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WRITING ACROSS CURRICULUM: EVALUATING A FACULTY-CENTERED APPROACH

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This paper discusses research on a pilot study for implementing a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program in the College of Business (CoB) at a California Public University. Data analysis focused on faculty and writing assistant satisfaction using interviews, and on student learning as measured by evaluation of progressive writing assignments. Discussion includes: 1) assumptions on which the pilot was based and its goals, 2) overview of how the program was structured and implemented, 3) outcomes of the pilot program, and 4) recommendations for future programs. Results suggest both faculty and student participants were satisfied with the pilot program implementation and student writing improvement.

Introduction

Our university envisions a university-wide Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, and the College of Business (CoB) was the first of eight colleges on campus to attempt implementing writing-intensive courses across its curriculum. The WAC pilot presented here was initiated and studied so that recommendations could be made to the University Writing Requirements Committee, regarding implementation of a full-scale WAC program in the CoB initially, and eventually for the university. The University Writing Requirements Committee awarded the project a $10,000 grant to fund the pilot implementation and research the effectiveness of its implementation.

Several studies (Plutsky & Wilson, 2001; Riordan, Riordan, & Sullivan, 2002; Rothenburg, 2002) support WAC programs. Compelling evidence suggests the value of WAC programs in improving both student writing (Riordan et al., 2002) and student learning (Boland, 1989). Many universities have successfully implemented such programs (Bamberg, 2000; Thaiss, 2000) with the goal of addressing student learning needs. Because the theory has been generally accepted (Farris & Smith, 2000), the CoB pilot research did not attempt to justify the effectiveness of WAC programs on improving student

writing and learning. We felt that such research, albeit justifying the need for WAC, would be an insufficient basis for implementation. The aim of the pilot instead was to (a) identify and overcome implementation barriers, and (b) develop and test WAC management strategies. As a result, this paper focuses on how the design of the CoB WAC pilot addressed faculty needs, especially, and specifically, faculty members who perceive WAC programs with skepticism.

Theoretical Basis of Design

Faculty buy-in and motivation are essential to successful implementation (Walvoord, 2000) of any college-wide program. Therefore, the pilot addressed faculty assumptions about the workload and skills necessary for teaching writing-intensive courses, which may be a major inhibition for participation (Carnes, Jennings, Vice, & Wiedmaier, 2001; White & Haviland, 2002), regardless of faculty interest in improving student writing. A faculty-centered approach was envisioned in place of a student learning-focused approach, often assessed in the literature. Based on faculty feedback prior to pilot design and a review of the literature, we found three possible reasons why instructors are reluctant to teach writing-intensive courses were specifically addressed:

1. The lack of time to address writing issues, both in grading (Munter, 1999) and in class (Epstein, 1999),
2. The actual or perceived inability to serve as a "grammar specialist" (Munter, 1999), both in how to grade and give feedback on assignments and in how to answer students' grammar questions, and
3. The shift from a professor-centered to a student-centered pedagogy, which places more responsibility on the students but requires faculty to change pedagogical approaches to curriculum (Farris & Smith, 2000).

In addition, Munter's (1999) criticisms of WAC programs were used to design clear guidelines (Farris & Smith, 2000) for faculty and student assistants. The pilot program was also based on proven implementation strategies (Plobywajlo, 2002; Sandler, 2000), which were expanded to utilize a "writing to learn" philosophy (Pobywajlo, 2002; Ranney & McNeilly, 1996; Hall & Tiggeman, 1995; Young, 1999a). As a result, faculty development, the provision of writing assistants, and a focus on campus resources were the primary mechanisms in the creation of a WAC Community (Kuriloff, 2000), which was the cornerstone of the CoB program.

CoB WAC Pilot Design

The overarching goal of the pilot was to design a program that would support faculty members by addressing WAC demands on their skills and

their time. Attempting to create solutions for actual and perceived problems before they occurred allowed us to address perceived WAC limitations within the context of the solutions and benefits, thus encouraging faculty to participate (Fulwiler, 1988; Rothenburg, 2002). The creation of a WAC community (pilot designers and advocates, faculty participants, and student writing assistants) and straightforward yet broad protocols that allowed for flexible and individualized use of the WAC pilot resources (Thaiss, 2002) were the mainstays of a support infrastructure. Our endeavors specifically addressed concerns about how time-intensive participation in the program would be, as well as faculty "perceived" skill in grading grammar.

The "perceived skill" issue was particularly important to address because the CoB is very diverse, with a large number and many classifications of ESL (nonnative English speakers) who struggle with writing. Of the 85% of CoB students who speak more than one language, nearly 50% speak more than two languages and most are classified as ESL. To complicate instruction needs, many different languages are spoken (i.e., French, Spanish, Mandarin, Hindi, Arabic, Japanese, Cantonese). Even business communication faculty express concerns about how to adequately help such students, and many nonbusiness communication faculty often choose not to address such problems at all (Matsuda, 1998). In addition to faculty support, the "writing to learn" philosophy was presented as an opportunity for faculty to create an environment where students would learn how to articulate their learning, thus making it easier to assess their work for content understanding (Connor-Green & Murdoch, 2002; Young, 1999a).

The primary assumption, underlying the design of the program, was that if semi-skeptical faculty could be persuaded to participate in the pilot, then realize the demands on their time were not unrealistic, and that teaching and grading became easier, a group of core advocates could elicit interest in other faculty (Magnotto & Stout, 2000; Sandler, 2000). We endeavored to "train" faculty by giving them the tools and the opportunity to develop confidence and show that WAC was an effective use of their time (Thaiss, 1988; Young, 1999b).

Scope of the Program

Once the pilot was designed, participation was solicited via an invitation from the CoB, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Curriculum, using the CoB distribution list, through announcements during departmental meetings, and using informal networking to promote the program. Both the concept and pilot infrastructure were presented to interested faculty in 30-minute presentations. Faculty participants agreed to have students write a minimum of 3,000 words in their respective courses and to give feedback on that writing. In return, grant funds and extensive coordination were used to support the faculty in their efforts.

Twenty-seven faculty members initially expressed interest and/or attended the orientation sessions, but not all could be accommodated. Eight faculty members who expressed strong interest were unable to participate due to logistical difficulties related to the timing of writing assignments; they were given WAC materials and did grade for writing, although the feedback was not monitored. Nine faculty members took materials presented at the workshop, but could not participate because the course content was incompatible with the WAC program requirements; for example, the writing assignments were minor components of a major course project (service learning, financial forecasting, or MIS program). These 17 faculty members supported the program and used WAC materials to contemplate strengthening the writing components of their courses, but no data were collected on this group and, because of time constraints, no formal follow-up was done.

Fifteen additional faculty members, unable to meet the writing intensiveness or to attend the WAC orientation session, did attend a supplemental WAC workshop presented by a language/linguistic development and education specialist, in coordination with the pilot program. These faculty members were interested in improving their feedback on the student writing they did assign and/or increasing the level of writing assigned in subsequent semesters, but did not receive writing assistants, so their students' writing is not included in the research data either. All 32 interested faculty members discussed were part of the CoB, WAC Community. They utilized campus tutoring resources and graded for and gave feedback on writing, even without the support of the writing assistants. Ultimately, ten faculty members moved forward in the pilot and were paired with writing assistants.

Of the ten faculty members who started the program, three participants found it easier to grade papers themselves than to coordinate with a writing assistant (despite initially feeling they needed the writing assistants). These instructors graded for writing and gave writing feedback on assignments over the semester, but student progress on these papers was not monitored. The data analysis, therefore, reports only on the seven faculty members who participated for the duration of the semester-long pilot. Anecdotal data was collected informally from all participants and will be discussed when relevant to understanding the research results.

Seven faculty members utilized five writing assistants, to provide specific writing instruction for students in 13 sections, of 8 different (nonbusiness communication) courses. Although many WAC programs mandate small class size, and the CoB business communication courses are capped at 30 students, no class-size restrictions were enforced during this pilot. Because of a flexible design, when larger classes had papers, multiple writing assistants graded and gave feedback. As a result, nearly 900 students received feedback on their writing.

Implementation

The pilot program was managed by the authors of this study, with the goal of developing relationships among and between all parties interested in, or tasked with, improving student writing (tutors, instructors, researchers, administrators). Although business communication courses (and instructors) were excluded from the process, the tools provided to support other participants were based on the business communication course content and grading standards, to promote consistency. The WAC pilot targeted a willing audience and enticed their participation by offering small stipends and writing assistants. Once in the program, several resources were developed and the process monitored closely to ensure participant satisfaction. Specific design contributions will be discussed in the following sections.

Supporting the Faculty

Several kinds of support were offered to faculty who volunteered to teach writing-intensive courses in the pilot program, including student writing assistants (WA), referral resources and coordination of them, and faculty development workshops. Participating faculty received a stipend for participating in the faculty development workshops, and writing assistants were paid from grant funds awarded to the project. These resources were provided to address two major criticisms of writing-intensive courses: (a) time for grading and instruction, and (b) insufficient qualifications to teach grammar.

Munter (1999) was particularly critical of programs requiring untrained faculty to undertake writing feedback and grading tasks, so some simple grammar rules and several models of effective feedback and grading techniques (Kiefer, 2000) were offered during the workshops. Studies show that simply highlighting a student's mistake is more effective than editing the passage and that grammar mistakes do not need to be clearly explained (i.e., telling them the structure or wording is awkward is sufficient). Instructors do not need to identify all the grammar errors made, or rewrite the sentence correctly (Herrington, 1997; Kuriloff, 2000).

Under the assumption that faculty members have the competence, not confidence, to "grade" student writing, we encouraged faculty members and writing assistants to isolate writing problems (i.e., wordy, awkward, too long, doesn't make sense, what do you mean? etc.) without citing specific grammar mistakes or rules, and then referring students to available resources to correct the errors. Such an approach addressed concerns about how to improve the communication skills of the variety of ESL students in CoB classes. Since language acquisition issues vary between different languages, faculty members only needed to identify writing deficiencies and then direct students to appropriate tutoring resources for specific instruction.

Writing workshops "taught" faculty members and writing assistants how to give effective feedback on writing, and provided writing-specific grading

support to minimize faculty grading and instruction time (Blakeslee, Hayes, & Young, 2002; Herrington, 1997). The writing assistants mentored one another, tutored the students whose papers they graded, and were responsible for coordinating grading among themselves (Kuriloff, 2000), eliminating additional administrative tasks for faculty. Because of the integration within the WAC community, the process of finding and utilizing writing support was simplified for faculty participants and also made both its use, and the type of guidance given to students, consistent (Harris, 2000). Conducting training at this level eliminated the need for faculty to train and monitor the writing assistants.

We felt a strong WAC community was integral for effective support of faculty because of Munter's (1999) criticism that WAC programs leave faculty feeling they compromise course content in an attempt to teach and reinforce the fundamentals of business communication. Faculty also feel that what exposure (to writing concepts) they can provide is insufficient in improving student writing. To address these concerns, the business communication-trained WAC Team gave consistent writing feedback and reinforced college-level writing concepts without a large time investment from faculty, thus offering some writing instruction as part of course requirements without sacrificing content instruction time. Many WAC programs provide faculty support in these two areas, but the CoB program expanded such support by overcoming faculty fears with a "writing to learn" philosophy (Kiefer, 2000).

Faculty and writing assistants assessed writing using a simple metric of "readability" (Connor-Greene & Murdoch, 2002). Grammatically incorrect, poorly organized, and confusing sentence construction is hard to read. To enhance the effectiveness of feedback given to students, faculty participants (usually via writing assistants) agreed to grade student writing for both content mastery and writing proficiency. If a student's writing obscured the content, both writing and contents components of the student's grade were lowered (Farris & Smith, 2000). Faculty and writing assistants were told to expect that college-level writing should not be hard to read, and should never contain incoherent sentence structure.

As a result, faculty did not have to "teach" writing, but instead set expectations for effective writing. When students were unable to meet such writing expectations, faculty referred them to the course writing assistant and/or campus writing centers where they could get more specialized grammar help (Gill, 1996; Harris, 2000). This put more responsibility on individual students to master written communication skills; once students realized how poor writing would lower their grades, they consistently become motivated to take responsibility for improving their writing.

Drawing from Kuriloff (2000), student tutoring groups on campus were invited to participate in training and were given the CoB WAC pilot program materials, which explained the writing standards being emphasized in order to maximize resources and ensure feedback consistency. All participants in the

WAC community, especially the pilot designers and writing assistants, evaluated and ranked the quality and type of support services offered in each of the campus tutoring centers. The complete list, with program hours and contact information, was included in the list of materials provided to all faculty members who expressed interest in the CoB WAC pilot.

Flexibility

Flexibility during implementation was important to encourage participation. We were also interested in determining how much variation a WAC program could effectively allow with regard to (a) type of writing assignments, (b) who grades (writing assistants or instructors), and (c) how writing components become part of the grading structure. Participants generally created processes that worked best for them, and we allowed faculty members to individualize WAC pilot resources to optimize goals around grading, assignment turnaround, content understanding, and writing quality in a variety of discipline-specific formats.[1]

Flexibility was important for resource management and quality control. When students were unable to meet a deadline (too much demand), or wanted more grading (available supply), they would contact us, who directed the writing assistant to another faculty member for additional work or to another writing assistant for additional support. Writing assistants were able to adjust their workload to manage their needs, resulting in higher quality work. For a couple of assignments, a pair of writing assistants completed the work, choosing to do the work together, which was valuable because of the immediate peer feedback between writing assistants.

Consistent with a write-to-learn approach (Kiefer, 2000), faculty incorporated writing intensiveness into their current course demands rather than building content to be writing-intensive; this was a major time savings. Faculty did not have to rework content curriculum to make time for grammar-specific grading and instruction. In addition, they could use assignments best suited to the content and course activities to meet writing-intensive (word count) requirements, thus addressing concerns about how to balance content with writing instruction (Munter, 1999). Ongoing support workshops and conversations allowed participants to share best practices, identify effective and ineffective approaches, and allowed us to adjust to faculty members' sometimes-changing needs during the semester. Flexibility also accommodated a faculty trend to replace long research papers with shorter, more frequent, and often reiterative assignments (Farris & Smith, 2000).

Although we were accommodating with regard to use of support resources, faculty participants followed clear selection guidelines for the papers that were included in this research. Because not all student assignments could be graded, the types of assignments reviewed by writing assistants were carefully chosen (Farris & Smith, 2000; Munter, 1999) from a "writing to learn" perspective. Even though most CoB course learning objectives require students to demon-

strate the ability to convey course content with effective oral and written communication, faculty are reluctant to restrict content learning in any way. The writing-to-learn perspective helped us address concerns that writing improvement would come at the cost of content learning objectives by structuring the program around course content.

Papers asking students to analyze and apply course theories to real and simulated scenarios were particularly appropriate. The value students would receive from feedback, especially if the paper was reiterative, as well as on the level of analysis required of the student in the writing, were also important factors for inclusion. Since the goal of business communication is to clearly articulate concepts, as a rule, assignments that emphasized analytical skills and content understanding, rather than short essay answers which could be paraphrased from other sources, were chosen.

Methodology

Faculty Participants

Faculty were solicited for participation in the program shortly before the spring 2003 semester began and agreed to meet several requirements in exchange for a small $20-54 stipend and a writing assistant. Faculty participants:

- Included 3,000 words of writing per student during the semester
- Gave students feedback on writing ability
- Explicitly held students responsible for demonstrating effective writing by incorporating writing into course grading structures
- Attended at least two workshops (the initial orientation workshop and a follow-up "debriefing" session)

Faculty who participated generally made few or minor adjustments to their syllabus because they had assigned sufficient writing and had already allotted sufficient time for grading them. Two faculty members could only add supplemental writing (such as extra credit or draft revisions seen only by writing assistants) to the course requirement, rather than as steps in comprehensive content, but were encouraged to participate.

Writing Assistant Qualifications

Student writing assistants were difficult to find. They were required to have passed their Business Communication (100W) course with an A- or above, with the exception of the undergraduate capstone, Strategic Management course, included in the data set. The writing assistant for that class was a graduate student in the MBA program, who passed Managerial Communication (200W) with an A- or better. Our attempts to make other exceptions by reviewing writing samples of additional potential writing assistants on four

different occasions were unsuccessful in finding a suitable writing assistant, and resulted in the only faculty complaints during the pilot.

Faculty Development Workshops

Because of the importance of faculty development in WAC programs (Blakeslee, Hayes, & Young, 2002; Magnotto & Stout, 2000), all participants (student and faculty) attended an orientation workshop. The WAC Pilot structure and rationale was introduced, and assumptions and intentions for WAC in the CoB were made explicit. The message was that everyone in the CoB can help improve student writing without additional work, and that faculty will benefit from improved student writing. Several protocols were presented in support of the WAC pilot goals:

- Grade for writing, and make sure students understand they are responsible for coherent writing in all assignments (learning-to-write concept).
- Do not "teach" grammar; refer students to campus resources (workshops, remedial courses, tutoring centers). A list of campus resources was provided to faculty who participated in all workshops.
- Identify grammar or style errors in student writing (at faculty's comfort and expertise level), but do not edit. The suggestion was to use time previously spent on rereading and trying to understand passages, to quickly comment the passage was hard to read.
- Focus on common student errors that are easy to fix; "shortcut" grammar rules for fixing them were provided.
- Utilize the *Seven C's of Communication* (Baird & Stull, 1993) and business communication, grading rubric, which were presented to ensure students got consistent feedback on their writing.
- Adopt a writing-to-learn philosophy in assignments (Young, 1999a), which emphasizes analysis and synthesis (through writing) of course content.

Faculty and students were paired at the orientation workshop, based on a match between the student's availability and the assignment timing. This student/faculty-managed process was very effective. In general, faculty worked with the same writing assistant or pair of writing assistants for the entire semester, allowing them to continually improve their feedback and relationships.

Program Assessment Goals

Because the goal of the pilot was to test a program that would promote faculty "buy-in" or support for the implementation of a CoB WAC program, the major focus was on faculty (and writing assistant) satisfaction with the

process. Faculty and writing assistant opinions of effectiveness were gathered through one-on-one "check-in" conversations during the semester, and during individual half-hour interviews at the end of the project. Student writing improvement, a secondary concern, was assessed through faculty and writing assistant perceptions of improvement (during conversations), which was then corroborated by content analysis of student writing over the duration of the pilot.

Writing assistants copied all assignments after giving writing feedback to students, and delivered the copies to the researchers to (a) ensure consistency, (b) determine the scope of feedback given, and (c) analyze student improvement at the end of the program. During the semester, we were able to evaluate the level and effectiveness of the feedback and work with writing assistants to improve the quality of their feedback. After suggestions were made on the first batches of papers, the copies served as a monitoring device to ensure all the feedback was consistent between writing assistants as the semester progressed.

Assignments were not only monitored, but were assessed for writing improvement in two ways. First, during the semester, individual student grades were assigned on the writing, which allowed us to measure the consistency of the feedback given by writing assistants. Second, after the semester was over, content analysis was conducted on the archived student papers to determine the level of grammar improvement. Using frequency counts, we compared the number and types of grammar mistakes made in the 34 sets of assignments that came from instructors who had multiple writing assignments over the pilot duration.

Writing assistants worked closely with faculty members to determine what level of content they would grade for (if any), how to assign grades and/or points, and to what degree they would assign grades or if they were to just provide writing feedback. Writing assistants graded a variety of different assignment formats, for a variety of different reasons. For example, one instructor had the writing assistant assign a writing grade worth 20% of the total grade, with an option on the first assignment to make up a portion of the 20% with a "one-time rewrite." Another writing assistant gave writing feedback on first drafts only, so that students could incorporate feedback into the final paper, which was graded by the faculty member; while this assignment would have been ideal for investigating student writing improvement, the draft version was voluntary (few students took advantage of the resource), and the students who participated met in one-on-one tutoring sessions so no copies were available for assessment.

In another case, the faculty member graded the assignment, underlined grammar errors or stylistically unclear passages, assigned a grammar grade, and returned the paper. Students were allowed to earn back the grammar points by addressing each of the underlined passages (they had to identify the error and grammar or style rule they broke, as well as edit the original pas-

sage); the students' work was reassessed by the writing assistant, who could award points back. All scenarios were successful in meeting the expectations of the faculty members, although there is insufficient data to determine if one scenario would be better overall, if used exclusively. The data collected was also insufficient to determine if one approach enhanced student learning more than the others, primarily because student improvement was not the focus of this research.

Immediately following final exams, individual interviews were conducted with all writing assistants and faculty participants to debrief the WAC pilot program. The interview utilized open-ended questions, which allowed participants to explain what worked and did not work with regard to implementation, whether they thought the pilot added value, including what specifically added the value (all participants thought the program added value), and suggestions for moving forward. In addition, faculty and writing assistants were asked questions about the effectiveness of their faculty/writing assistant relationships and what could be improved.

Results

Overall, the pilot was a success. The CoB was able to implement the pilot program with only three minor problems. All seven WAC faculty and all five writing assistants found the process worth the effort and became advocates for implementing a more permanent WAC program in the CoB. Anecdotal evidence from faculty not involved in the research corroborates this research finding as well; everyone involved in the pilot expressed interest in proceeding with a larger-scale implementation.

Further evidence of success has emerged over the past two years since the pilot program ended; 18 of the 27 faculty members who attended the orientation workshop and an additional 9 faculty members who had no previous relationship with the CoB WAC pilot have solicited more feedback on improving student writing and have expressed excitement about the possibility of a CoB WAC program.

Despite the loss of their writing assistants, all seven fully immersed participants have continued to assign writing assignments and grade for writing proficiency; in some cases, finding other funds to rehire the writing assistants for subsequent semesters. Of the 27 faculty that attended the orientation workshop, all now utilize writing assignments and are assigning grades based on writing proficiency, even though no formal WAC program exists.

The writing assistants especially felt their writing improved, and also valued the one-on-one relationships they developed with faculty members. Aside from a few logistical glitches and a batch of "misplaced" papers, both groups were satisfied with their working relationships. Much of the success of the pilot program is a direct result of the excellence of the writing assistants; they were accurate, timely, conscientious in their feedback, and fully committed to the mission of the WAC pilot.

Determining the effectiveness of the WAC program for improving student writing was not an underlying goal of the pilot. The pilot was faculty-centered, and assumed previous WAC findings regarding student improvement were accurate rather than attempting to test them. However, assessing student improvement on some level is important because no WAC program will work if it does not result in student improvement, regardless of how satisfied faculty members are with the program, or how much student improvement the faculty and writing assistants perceive. Student grades were an ineffective measure of student writing because of variation in the content and how papers were assessed; because grading scales and percentages were inconsistent or unknown, and because not all faculty assigned grammar grades, there was no way to correlate scores. For example, several students had excellent writing, but received poor grades because of content errors.

Additionally, because the CoB writing-intensive courses did not enforce a multiple writing assignment requirement, only 34 sets of student papers could be analyzed for improvement during the semester. Therefore, a multipronged content analysis approach was utilized on the 119 papers, written for two different courses (a pair of assignments from 17 students, and a set of five cumulative assignments, from 17 groups).[2]

The first step in the content analysis was to conduct a frequency count of the number of writing mistakes per assignment made over the semester, which was possible because the assignments within each class were similar in scope, requirements, and length. In the group assignments, 53% (9/17) of the groups reduced errors per assignment when the first and last assignments were compared. Of those, 89% (8/9) showed a pattern of improvement, reducing errors on each subsequent assignment in the series. In the individual assignments, only 29% (5/17) of the students demonstrated the same writing ability or did not show improvement, suggesting a 63% improvement rate. Of the 12 students who reduced the number of errors made in their second assignment, half improved the specific writing problems highlighted by the writing assistants.

Another level of content analysis was conducted to analyze the types of mistakes students and groups (reported in aggregate) made over the duration of the semester, and specifically whether students addressed problems noted in the feedback they received. Nearly 85% (101/119) of the students improved the quality of their writing in subsequent drafts/papers, often because they successfully addressed problems found in their writing. For example, a common improvement in 45% of the papers (52/119) was from major sentence structure errors, such as run-ons and incomplete sentences, to minor punctuation errors, such as adding or omitting commas. Another common mistake improved by many students was the frequency and severity of tense and plural/singular agreement mistakes (common in ESL students); in 52% of both types of errors (both often occurred in the same papers), the mistakes were less frequent and less severe as the semester progressed (62/119). Thirty-

six percent of students also struggled with transitions, but 90 percent improved in this area, evidenced by the number of "need better transition" comments at the onset of the program (43/119) compared to the end (12/119); nine comments were included in later papers, specifically commending a transition, which never occurred in the early papers.

Although suggesting that students improved specific writing components (such as sentence structure, grammar agreements, transitions) from one paper to the next, it does not provide solid evidence that student writing improved overall. However, the writing improvement results corroborate faculty and writing assistant perceptions that writing did improve. During the debrief interviews, faculty suggested one of the successes of the program was that student writing became easier to read as the semester progressed, suggesting that "readability" (Connor-Greene & Murdoch, 2002) was improved. Faculty and writing assistants supported their perceptions with anecdotal evidence comparing student writing (and writing improvement) from previous semesters, and through multiple class assignments (i.e., essays, discussion questions, homework) that were not included in the pilot data. Whether this improvement was an indication of the grading structure or the feedback was not within the scope of the study.

In addition to finding papers easier to read as the semester progressed, faculty articulated other WAC benefits, consistent with the literature. Five faculty members felt that consistent writing assignments helped students become more organized and prepared for class (Pobywajlo, 2002), and all seven faculty members remarked that students appeared to be more proactive and diligent in their studies, which resulted in higher level class discussions (Hall & Tiggeman, 1995; Ranney & McNeilly, 1996) and higher quality work. The two writing assistants who worked directly with students remarked that students said they found it difficult to write clearly if they didn't understand the material, so they improved writing by studying more. Three faculty members also specifically remarked on the improvement in students' ability to ask cogent questions (Hall & Tiggeman, 1995) during class discussions. By employing the "writing to learn" approach, all seven faculty members felt they were better able to assess student learning (Pobywajlo, 2002) toward the end of the semester, because students were clearly articulating what they understood, and having trouble articulating what they did not. At the beginning of the semester, faculty felt it difficult to tell the difference.

Discussion of Results

Because the primary goal of this research was to assess the effectiveness in implementation of a WAC program, discussion of results focuses on the strengths and limitations of implementation strategies, especially in areas that may be helpful in the design of other WAC programs. When limitations are discussed, suggestions for improvement, which evolved from conversations with participants and debrief sessions, are also provided.

Program Strengths

Several design components, which may be generalizable to other WAC programs, worked well during the CoB pilot:

1. Flexibility in the system (within the program protocols) allowed faculty members and writing assistants to work together on the type of feedback, the grading system, and the scenario and timing of feedback for assignments (prereading, final grade, supplemental grammar work), better utilizing resources and allowing for mid-semester adjustments.

2. The orientation workshops were effective because everyone involved in the pilot was there at the same time, building WAC community synergy (Harris, 2000). During implementation, resources were used very effectively, because faculty members did not have to train each writing assistant. The feedback was consistent even when there was a change in writing assistants (either a switch or an addition). An added benefit was that everyone involved in any of the WAC workshops became part of an informal "discourse community" (Kuriloff, 2000), which has since resulted in additional "brown-bag" seminars, workshops, and requests for grading and grammar guides, and writing assistant referrals for subsequent semesters. Such communication channels are important in the satisfaction of faculty because they provide outlets to voice concerns and avenues to support.

3. The writing assistants were excellent. The initial screening resulted in a five students who were able to provide feedback for approximately 900 students, at 3,000 words per student (2,700,000 words, or nearly 11,000 pages).

4. Providing standards for feedback and grading made the process easier for both faculty members and writing assistants. Several faculty members utilized the grading standards "as is," and others were already using something similar. Faculty who provided the grammar and style rules presented in the orientation session as guidelines for students expressed appreciation for having the resource, and relief that they did not have to be grammar experts. Faculty became more comfortable identifying grammar errors and sending students for help. Standards were also valuable to faculty members concerned about what level of writing to expect from ESL students.

5. Having copies of the writing assistants' feedback was very helpful, and allowed researchers to make minor suggestions early in the process, thus ensuring consistency and high quality; once a stable program is in place, random and/or beginning of the semester copies would probably be sufficient to maintain consistency.

6. The relationships between writing assistants and the faculty members were a key strength of the program. Three of the five writing assistants have continued as teaching assistants, and all the writing assistants

expressed strong intentions of being involved if the program is offered again.

Program Limitations

Although the WAC pilot was successful overall, some improvements could be made in subsequent implementations. Introduction of the program occurred too late to be fully implemented. A permanent WAC program would minimize the course development issues faced in the pilot as a result of timing. Several faculty members expressed interest, but did not have time to make necessary adjustments in their syllabi to accommodate the additional writing or grading time and writing assistant logistics. An investigation of CoB syllabi showed at least 12-15 additional faculty members who currently have students write 3,000 words per semester, and another 15-20 faculty who could, based on current course content learning objectives. More faculty participation would have strengthened the results of this research, and getting more participation is a challenge to implementation of any WAC program, especially if it is voluntary, as with the CoB pilot. We also did not investigate what level of participation would be necessary to positively affect student writing at the college level.

For those who participated, one of the most difficult aspects of implementation was managing the turnaround time for assignments, especially in the introductory courses where each new concept builds heavily upon the last. Papers would often have to be turned around in a two-day period, which was not possible in some cases; the writing assistants and faculty members worked hard to manage this issue, and usually came up with creative solutions to the problem, such as having students turn in two papers: one to be graded for content by the faculty and handed back during the next class, and the other to be graded for grammar by the writing assistant, who needed more time to give the detailed feedback.

There were two glitches during the program, which are likely in any program where papers change hands multiple times. A misunderstanding between faculty and writing assistants caused one set of assignments to be late, and the faculty didn't know which writing assistant to call; and another set of papers was "misplaced" by a writing assistant who was added to the program late and then backed out. A log-out/log-in form may be effective in preventing such a problem, but would depend on participant diligence to be effective.

Implementing a permanent WAC program would be constrained by the number of writing assistants who could be identified and funded. Although screening standards were effective in identifying qualified writing assistants, it did not result in an adequate supply. The five writing assistants involved in the project were able to manage a much higher workload than expected by pairing up and shifting to where the need was greatest; however, the pilot implementation fully utilized their capacity.

When additional requests for writing assistants were made during the semester, writing assistants had to decline the additional work. Because the writing assistants were an integral component in the implementation, identifying a larger group of students to serve as writing assistants before implementation would be essential if a permanent program were implemented. Unfortunately, the CoB lacks an infrastructure to track a "pipeline" of qualified writing assistants.

The common solution is to have faculty members find their own writing assistants; however, they often have difficulty assessing the writing ability of students because they only offer one or two writing assignments during the semester. The criterion of having passed an upper-division business communication course with an A- or better appeared to be an effective measure in the CoB, but it is unclear how other colleges or universities can use this data, and such difficulty is probably a key constraint facing any university that attempts to utilize writing assistants.

Further Research and Next Steps

Although initial results show that the WAC Pilot Program was successful, longitudinal research on the sustainability of this model must be done before a structured WAC program can be implemented in the CoB. Communication within and between college departments and university resources is an essential component to investigate further. Such research could test propositions about the degree to which consistency among grammar style and grading are important in a WAC community.

Another specific variable to investigate should be the degree to which coherent writing is factored into a student's grade. This paper inferred that the grading structure (making good writing part of the content grade) may be a motivating factor for students to improve writing, but the inference, as well as the implications of it, should be investigated.

Because confusion about the role of the business communication curriculum and its contribution to the writing ability of students may make it difficult to solicit participation, learning about faculty perceptions of WAC is important. Faculty who may not be aware of the severity of the writing deficiencies of students, or who express concerns about knowing how to help students, may complain that campus resources are either ineffective or improperly utilized (if utilized at all), and may not understand what they can do. For example, one of the specific concerns voiced prior to implementation of the WAC pilot was that student writing is a business communication issue, unrelated to discipline-specific course content. Knowing this resulted in an overview during the orientation sessions about what the business communication course teaches, as well as research suggesting that proficiency comes from consistent and cumulative use of communication concepts and skills. The message that nonbusiness communication faculty were not responsible

for teaching communication skills, but merely for reinforcing them, appeared to be an effective response to faculty concerns. Researching and understanding faculty perceptions before program implementation may be helpful for those designing a WAC program, and the connection between such assumptions and WAC program design and/or implementation effectiveness needs to be further investigated.

Another issue relates to the flexibility of the pilot program. There are inherent problems with assessing the effectiveness of a WAC program if there is wide variation in the types of assignments that are given. Whether such variation limits student's learning should be investigated; the creativity of faculty-writing assistant teams provided a number of different approaches, which could be individually investigated for effectiveness in satisfying faculty needs (the goal of this study) and in improving student writing. The assumption in this project was that the more students write and the more feedback on their writing they get, the more their writing will improve. Recognizing that just getting students writing was positive, and that faculty would have to buy-in to teaching a writing-intensive course, the goal was not to find the most effective method for assessing learning, but rather to see what was possible.

Perhaps the most serious limitation of the CoB WAC program was the lack of data collected on student improvement. Specifically, multiple sequential (perhaps reiterative) assignments should precede permanent implementation of a WAC program to ensure student writing mastery, which is the ultimate goal of any WAC program. However, the modus operandi for the CoB pilot was to create a group of willing participants and a sufficient implementation infrastructure to provide more stable opportunities (defined processes and variables to investigate, larger samples, fewer data collection problems) for further research, thus ensuring stronger results. As exploratory research, the CoB WAC pilot met all goals, and provided a number of further research avenues.

Conclusion

Although much work must be done on creating effectiveness protocols, the WAC pilot program suggests several important implementation tactics for anyone attempting to set up such a program:

1. A well-trained group of writing assistants is essential.
2. The program must be flexible enough to accommodate a variety of assignments.
3. Students must be graded on their ability to write, in addition to course content.
4. The development of a WAC community infrastructure, emphasizing consistency among several different groups, is necessary.
5. Guidelines for grading and commenting on grammar are helpful for faculty.

6. WAC goals and initiatives should be communicated consistently and often.
7. A WAC program needs to be designed to get "buy-in" from faculty.

In a faculty-centered WAC program, the key message is that the entire faculty is responsible for the effective communication skills of students, and that it is in a college or university's best interest to work diligently on the communication deficiencies of students. To generate buy-in, the benefits should be emphasized. First, it is not hard to demand effective writing, and teaching and grading become easier when instructors do it. Second, as students improve their grades and skills, employers will be more likely to hire them, so there is a strong impetus for influencing students to improve their writing. One of the benefits of making a WAC program faculty-centered appears to be the group of advocates who support student writing assignments and are willing to participate in the development and use of general writing standards. Whether a university adopts a formal WAC program or not, such results are of great benefit to students and faculty alike.

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Notes

[1] Classes represented Human Resources, Finance, MIS, Management, Marketing, and Global Studies majors and concentrations.
[2] Issues related to writing improvement for group assignments create serious limitations in how the student writing improvement results are interpreted, but have been included because the writing patterns, types of errors, and the

specific improvements were consistent in both groups. This limitation is discussed and must be addressed in future research.

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