI courses, although priority is given to AA transfer students. New faculty participate for the first time in the WI program by teaching a practicum course (a course with the WAC structure and enrollment but without the WI designation). The practicum session serves as a trial run that in turn permits a confident entry of the course as WI-designated in the class schedule for the following semester. Instructors can teach a maximum of two WI in any semester.

In the first full year of implementation, 2002-03, 6 courses were designated WI in the college calendar. For the W09 semester, Longview is offering 57 WI sections within its Gen Ed eligible courses.
D. Student Writing Fellows Program

- program designed to support WI instructors as well as other faculty experimenting with applying WAC strategies to their courses and assignments
- student Writing Fellows trained in tutoring by WAC Coordinator
- supports students in WI courses by providing a peer coach dedicated to their class
- offers opportunity for high achieving students with strong written and interpersonal communications skills to serve as peer coach for students in individual conference settings
- creates mentoring relationship between Writing Fellows and instructors

Peer tutoring has expanded dramatically as a form of supplemental instruction in higher education, particularly so at those colleges and universities with strong writing programs and established Writing Centres. At Longview, the Student Writing Fellows program is administered by the WAC Coordinator. The Longview Writing Centre does have a WC Tutors program, where peer tutors coach students on-site at the Writing Centre, but this is a separate entity with a different emphasis. The Student Writing Fellows are attached for a semester to a specific instructor in a WI course, and attend the class to work with the students and instructor. They confer with the instructor on course materials and assignments, and assist students with advancing their understanding of both. Student Fellows coach students in the planning and execution of assignments, provide feedback on drafts and ideas for revisions, and supply the instructor with detailed feedback on the progress of both individual students and the class as a whole. The Fellows are selected from a pool of upper-level student applicants with high marks in English. They attend a training workshop given by the WAC Coordinator which introduces them to effective techniques in peer tutoring, and familiarizes them with the learning objectives of the WI courses to which they will be assigned.

Discussion

The WAC literature illustrates how Writing Intensive courses come in a multitude of flavours. Many 4-year universities run WI courses as required, multi-section “Writing in the Major” courses from sophomore to senior levels, building up vertically from a First Year Composition foundation. The resources required for an integrated program of this nature are far beyond the means of most two-year colleges, and obviously all Cegeps. Comprehensive universities rely on adjunct faculty and graduate students to staff many of these courses, and while there are typically exceptions where tenured faculty are teaching capstone courses (i.e. a senior writing-in-the-major research seminar), the entire structure could not exist without the adjunct and graduate labour pool.

Longview illustrates the adaptation of the WI model to a particular institutional context. The design and planning process aimed at the creation of a WI format suitable to Longview’s mission, size and resources. The college did not have either the budget or the staffing pool for a broad set of requirements. More important was the very nature of the two-year college. Inserting the WI requirement within the already existing menu-format Gen Ed structure appeared the best way to ensure that transfer students would be
prepared for the more demanding Writing in the Major courses that typically await them at the upper-division level in American universities.

It did not attempt to create multi-section WID-style WI courses within the major, but instead integrated the WI experience into its Gen Ed program, maintaining a focus on WAC writing-to-learn activities. More than 20 departments offer courses that count toward the Gen Ed requirements, and within these offerings are the WI-designated courses. For example, in Spring 09 the Biology department offered 7 different WI sections across 6 different multi-section courses that are eligible as Gen Ed credits. Departments cooperate with the WAC Committee in overseeing workload and grade equity between courses that are offered in both WI and non-WI formats.

While Longview has found a way to adapt the WI format to its particular needs, it is important to note that implementation of the WI initiative came fully fifteen years after the founding of their WAC program. Briefly, the ground was prepared for a successful launch of WI by years of WAC faculty development, which ensured buy-in at the faculty level and a familiarity with and confidence in the objectives and methods of the WI courses at the level of the academic administration. Institutions that have tried to skip building faculty consensus, opting instead for a top-down imposition of WI requirements on programs and departments, have been met as frequently as not with significant and sometimes insurmountable resistance.

b) Montgomery College - Germantown, Maryland (suburban Washington, D.C.)

Montgomery is a two-year college with approximately 8000 full-time students, 52% of whom are university transfer, and 48% certificate or diploma candidates. The student body is culturally diverse, with a significant percentage of ESL learners (more than 30%).

Montgomery had an active WAC program from the mid-80s through until 1992 which focused on faculty workshops. Budget compressions led to a loss of funding, a frequent occurrence in the mid-nineties. As colleges responded to new economic conditions, many formerly autonomous WAC programs affiliated at this time with Writing Centres or Centres for Teaching and Learning. However, this did not occur at Montgomery. In 2002, Rita Kranidis, a professor in the English Department, applied for funding for a WACWID research project that examined college needs and WAC programs elsewhere. Supported by academic administration via an internal innovation grant, she developed a pilot project for Montgomery faculty consisting of a cross-disciplinary on-line seminar on WACWID which ran in 2005-06. This led in turn to the creation of a Faculty Writing Fellowship program, described below, and a regular series of workshops for faculty co-hosted by the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Reading / Writing Centers at each of the three Montgomery campuses. The Montgomery Writing in the Disciplines program is led by a Coordinator and three campus faculty contacts. It is guided by an advisory board made up of fifteen faculty members from across the college.
In 2008, WID at Montgomery was nominated as an “exemplary program” by the Two-Year College Research Initiative (a branch of the National Council of Teachers of English).

**Focus of Program:** WID Faculty Development

**Staff:** Ongoing 3/4 release for WID Coordinator, 1/4 release for 3 campus faculty contacts

**Features:**

**A. Faculty Development Workshops**
- co-sponsored by WID Program, Centre for Teaching and Learning and campus Writing and Reading Centers
- sharing of strategies for integrating writing in all discipline courses and facilitating discussions on same.
- department/program specific workshops and consultations on demand
- New Faculty Orientation workshop
- ESL special needs workshop
- see Fall 2008 newsletter for details of one session’s schedule of events
- each session brings at least one high-profile external speaker who shares current information and research on best practices for writing in the disciplines

The WID Coordinator works closely with both the Centre for Teaching and Learning and the campus Reading and Writing Centres in these activities.

**B. Curriculum Development**
- participation in First Year Experience: Common Reading
- Health Sciences Boot Camp: writing intensive ESL workshops
- Service Learning writing components
- Honors courses writing components

The coordinator collaborates on the design and implementation of a variety of curricular initiatives across the college. For example, First-Year Experience is an amalgam of advising services, freshman courses/seminars, and campus activities tailored to first and second semester students that aims at adding coherence to the whole of their introductory curricular and extra-curricular activities. For the Common Reading component, the FYE representatives from several programs and the WID coordinator select a topical book that has recently received national attention. Curricular and extracurricular activities are designed around the book, so that it can be used in part or whole within courses across the disciplines, as well as outside of the classroom as a topic for guest speakers or campus special events. These activities are offered to the college community as opportunities that will help first-year students make connections between different elements of their academic experience. In 2007-08, Barbara Ehrenreich’s “Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America” was chosen. The FYE webpage made a range of cross-disciplinary curricular resources available, and notified the community of
campus events related to the Common Reading (speakers, films, field trips) as the year progressed. For 2008-09, the FYE committee prepared an e-anthology of recent writings on the topic of water entitled “The Poetry, Purity and Politics of Water.”

Another example of WID collaboration on curriculum development is the Health Science Boot Camp. This is a summer intensive where students seeking admission to Montgomery’s Health Science programs (including nursing) upgrade writing skills required by high-stakes tests and exams. The target group for this course is ESL students with high marks but chronic weaknesses in writing.

B. Faculty WID Fellowships

- more than a dozen faculty members from all disciplines meet for one semester to study WID scholarship and pedagogy and then revise one course and create new tools for teaching with writing
- each instructor produces of a portfolio of best practices for course and assignment design, assessment and evaluation, along with reflections on disciplinary writing. The portfolio is then made available on-line
- faculty are supported by a one course release for the semester
- faculty remain WID associates afterwards, participating in future workshops in departments and across the college
- see WID Fellowship application / sample portfolios

The program of Faculty Writing Fellows has been at the center of Montgomery’s WID initiative. It grows the body of faculty involved in WID each semester, and keeps them involved in the programs activities afterwards. A dozen faculty participate in a semester-long seminar on WID theory and practice, with readings and focused task to be completed for each meeting. The experience of the Fellows is documented via an e-portfolio that archives, for example, the instructors’ revised syllabi, assignment design revisions, evaluation rubrics, reflective writing on disciplinary writing conventions, and more. This portfolio is accessible on-line to the home department and the entire college community, giving the Writing Fellows program a transparent public profile. Essentially, the whole community can see who goes in, and what comes out, and can judge for themselves the outcomes.

3. Discussion

Montgomery’s program is still a relatively new one. Until recently, its funding under the college’s Innovation Grants program was renewed yearly. Its initially modest scale was arguably the source of its early success. It started by focusing on one main strategy, faculty development through its Faculty Writing Fellows program, and it succeeded on these terms alone in publicizing and legitimizing the Writing in the Disciplines program throughout the college. According to Rita Kranidis, the typical expressions of resistance to cross-college responsibility for literacy – i.e. “we’re not qualified to teach writing or language” or “that’s the work of the English department” - are simply no longer heard on the Montgomery campuses. The recent branching out of the program beyond faculty
development builds on this legitimacy. Positive reviews of the program at the Dean’s level have ensured that its funding is now a permanent feature of the academic budget. It is worth pointing out at this point the importance of supporting leadership in the development of a successful writing program. Any college that commits itself to changing the culture where writing instruction is concerned needs a point person in a full-time or near full-time capacity. Dr. Kranidis underlined that the support of her Dean’s group for WID in the form of her ongoing release was crucial.

The Faculty Writing Fellows format is especially attractive for several reasons. It offers a cross-disciplinary meeting ground in which assumptions about disciplinary genres and conventions can be examined in a stimulating and collegial manner. The accompanying release also gives faculty the time to effectively integrate new ideas into course design and teaching practice. One-day workshops can be stimulating, but teachers with full workloads don’t necessarily have the time or focus to follow-up effectively on good ideas afterwards. The fellows program makes this more likely. An interesting adaptation would be encouraging participating faculty to start or continue with a disciplinary writing project of their own - journal article, conference presentation - over the semester of their involvement. This could add to the depth of the conversation about teaching discipline-specific writing, as instructors move back and forth between their writing practices and their teaching practices with their own very specific examples at hand. Lastly, the structure of this initiative, with a new complement of a dozen teachers each semester, means that rather quickly a network of advocates for literacy can build within departments and across the college. This makes it an effective tool of cultural change where writing instruction is concerned.

Finally, it should be noted that this program is obviously supported in its willingness to innovate. The co-development of the First Year Experience illustrates this well. So does WID’s collaboration with several programs on their service learning courses. In these courses students are working in community service settings and are receiving credit for that work. A portion of their evaluation is based on their written work, and WID helps programs to develop criteria for workplace writing tasks, and develop assessment tools for both workplace writing and reflective writing.

In short, this is a program that started small, built its credibility at the faculty level early on, and now is implicated in an ever-wider range of curricular and faculty development activities, all of which promote literacy skills to the community as a whole.

c.) Vancouver Island University - (formerly Malaspina University-College) Nanaimo, British Columbia

Situated in Nanaimo, British Columbia, VIU is a recently-accredited university with a community college history. It is one of a group of BC community colleges that first earned the right to offer some transfer credit courses in recognition agreements with BC universities, and eventually applied for accreditation as degree-issuing institutions.
themselves. VIU now offers complete BA and BSc degrees, but also continues to offer a range of diploma and certificate programs. It has 6500 full-time students, 45% of whom are in degree programs and 55% in careers and trades. A significant number of degree-stream students still transfer out of VIU to complete their degrees at the University of Victoria.

VIU has a history of interest in WAC that began with informal faculty discussions in the 1980s. By the early 90s there was broad agreement that the challenges of writing instruction pointed to devoted funding for a WAC initiative and in late 1992 the college’s Instructional Management Committee supported a budget allocation for the activities of a five-member WAC steering committee that began work in 1994. The committee members were drawn from several academic departments and service units.

This first attempt at institutionalizing WAC produced uneven results. Malaspina was one of the leaders in North America in using the Web to communicate with faculty. The WAC homepage introduced instructors to the history of writing instruction in higher education, the sociolinguistics behind WAC theory, a wide range of discipline-specific techniques for integrating writing successfully into class work, and a comprehensive bibliography of WACWID articles and books – plus an up-to-date page of links to related programs at other institutions. This Web presence was so successful that even now the original “WAC at Malaspina” webpage is cited as an exemplary resource, and linked on writing program homepages at universities throughout North America.

However, the first incarnation of the program evolved into an example of how not to do WAC. According to Dale Wik, the current director of VIU’s Writing Centre, serious problems emerged by the third year of the committee’s operation. The leadership of the committee had committed itself to an overly ambitious agenda of curricular change. It set aside the goodwill created by the earlier faculty conversations on student writing in favour of issuing broad directives to departments about how writing must be taught and evaluated. Finally, it failed to incorporate and maintain channels of feedback from faculty and departments that could have enabled it to make adjustments in the face of doubts and criticism in a timely and effective manner. As a result, in 1999 funding for the WAC Committee and its activities was discontinued. The fate of the first Malaspina initiative shows how institutionalizing WAC can be a tricky business. The stage seemed to be set for a successful transition to a college-wide program, and yet due to weaknesses in leadership styles and misjudgments in the implementation process, the initiative failed.

Meanwhile the challenges in writing instruction remained. By 2001 the academic administration was consulting the Malaspina community on what steps ought to be taken to fill the void left by the lapse of the WAC initiative. The English department had run a drop-in writing centre in the early 1970s, and again during the 1990s. Recognizing that the ability of the centre to serve student demand was limited in terms of both space and budget by its situation in the English department, the staff of the centre lobbied for a review of the centre’s mission. In 2001 an internal working group recommended that the Writing Centre be reconstituted as an independent department within Arts and Humanities at Malaspina, under an expanded mandate that went well beyond the
traditional view that the purpose of such a centre is to provide remediation for the weakest students. The new Writing Centre would now offer “outreach” as well as drop-in services to students. It would take on a new profile as a department in its own right, with its staff on equal footing with faculty. Most importantly, to its role of serving students directly would be added the role of providing instructional support to all faculty on matters of student writing. This broader mandate was guided by Stephen North’s idea (articulated in a seminal article from the mid-80s) that writing centres can be “centers of consciousness about writing on campuses, a physical locus for the ideas and ideals of college and university commitment to writing” (North, “The Idea of a Writing Center”).

In the Fall of 2005 the new Writing Centre, situated in the VIU library and sharing space with the VIU ESL Learning Centre, opened under the direction of Dale Wik.

**Focus of Program:** Writing Centre services for students and faculty

**Staff:** Full-time Writing Centre Coordinator

**Features:**

A. **Tutoring Services for Students**
   - tutorials for individual students by appointment and on drop-in basis

B. **Consultation Services for Faculty**
   - in collaboration with VIU Centre for Teaching and Learning, the Writing Centre offers faculty across the college the opportunity to consult with the Coordinator or the Faculty Writing Tutors on instructional strategies, assignment design, assessment tools, and their own research writing

This faculty development role illustrates a wider trend in the revisioning of the role of Writing Centres in higher education in North America. (resource).

C. **Faculty Writing Tutors**
   - A Full-time Writing Centre Coordinator is joined in the Writing Centre by four Faculty Tutors from different departments on partial release
   - Faculty Tutors learn about WACWID strategies, spend 6-8 hours per week at Writing Centre helping individual students, giving WID workshops
   - Faculty Tutors also support writing instruction within their home departments

The Writing Centre is staffed by the Coordinator and four Faculty Writing Tutors on a single-course release from different departments. The Faculty Tutors work with students one-on-one during the Centre’s drop-in hours, and also provide workshops on instructional strategies, assignment design and assessment in their home departments, both during and after their tenure in the Centre. Dale Wik describes the faculty development activities of these Faculty Tutors as “WID by stealth.” Working alongside the Coordinator in the Centre they refine strategies for effectively teaching disciplinary
writing, and carry that expertise back to their home departments afterwards as a new group of Tutors rotate into the Centre.

B. Writing Workshops / Labs for Courses

- centre offers in-class workshops integrated into coursework, or attendance-required labs for specific courses run at the Writing Centre (Ryerson Writing Centre offers similar service)
- basis for future devoted WI courses for some programs

The Coordinator currently offers one-day, in-class workshops on revision strategies or documentation, for example. The Centre will also create, on demand, multiple-day attendance-required labs for writing intensive units within a course. As a strategic form of supplemental instruction, the lab format offers programs an opportunity to test a writing intensive approach, while addressing their initial concerns regarding the sacrifice of class time and content. Wik sees this as a stepping stone to the creation of full WI courses for some programs. Indeed, the development of WI courses for selected programs is part of the Centre’s long-term vision for creating a voluntary WID program.

C. Staff Consultations and Community Outreach

- Centre provides writing support to VIU’s professional staff on questions related to internal and external communications and institutional writing of all descriptions
- Organizes and publicizes literacy-promoting events such as a reading series and book club gatherings

The Writing Centre’s mission statement states that the Centre takes writing throughout the college as its central concern. It thus provides support to non-academic units of the college where communication is concerned. It also looks for opportunities to promote literacy within the VIU community; for example, it hosts an annual reading series (Bright Lights Book Nights) and several reading clubs composed of members of the community.

Discussion

The VIU WAC story neatly presents a pitfalls and successes story of one Canadian college struggling to address the challenges of teaching writing. A background of WAC faculty discussion and workshops did not prevent the failure of the first initiative. A re-evaluation in the aftermath suggested that the college already had an entity, its English Department-based Writing Centre [similar to John Abbott’s], that could serve in a somewhat modified form as the home base for a more modest, incremental approach to WAC. The immediate success of the Writing Centre in its new guise won it respect from both faculty and administrators. Usage rates climbed dramatically, and student satisfaction surveys registered a very high rate of approval for the Centre staff and services.

An important aspect of the Centre’s success has arguably been its communication strategy with the community, wherein the Centre emphasizes forcefully that it is not a
remedial service for weaker students, but an academic unit for students of all levels, from undergraduates of all stripes to VIU’s graduate student community. This is consistent with a trend across North America: writing centres are moving from the periphery of academic activity toward a more central role, one that makes them a cross-disciplinary meeting place for faculty and students alike. (see Stephen North’s “The Idea of a Writing Centre”).

The tutoring and faculty development roles taken on by the Faculty Tutors is an illustration of this kind of expanded activity. As “neutral ground” in a political sense, the Centre is a space where the Tutors can develop ideas about writing instruction outside of the confines of departmental settings and disciplinary assumptions.

The Centre’s planning for the future involves expanding the range of departments represented among the Faculty Tutors, and adding peer student mentors to the mix.

V. Conclusions

The broadest conclusion to draw from this survey of several programs is that WACWID evolves as a function of each institution’s unique character and needs. Growing first out of faculty interest in teaching writing more effectively, the initiatives at each college reflect the realities of existing program, departmental and administrative structures, as well as the realities of budget allocation and staffing allowances. There is little doubt that with leadership and the deployment of appropriate resources, Dawson could also develop a writing program commensurate with its means and needs.

More specifically, each of these exemplar programs is characterized by coordination and collaboration between three domains: faculty development aimed at heightening awareness of how to incorporate writing successfully across the disciplines; curricular innovations including, but not limited to, writing intensive courses or lab components; and a writing centre offering support to both students and teachers.

If we examine the history of our own engagement with writing instruction, we do see some significant developments in these three areas, each development reflecting in its time trends in progressive reforms in higher education over the last 25 years.

At Dawson we did in fact respond to the first and second waves of WAC: in the late 80’s and early 90’s with LAC workshops led by Linda Shohet, and then again in the new millennium with the LEAP program led by Barbara Moser, we see faculty-led workshops that aimed to create a college-wide dialogue on effective writing instruction. Although both were successful at the time, for a variety of reasons support for them was discontinued, and the progress they represented was lost, or at least lost to the view of the college as a whole.
At the curricular level, in Preparatory Arts, in smaller English classes for Effective Reading and Writing English, and supplementary labs for Writing English, we see specific efforts to address student needs. Where Prep Arts, WE and ERW are concerned, these efforts also reflected progressive trends in higher education, both in the concern for accessibility and the acknowledgement of the special needs of ESL and developmental writers. In a sense, Dawson is already offering a significant number of its students a Writing Intensive experience through these smaller classes, without labeling them as such. The success of these initiatives can be confirmed at least anecdotally, and over time they have become permanent features of our curricular landscape. We can also mention program initiatives to develop specialized, discipline-specific writing courses; for example, Business Communication, which runs with a supplemental lab component. Other programs have expressed interest in developing similar courses – for example, Social Services’ Writing and Research in the Social Technologies. The question then is how to support more of these kinds of curricular innovations where effective writing instruction is concerned.

Finally, we have an Academic Skills Centre that offers individual students tutorials with professionals, organizes the activities of a limited number of peer writing tutors, executes class workshops that support writing and research in the disciplines, and runs some supplementary labs for programs/departments. Of the ASC’s 1000 interventions a semester with individual students, more than half concern writing directly. In the ASC staff we have a team of professionals with expertise and experience in writing instruction. However, arguably the true nature of much of the work that goes on at the ASC is misunderstood, as many students and faculty still hold to the notion that the ASC is a remedial service where weak students go to get help. It is certain that the potential of the ASC to valorize writing throughout the college is compromised by this view of its mission and activities. Furthermore, in view of the integration of faculty and professionals within the Writing Centres in the exemplar colleges, it can be argued that ASC professionals lack the same range of structured opportunities to confer and collaborate with our own faculty. Thus the potential for a constructive feedback loop has not been fully exploited. In short, an examination of the expanding role of Writing Centres elsewhere – a shift that moves the writing centre from the periphery toward the centre of academic activity, to paraphrase Dale Wik - gives us an idea of how our own ASC could evolve.

In the colleges profiled, efforts in these three areas - faculty development, curricular innovation and writing centre services - is supported and given coherence by the coordination and collaboration of a WAC/WID program. With a full-time or practically full-time coordinator and consistent funding, these colleges have given writing instruction across the institution a permanent advocate, and that appears to result in net benefits to the quality of the educational experience of all students.
To conclude, these profiles raise the following questions:

What kinds of ongoing WACWID faculty development would be appropriate and effective for Dawson?

What potential is there for a wider range of our programs/departments to integrate explicit writing instruction effectively into their curricular offerings?

What cues can we take from the expanded role given to Writing Centres elsewhere, as we consider the relation of Dawson’s ASC to any WACWID initiative?

How would resources and personnel for a WACWID program be allocated and maintained and what would the relation of such a program be to existing academic and professional units?

Recommendations linked to each one of these questions will be presented in the second phase of this research project, to be delivered in Fall 2009.

Resources:

Longview College


“What is WAC?”
“History.”
“Best Practices.”
“Professional Development.”
“Writing Intensive.”
“Writing Fellows.”

“What Metropolitan Community College Official Catalog.”
http://mcckc.edu/catalog/Catalog0910.pdf

Interviews with Dr. Mary McMullen-Light, WAC Coordinator. January 2009.
Montgomery College

http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/departments/WID/
“Results of Fall 2009 Faculty Survey.”
“Resources for Faculty.”
“Resources for Students.”
“Campus Faculty Contacts.”
“Partnerships.”
“WID Advisory Group.”
“WID Events: Fall 2008.”
“Faculty Fellowship.”
“Faculty Workshops and Retreats.”
“Consult with a WID Fellow.”
“WID Archives: Report on the Status of Writing Across the Curriculum - October 2004”

“President’s Report to the Board – September 2008.”

Interviews with Dr. Rita Kranidis, WID Coordinator. March 2009.

VIU-Malaspina

“The Malaspina University-College Writing Centre: Outlook and Planning 2005.”

“VIU Writing Centre represented on world stage.” VIU News: 9/16/2008.
http://www.viu.ca/mainly/page.asp?ID=1488

The Malaspina Project: WAC web pages:
http://records.viu.ca/www/wac/proj.htm
“The Malaspina Project: Background.”
“What is Writing Across the Curriculum?”
“Writing to Learn / Learning to Write.”
“Does WAC Work?”
“Strategies for Writing Assignments across the Disciplines.”
“Bibliography.”


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<tr>
<th>Faculty Development</th>
<th>Curricular Innovation</th>
<th>Links with Writing Centre</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Longview College</strong>&lt;br&gt;Staff: Full-time WAC Coordinator&lt;br&gt;3-day WAC workshops for WI teachers&lt;br&gt;One-day workshops open to all&lt;br&gt;Consultations with individual teachers&lt;br&gt;“What Works” on-line forum</td>
<td>Writing Intensive courses (graduation requirement of one course for university transfer students)&lt;br&gt;Student Writing Fellows – peer tutors attached to WI courses&lt;br&gt;Custom-designed in-class workshops</td>
<td>Tutoring by professionals and Student Writing Fellows trained by WAC Coordinator – in-person and on-line&lt;br&gt;Reading Lab – geared to developmental and ESL students</td>
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<td><strong>Montgomery College</strong>&lt;br&gt;Staff: WID Coordinator at ¼ release, 3 campus faculty contacts at ¼ release&lt;br&gt;Faculty Writing Fellowships – semester long seminar with ¼ release for participants&lt;br&gt;New Faculty Orientation Workshop – collaboration with Center for Teaching and Learning&lt;br&gt;ESL special needs workshop&lt;br&gt;On-demand department/program consultations&lt;br&gt;Schedule of regular workshops, guest speakers each semester – CTL collaboration</td>
<td>First Year Experience: Common Reading – collaboration with FYE&lt;br&gt;Service Learning writing components&lt;br&gt;Honors courses writing components&lt;br&gt;Health Sciences Boot Camp – intensive reading/writing upgrading</td>
<td>Reading / Writing Centers – collaborate on faculty workshops&lt;br&gt;Tutorials for students</td>
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<td>VIU- Malaspina</td>
<td>Consultation with Writing Centre coordinator on instructional strategies, writing assignment design, writing assessment tools, and teacher’s own research writing</td>
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<td>Faculty Tutors – WAC theory and practice with coordinator – Tutors in turn lead workshops in own sectors</td>
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<td>In-class workshops on writing and research processes</td>
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<td>Required lab components tailored for specific courses and run at Writing Center</td>
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<td>Extra-curricular activities include readings series, support to non-academic units on communications, professional and personal writing</td>
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<td>Collaboration with departments on future WID courses</td>
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<td>Writing Centre staffed by Faculty Tutors – tutorials for students</td>
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WAC Summary Table 1