

The International WAC/WID Mapping Project: Objectives and Methods

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Abstract

Begun in 2006, this survey-based project aims to identify and facilitate activity and interest in writing in the disciplines in higher education around the world. Interested both in first-language and in English-language initiatives, the project encourages responses concerning college-university activities, undergraduate and graduate, focused in disciplines, as well as academic writing centers or similar services devoted to working with students and faculty/staff in and across disciplines. Two different surveys, one international and one focused on the U. S. and Canada, comprise the project. This paper describes the origins, aims, and methods of the surveys, accounts for their differences, and begins to report early results.

Introduction

My interest in an international WAC/WID¹ «mapping project» grew out of my coordination of the National (U. S.) Network of Writing-across-the-Curriculum (WAC) Programs. The Network became the International Network of WAC Programs (INWAC) as recently as 2005, when our Canadian members asked that the name be changed to more accurately represent the membership. During its 28 years, the Network's board of consultants have held annual meetings and, with other invited scholars, collaborated on four volumes of essays (1988, 1992, 2001, 2006) to portray the varied

goals and best practices that characterized initiatives in WAC and writing in disciplines (WID), primarily in U. S. higher education.

In the earliest of these volumes, *Strengthening Programs in Writing across the Curriculum* (1988), Susan McLeod (who has edited or co-edited all four volumes) included results of a survey she and Susan Shirley had conducted on the prevalence of WAC initiatives in the U. S. in 1987. Surveying some 2700 institutions and receiving some 1100 responses, the McLeod-Shirley survey remained the only effort to measure the presence of WAC across the U. S. until the current project.

That it was high time to undertake another broad-sweep survey of U. S. WAC activity was clear. In the intervening twenty years, higher education – and our concept of «writing» – has been revolutionized by electronic technology. What it means to write

¹ On the Mapping Project website, mappingproject.ucdavis.edu, we define the acronyms as follows: «WAC refers to <writing across the curriculum> and usually implies an initiative in an institution to assist teachers across disciplines in using student writing as an instructional tool in their teaching ... WID refers to <writing in disciplines> and usually implies that writing is occurring in some form as assignments in subjects or courses in one or more disciplines in an institution; it also refers to research that studies the theory, structure, and rhetorical properties of writing that occurs in disciplines, whether in teaching the discipline or in disciplinary scholarship.»

in disciplines differs from what it meant in 1987. To cite just one change, electronic mail has made it far easier for students and teachers to write among and to each other about disciplinary issues. Moreover, in those two decades, the scholarly resources to support WAC/WID initiatives have increased and become more easily available. For example, the WAC Clearinghouse website (wac.colostate.edu) housed at Colorado State University (U.S.) makes available (and easily updatable) information about WAC/WID initiatives across the globe. All four of the volumes noted above were published after 1987 (with the earliest two now available free at the Clearinghouse). The journals *Across the Disciplines* and *The WAC Journal* both began in the 90s as print publications; both are now published electronically at the Clearinghouse. In addition, the first National Conference on Writing across the Curriculum was not held until 1993; these have been held biennially since then, with the most recent three re-titled International WAC Conferences, to reflect the cross-national influences that I will explore below.

While the spread of readily available materials suggests that the presence of WAC/WID initiatives would have intensified in the U.S. since 1987, popular lore has questioned this optimism. As WAC became the «old idea», no longer attracting federal, state, and private funders who had stoked WAC program development in the 70s and 80s, some programs died. In their report of a ten-year follow-up survey (1997) of the 418 WAC programs identified in the 1987 survey, Miraglia and McLeod reported loss of funding as a major reason for the demise of some programs. Moreover, they noted that two-thirds of the respondents said their programs were still led by the same director; while this fact might evidence «strong, consistent leadership» (53), they found threatening to WAC the perception by some leaders that programs would die after these initiators left or retired. Russell, in his second edition of the influential WAC history *Writing in the Academic Disciplines: A Curricular History*, concluded: «The U.S. educational system will have to find new ways of organizing teaching and assessing learning through writing in order to make WAC an expectation rather than an exception» (332). Anecdotal evidence was contradictory. At the annual meetings of the National WAC Network at the conventions of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), attendance remained high – but many of the self-identified «just starting» programs were described as

attempts to re-start a dead former initiative. Surely there was a need to test these anecdotal findings in a systematic way.

Perhaps the most profound difference between the 1987 and 2006 contexts has been the internationalizing of the ideas of WAC and WID, another effect of the electronic revolution. Ironically, the U.S. notions of «WAC» in the 1970s owed their origin to British researchers (e.g., James Britton and Nancy Martin) who first studied in depth the roles of language activities in learning across the disciplinary spectrum in the 1960s. But between 1966, when the legendary Dartmouth Conference brought together scholars from the U.K. and the U.S. to share practices in the teaching of writing, and roughly 2000, well into the information age, relatively few language-and-learning scholars from the U.S. shared concepts and techniques across borders of language and geography with their counterparts in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and even the rest of North America. Few scholars in U.S. composition studies, focused as they were on emerging U.S. policies and practices in education, had the international perspective of those who taught English writing, speaking, and reading to non-native speakers, most often outside the U.S. The first International WAC Conference occurred in 2004 (it has still not been held outside the U.S.), and CCCC is still basically a U.S. organization, though it is attracting an increasingly international mix of scholars and teachers.

It would have been easy to limit the new survey of WAC/WID activity to the U.S. The changes in U.S. contexts have been sufficiently great over 20 years to stir interest in a new survey. But the notable presence of scholars from diverse countries at the 2004 and 2006 International WAC Conferences, as well as the substantial proportion (30%) of international attendees at the 2007 meeting of the International WAC Network in New York, encouraged a «mapping» effort relevant to the global scope of interest.

Further, such organizations as the European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing (EATAW), the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA), and the European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction (EARLI) have welcomed participation in conferences by scholars and teachers from around the world – thus encouraging an international perspective on questions of writing in and across disciplines. This interchange has been enriched by their listserves that regularly enable cross-national discussions of pedagogical and research

issues. An impressive list of international conferences, such as the summer 2007 EATAW Conference in Bochum, Germany, with its focus on writing in the disciplines; the February 2008 Writing Research Across Borders Conference in Santa Barbara, California, US; and the June 2008 EWCA Conference in Freiburg, Germany, enable writing researchers from around the world to come together to share their scholarship. Aiding this specific networking of writing researchers and teachers is the primary goal of the International WAC/WID Mapping Project.

Aims

According to the mapping project website (mapping – project.ucdavis.edu), the «first objectives» of the Project are to:

1. build a network of teachers and scholars from many countries who will contribute and keep in contact about their work in this field; this network will be built using the International Network of Writing-across-the-Curriculum Programs/WAC Clearinghouse tools;
2. gather as much data as we can through surveys, interviews, and meetings.

«Future objectives of the Mapping Project», as stated on the website, «include publication and presentation of results by members of the collaborative in a range of venues internationally.»

Methods of the U.S./Canada Survey

The two surveys that thus far comprise the Mapping Project differ significantly. The U.S./Canada survey, launched in early 2006, is modeled on the McLeod/Shirley survey of 1987, with additional questions and significant rewording. I designed the survey with consultation from McLeod and from Terry Myers Zawacki, with whom I had collaborated on two WAC research publications (1997, 2006). The survey depends for its language and emphases on the lengthy tradition of WAC/WID program literature in the U.S., as summarized above. It asks a series of multiple-choice and open response questions on the following themes:

- Program leadership/administration
- Sources of funding
- Goals of the initiative
- Components of the program

- Opportunities for faculty/staff training
- Connections with other campus support services
- Importance of electronic technology
- Curriculum elements (e.g., courses, centers) devoted to writing
- Incentives to program assessment

Unlike the McLeod/Shirley survey of twenty years earlier, it also invites responses from colleagues at Canadian universities, not because the traditions of writing program design are the same in the two countries (they are not), but because of involvement in INWAC by some Canadian institutions.

Graduate student researcher Tara Porter and I sent email invitations to writing program leaders at more than 2600 institutions beginning in late 2006; we also advertised the survey on the listserve of the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) and the wcenter and wac-I listserves. These calls have been repeated several times since. Porter worked with the 1987 survey, the directories of INWAC and the WAC Clearinghouse, weblists of U.S. and Canadian institutions, etc., to compose the original email list. She has continually updated the list by purging names of non-respondents and replacing them with names of other writing-related faculty at these institutions, as these have been suggested by respondents, by searching of websites, and by scholarly sources.

In spring 2007, the survey's web presence changed from my UC Davis homepage to its own page on the UC Davis server (mappingproject.ucdavis.edu), where it may now be reached.

Methods of the Preliminary Survey of Higher Education Worldwide

The first call for international responses did not occur until late 2006 – after design of the «preliminary» survey expressly for colleges/universities outside the U.S. and Canada. I asked Christiane Donahue of the University of Maine at Farmington, who participates in European organizations of writing teachers and in collaborative research on the teaching of writing in France (Donahue), for help in reaching European scholars who would comment on the design of an appropriate survey. Donahue generously contributed both by creating an initial mailing list of potential respondents and by holding small focus groups of scholars while in France in early 2006. Donahue asked

these scholars how the U.S./Canada survey might be suited to a European audience.

We expected that European scholars would find significant incompatibility. For example, the U.S./Canada survey assumes «WAC» and «WID» as commonly understood terms; it assumes «WAC program» as a recognizable entity, an institutionally-organized effort to educate faculty across disciplines to take responsibility for helping students improve as writers. Twenty years earlier, 38% (418) of respondents to the McLeod/Shirley survey had reported having a «program» that fit this description.

Even more deeply, the U.S./Canada survey – reflecting American «WAC» – assumes an institutional mission in higher education to continue the «general education» of undergraduate students in written literacy, as well as in political and civil awareness, training in non-native languages, science, mathematics, etc. (Thaiss, 1992). Not only do most U.S. institutions devote a substantial amount of required coursework – for all undergraduate students – to all these areas of thought, but, specifically, virtually every American college or university follows the tradition of requiring coursework in English composition. «WAC» in U.S. parlance usually implies an effort *beyond* this required investment in the teaching of writing – e.g. «writing intensive» courses within each discipline or faculty-training workshops for teachers in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences to help them aid their students' writing development. Thus, a U.S. college could respond to the U.S./Canada survey that «No», it does not have a «WAC program», but almost surely that institution will have had for a long time one or more required courses in English composition.

In designing a workable survey on «writing in disciplines» internationally, these assumptions of the one survey would have to be eliminated. Indeed, the focus group participants in Europe saw the U.S./Canada survey as inappropriate. As Donahue reported, virtually every term would have to be replaced, the questions redesigned. The current survey on the Mapping Project website is titled «preliminary», to show that it is still a work in progress. It was designed by Donahue, Zawacki, and me in mid 2006 and was first sent out to a small mailing list of European scholars later that year. As the website states,

A database is being constructed from responses to this survey that will be the foundation for further study by members of the collaborative.

Rather than database entries being considered definitive and complete in themselves, they will help in further refinement of the instrument and as a springboard to further study. Indeed, some of the respondents' comments directly address ways the survey may be improved. Nevertheless, many respondents have provided detailed information about writing and its teaching in their institutions – as well as generalizing about the teaching of writing in the particular national culture – thereby augmenting the cross-national scholarly record and perhaps becoming a vehicle for future national and cross-national investigation.

The questions on the preliminary survey are as follows:

1. Where is student writing happening in your institution, in either a first language of instruction or in English? In what genres and circumstances?
2. Who cares in your institution about the improvement of student writing or student learning through writing?
3. Is improvement in student writing an objective of certain courses in a discipline or of the overall curriculum? How and why?
4. Have any teachers in/across disciplines met to talk about these issues or made an effort to plan curricula in relation to student writing?
5. What is the source of their interest and what models of student writing/learning development (e.g., articles, books, other documents), if any, help guide these discussions?

These open-ended questions limit jargon and invite discursive response. Many responses thus far go on at length into nuances of institutional policy and practice, while frequently commenting on the terms of the questions themselves (e.g., «if by <caring> you mean actual attention to student writing, then...»). In wording the questions, the three of us attempted to use terms common in discussions on the European listserves, as well as in exemplars of the European cross-national writing research, such as Björk, Bräuer, Rienecker, and Jørgensen's *Teaching Academic Writing in European Higher Education*. We realized that any model we derived would privilege some discursive practices. The

most significant shortcoming of the survey is that it has been in English, thereby privileging one international language. In this regard, a few respondents have answered the questions in their first languages (e.g., French, Greek, Spanish), and co-operative colleagues have translated. (Recognizing this limitation, we have asked some respondents to serve as translators, and as of April 2008 the survey is now available on the website in German, Russian, and Spanish as well.)

Graduate student researcher Erin Steinke of the University of California at Davis has assisted greatly in building the email list. The EATAW and EWCA lists (with thanks to Dilek Tokay, EWCA board member and past president, in particular) have helped the international survey work. We have augmented the mailing list with names of the invited speakers to the Writing Research Across Borders Conference in Santa Barbara. Most important to building the list has been the generous «spreading the word» by those who have already responded. Scholars from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Germany, Greece, Israel, Japan, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom, to name a few, have asked counterparts at other universities in their nations and regions to send responses.

Results from the U.S./Canada Survey (as of April 2008)

In this limited space, I report results from only the first of the 13 categories on the U.S./Canada survey. Further results and substantial analysis will be reported at conferences in the U.S. and Europe in 2008.

1. Reported presence of «an initiative or program dedicated to student writing across disciplines, e.g., WAC or <writing in the disciplines> (WID)»

Responses: 1297	Yes 616 (47%)	No 681
Canadian institutions reporting: 71	Yes 26 (37%)	No 45

Analysis: the response rate (1297) to the survey is roughly 50% (of approximately 2600 institutions directly queried), higher than to the pre-electronic 1987 survey (43%). In comparison to the «Yes» answers in 1987 (418, 38%), the 47% figure in 2008 indicates substantial growth over 20 years.

Results from the International Preliminary Survey

As of April 2008, more than 250 respondents from just over 200 institutions in 47 countries have contributed to the data. The nation with the most responding institutions thus far is the United Kingdom, with 43. Responses from Germany (13), the Netherlands (9), Argentina (8), Australia (8), Israel (8), Switzerland (7), Spain (7), South Africa (6), Brazil (5), Colombia (5), France (5), Turkey (5), Venezuela (5), Austria (4), Mexico (4), and Norway (4), are at or above the average per country. Also represented thus far are the following:

- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Chile
- Czech Republic
- Denmark
- Egypt
- Finland
- Ghana
- Greece
- Guatemala
- Guyana
- Hong Kong (People’s Republic of China)
- Hungary
- Italy
- Japan
- Lebanon
- Malta
- Nepal
- New Zealand
- Portugal
- Puerto Rico
- Qatar
- Russia
- Singapore
- South Korea
- Sri Lanka
- Sweden
- Taiwan
- United Arab Emirates
- Uruguay

While almost all data have come from the survey itself, data on 25 institutions have come from other sources: e.g., Ganobcsik-Williams (2004); Zawacki’s extensive interviews with program leaders in Sweden, Italy, and

Hong Kong; my own conversations with and notes on presenters at the 2007 EATAW Conference.

Because of space limitations here, I will give only the briefest characterization of the data received thus far in the responses to Question 1. I refrain from naming specific institutions and respondents, because, as explained on the website,

At this early stage of the research, all survey responses are confidential, for data-gathering purposes only. Once the project moves to setting up a network of respondents, each respondent will be asked for permission to be included in the network.

Analysis of Responses to Question 1:

Where is student writing happening in your institution, in a first language of instruction or in English? In what genres and circumstances?

The great majority of respondents report an extensive amount of writing occurring across the disciplines with which they are familiar and often across all disciplines in an institution – in either undergraduate or graduate courses or both. Depending on the institution, writing occurs in English and/or in other first languages of instruction. Genres typically include those most pertinent to the methods of the particular discipline. On the other hand, a few respondents assert the lack of writing in disciplinary courses in their institutions and ascribe traditional cultural reasons for this pattern. These few respondents see a disjunction between their own institutional mission to improve students' language skills and the lack of opportunity for students to use them in classes.

Discussion

The collection of survey responses continues in both parts of the project, aided by a growing number of scholars who spread the request. Meanwhile, 2008 conference presentations and workshops on the Mapping Project (at Santa Barbara, CCCC in New Orleans, the International WAC Conference in Austin, Texas, and the EWCA conference in Freiburg) have reported and will report further results, as well as focus on engaging participants in defining mutually helpful next steps in the research, for example:

- Updates and refinements of the now «preliminary» international survey, such as translation into additional languages
- Translation of the survey response lists into an active international network of fellow teachers, administrators, and scholars sharing an interest in WAC/WID, broadly defined

One tool for the networking objective, specifically devoted to WAC/WID, is the WAC Clearinghouse (wac.colostate.edu). One next step of the mapping project will be to encourage those who have been so generous in responding to the surveys to post their program descriptions and their research ideas to the named sections of the Clearinghouse for these contributions.

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