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# Talking about Writing across the Secondary and College Community

Michelle Cox  
*Cornell University*

Phyllis Gimbel  
*Bridgewater State University, pgimbel@bridgew.edu*

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## CHAPTER 2

# TALKING ABOUT WRITING ACROSS THE SECONDARY AND COLLEGE COMMUNITY

**Michelle Cox and Phyllis Gimbel**

Many have commented that higher education is becoming increasingly fragmented, leading to the overspecialization of scholars, disciplinary discourses that are opaque to those outside the field, and lack of cross-pollination among disciplines (Kerr). WAC has long been seen as a movement that creates connections among disciplines. In fact, these connections are often created through the workshop, the quintessential WAC experience, as it “bring[s] faculty together around the same table” —bringing together people who may work at the same institution but, in practice, work worlds apart (Cox 317). More recently, this movement to bring people around the same table has come to include colleagues from secondary education (Childers and Lowry).

While this practice of WAC has long been recognized, it has not been adequately theorized. Writing Across Communities (WACCommunities), introduced by Michelle Hall Kells and Juan C. Guerra, was developed to rethink student writing. This approach to WAC asks us to think of student writing holistically, as including students’ literacy and language experiences outside of the classroom—online writing, civic writing, disciplinary writing, writing in languages other than English—as well as the writing students did before they entered our classrooms and what they’ll write after leaving them. In this chapter, we argue that WACCommunities is also a productive theory for reconceptualizing relationships among educators, drawing on an event we organized at Bridgewater State University (BSU) as an example of this theory in practice.

## **WRITING ACROSS COMMUNITIES: FROM STUDENTS TO EDUCATORS**

Writing Across Communities (or, WACCommunities) is a conceptual framework developed by Kells for the WAC initiative at the University of New Mexico. Inspired in part by Steve Parks and Eli Goldblatt’s “Writing beyond the Curriculum: Fostering New Collaborations in Literacy,” the UNM WACCom-

munities program intentionally reaches across multiple sites and types of writing. Kells tells us:

WAC is not a single conversation. It is a ganglion of conversations that links to an ever-expanding range of practices and intellectual pursuits: computer-mediated writing instruction, service learning, writing-intensive courses, first-year writing seminars, technical and professional writing, interdisciplinary learning communities, writing centers, ESL and bilingual education, and many more. (91)

Here, the emphasis is on types of writing and programs that are included within the scope of a university curriculum. But Kells' view of WAC is more expansive than this: "I contend that traditional models of WAC too narrowly privilege academic discourse over other discourses and communities shaping the worlds in which our students live and work" (Kells 93). We would add that WAC has too narrowly privileged *college-level* academic discourse, a view supported by Juan Guerra, who describes traditional WAC programs as having a "too-limited and limiting focus on language, literacy, and learning *within the university itself*" (emphasis added, 298).

We can see that Kells' vision for WAC is focused on students—the students' experiences of literacy across writing programs and within disciplines, but also beyond the curriculum, across the myriad writing, reading, and language experiences in daily lives. With this article, we use this same inclusive approach when considering faculty. Too often, educators are separated by level and by discipline. How often is it that secondary school teachers and college teachers—who may be teaching down the road from each other—meet and talk about teaching? How often is it that even educators in the same discipline from different levels—say a math high school teacher and a college professor teaching the same subject—meet? Our students traverse secondary and higher education, but the teachers who work with them often only meet teachers within their own institution, and, at conferences, specialists in their disciplines who teach at the same level. WACommunities, as conceived by Kells, reconceptualizes writing by decompartmentalizing it. This approach to WAC, thus, can be used to broaden our view of the communities we perceive as within the scope of a university WAC program, namely the teachers who mentor literacy beyond the university curriculum.

Doing so benefits all involved. For secondary schools, participation in university WAC programs provides models for WAC programming, a need emerging as schools struggle to meet the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which compels content area teachers across the curriculum to include writing as

a focus of instruction. Moreover, as CCSS emphasizes college readiness, inclusion of secondary school teachers in university WAC programs creates opportunities for these teachers to learn more about current college curricula. WAC programs also benefit from contact with secondary teachers. As we argued in “Conversations among Teachers on Student Writing: WAC/Secondary Education Partnerships at BSU,” “In order to create effective programming, we need to know more about the kinds of experiences with writing students have had before arriving on campus” (Cox and Gimbel n. pag.).

This goal of learning about student writing experiences before they arrive at the university fits with the philosophy of WACCommunities. Guerra argues, “the focus of traditional WAC programs and initiatives on writing across academic programs has left under-examined the experiences students bring with them from their earlier grades in school and the varied out-of-school communities that all of our students inhabit” (298). He states that WACCommunities address this issue by “argu[ing] that teachers and contexts can play critical roles in a student’s ability to use the prior knowledge and experiences that every student brings from previous communities of practice to any social or cultural setting” (Guerra 298). As writing becomes embedded in content areas across the curriculum, it will become even more important for secondary teachers and college faculty from the same field to become acquainted with how writing is used and taught in their respective classrooms, so that secondary teachers can help their students prepare for college-level writing-in-the-disciplines (WID), and so that college faculty can help students utilize what they learned about WID before entering college.

The panel event we describe later in this chapter was designed to begin this exchange among content-area teachers in secondary schools in southeastern Massachusetts and faculty at Bridgewater State University (BSU) teaching in the same discipline at the college level. During the event, we also distributed an IRB-approved questionnaire surveying the participants’ responses to the event, as well as their responses to CCSS, which was used as a focal point for the event. Below, we provide background on our local context, describe the panel event in more detail, and analyze participant responses to the event and to CCSS, ending the chapter with a discussion of how WACCommunities and CCSS can continue to frame secondary education-university WAC discussions and collaborations.

## **WAC AT BRIDGEWATER STATE UNIVERSITY**

The event we describe below, which was held in April 2012, was one in a series of events and programs that brought together secondary education teachers and BSU faculty through the BSU WAC program (for more details, see Cox

and Gimbel). The WAC program at BSU, a regional university in southeastern Massachusetts enrolling about 11,000 students, was launched in spring 2007 by Michelle Cox. BSU, unlike many universities, did not have a history of started, stopped, and restarted WAC programs—this was the first attempt to initiate a WAC program at BSU. Further, at BSU, WAC is not directly tied to the general education curriculum. It provides support for the writing-intensive courses mandated by the university's latest reform to general education, but is not limited to working with this program. Therefore, without these restraints in place, Michelle felt free to not limit the scope of the program to the undergraduate curriculum, the traditional scope of university WAC programs, but to instead develop the program's scope in response to needs she observed. The BSU WAC program would come to include support for graduate student writing, support for faculty writing (Cox and Brunjes), and a series of programming focused on connecting secondary and college educators. (This series was informed by Michelle's participation in Pamela Childers and Jacob Blumner's pre-conference workshop on WAC-secondary education collaborations at the 2010 IWAC Conference, a workshop also described in Hansen, Hartely, Jamsen, Levin, and Nichols-Besel in Chapter 8).

Secondary-education related programming was strengthened in 2010 when Phyllis Gimbel, a secondary education leadership professor and former secondary school language teacher and middle school principal, joined the WAC program as assistant coordinator. Phyllis spearheaded a series of secondary education-university events (Cox and Gimbel), including the panel event that is the focus of this article.

### **PANEL EVENT AT BSU: “THE TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE WRITING: COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS”**

The focus of this panel event emerged from discussions with area secondary school teachers and feedback to other secondary education-university WAC events. Again and again, we heard from teachers that they wanted to talk about the impact of CCSS on student work and teaching, and hear about student writing across academic levels and disciplines. A group that was critical in helping us plan this event was a group convened by BSU English education specialist John Kucich, who organized monthly meetings of high school and college English teachers. The high school teachers at this meeting emphasized the fact that neither secondary nor college teachers knew what kinds of writing was assigned at other levels, and that high school teachers in particular would be interested in seeing samples of student writing from college content areas. As English

teachers, they were seen as having the responsibility of introducing writing instruction to the social studies, math, and science teachers, and yet they did not know what writing would look like in the disciplines. This group also helped us make decisions about the timing and format of the event. With their help, we planned for an after-school panel discussion that included opportunities for group discussions and ended with dinner and another opportunity for cross-level conversation.

CCSS is not only a focus of practicing teachers. As we began looking for collaborators in hosting the event, we learned that the BSU College of Education and Allied Studies (CEAS) was under pressure to provide programming focused on CCSS. When we met with the CEAS dean, she immediately offered to fully fund the event, advertise the event, and handle registration. This was welcome news, as the WAC program had been level-funded that year and the dinner requested by our secondary school colleagues had not been part of the initial budget. Further, we, as WAC administrators, didn't have access to administrative assistants for such tasks as advertising and registration.

With the funding and administrative issues under control, Phyllis could focus on pulling together a cross-level and cross-disciplinary panel. For the panel, Phyllis recruited representation from secondary schools—a middle school social studies teacher who was also enrolled as a graduate student at our university, a high school English department chair, and a public school director of instruction and assessment and former graduate of our institution. Phyllis also included administrators and faculty from BSU: the CEAS dean, our WAC Coordinator (Michelle), an assistant professor of mathematics, and an assistant professor of math education. The dean was asked to give a brief overview of CCSS, which was particularly important for those in the audience from higher education, and Michelle was asked to wrap up the panel discussion. The other four panelists were asked to, in seven minutes, respond to the following prompts:

1. What is the role of writing in your field (social studies/history, science, math, English/language arts)?
2. Show/provide us with an example of a writing activity or student writing from your classroom.
3. How do you see the CCSS standards impacting what you are doing now with writing in your classrooms?

On the day of the event, eighty local secondary school educators and administrators, college faculty and administrators, and pre-service teachers gathered for this cross-institutional and cross-level discussion of student writing, WAC, and CCSS. The presenters talked candidly about their concerns about CCSS and shared their teaching practices related to writing. From our perspective, it

was quite wonderful to see student writing, often handwritten, projected on the big screen, as well as to hear how faculty from different disciplines saw writing as integral to teaching and learning. Indeed, many of the samples of student writing shared by presenters were from writing-to-learn activities (an emphasis also shared by Navarro and Chion, Chapter 4). Based on responses on the IRB-approved questionnaire we distributed after the event,<sup>1</sup> many of the participants also saw these aspects as the highlights of the event. Here is a sampling of responses to the question, “What from today’s event impacted you the most?”:

- Examples of student work. [elementary school teacher and BSU graduate student<sup>2</sup>]
- The writing occurring here at BSU across the curriculum. [secondary school teacher, special education]
- The sample math writing examples were interesting. [high school teacher, English]
- Seeing student samples of writing. [secondary school teacher, visual arts]
- The examples of science and math writing. [secondary school administrator, curriculum director]
- All the great ways writing is being used in math learning about the CCSS. [college teacher, English]
- Examples of really rich writing in different disciplines – there are lots of great opportunities for engaging, meaningful writing. [college teacher, English]

Here, it is clear that just seeing actual student writing was important to both secondary and college faculty, while it was seeing samples from disciplines other than their own, such as math and science, that most impacted them. In response to the same question, others spoke more holistically about the impact of the event:

- Hearing from the teachers and speakers who have great creative ideas that are working in the classroom. [middle school teacher, history]
- The willingness of other disciplines (other than English) to embrace the ideas of WAC. [high school teacher, English]
- Confidence that we can handle this. [high school teacher, history]
- The sense of optimism that radiates from this kind of dialogue [high school teacher, English]
- The acknowledgement that writing is a complex thought process that needs opportunity for practice and specific feedback in a timely manner. [high school teacher, English]

- Seeing what other schools are currently doing made me aware that our school is way behind when it comes to preparing for CCSS [and] when it comes to WAC. [high school department head, science]
- Ideas to incorporate in my teaching practice. [college teacher, early childhood education]
- I was pleased that the conversation is beginning in academic departments other than just English (although I appreciate the idea that writing is everyone's responsibility now). I like that math and other departments will also be conducting seminars/conversations. [college teacher, English]
- It was very valuable to hear from teachers and administrators from a wide variety of districts sharing their concerns and ideas surrounding the Common Core. It was a good "zeitgeist-capturing moment" for me, since I'm not often involved in wider conversations around writing, teaching writing, and the K-12 curriculum. [college teacher, mathematics]

Though the event was designed to facilitate conversation between secondary and college faculty teaching in the same discipline, most respondents focused instead on the value of cross-disciplinary conversation. Based on these comments, we can see that both secondary school and college faculty were inspired by the ways in which writing is taught in fields other than their own. In particular, English teachers at both the high school and college level appreciated seeing faculty from fields other than English taking responsibility for teaching writing. Further, both high school and college faculty commented that just being part of the conversation was valuable, either to get a sense of where their own institution stood in relation to WAC programming (as expressed by the high school science department head), or because such opportunities are rare (as expressed by the college math professor).

We also asked participants to comment on what they would want as a focus for future workshops. Respondents' comments centered on specific teaching practices (i.e., designing writing assignments, assessing writing), seeing writing from more disciplines (such as music and art), spending more time on specific disciplines (such as English or history), and using a workshop structure in place of a panel, in order to facilitate more small group discussions and hands-on activities. This year's panel discussion was followed by a question and answer session, small-group discussions, and dinner, which provided more opportunities for conversation, which was a change from the previous year's program in response to requests for more interaction. It is clear that the participants desired even more time for interaction. Further, not all participants remained for ac-



tivities that followed the panel discussion. Many public school teachers, tired from a day that often begins before 7 a.m., wanted to go home to their families for dinner, and they did not stay for dinner or for small group discussion and materials exchange.

## RESPONSES TO CCSS

We also used this event as an opportunity to learn more about how educators in secondary and higher education thought about CCSS, as we felt that it was important that the panelists' perspectives on CCSS were not the only ones expressed during this event. Kells criticizes "traditional WAC approaches" for "replicat[ing] and reaffirm[ing] dominant discourses by socializing new writers into established systems" (93). In keeping with WACCommunities, in our work with educators, we didn't want the WAC program to be positioned as fully supporting CCSS, a dominant discourse present in secondary education, but as interrogating it and as providing space for public dialogue. Further, traditionally, the secondary school-university relationship is one of uneven power, with secondary education teachers tasked with preparing students to meet the expectations of college teachers, a dynamic reified by the CCSS's emphasis on college readiness. In addition to the other opportunities provided by this event, the questionnaire created a space where each participant could voice his/her point of view.

Before sharing the responses, it is important to provide some context on the history of standardized testing in Massachusetts, where our institution is located. In this state, the teaching of writing in public schools, especially public schools in under-resourced districts, has been largely shaped by standardized testing, particularly the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Students take MCAS tests in grades one, three, five, seven, and nine, with the sophomore test determining high school graduation, and test scores at each level impacting school funding and ranking of teachers. Writing in MCAS tests is restricted to two genres: an "open response," which is a response to a question based on a short reading, and a "long composition," which is a five-paragraph thesis-driven essay (for more details, see Cox and Gimbel). Some of the more positive perspectives on CCSS expressed by some of the secondary school participants may surprise readers familiar with the criticisms of CCSS for not stressing rhetoric's relation to writing, but the varied genres and purposes of writing as represented in CCSS are richer than in MCAS, the point of comparison for many who participated in this event.

Below, we list each question and then share and discuss sample responses.

**How has/will the new Common Core State Standards impact you? How will it affect the ways you write/teach writing/administer a program?**

Some respondents from K-12 talked about CCSS as *forcing* change:

- Have to incorporate more writing in my subject area (music). [elementary school teacher in music and BSU graduate student]
- Force me to move history closer to English through writing, research, and discipline. [secondary school teacher, history]
- This will force my school to emphasize argumentation far more. [high school teacher, English]

Others in K-12 discussed how CCSS will have widespread impact:

- They will change my curriculum. It will involve training, more professional development, and different pedagogy. [secondary school teacher, subject not provided]
- The CCSS impact the ways I will administer a program by giving writing assignments for every art assignment. [secondary school teacher, art]
- These standards will have a major impact. They will permeate the assessments, interaction, and activities in the classroom. The standards will give impetus for a history teacher to look critically at student writing. Collaboration will be of the utmost importance among faculty. [BSU graduate student, accelerated postbaccalaureate program]
- Greater focus on helping teachers in other disciplines incorporate reading and writing, by providing professional development in reading and writing pedagogy. [secondary school administrator, curriculum director]

Here, we hear the respondents discussing how writing will now be emphasized in disciplines outside of English, specifically in history and art. We hear faculty development and collaboration among teachers from different disciplines emphasized. Change is emphasized, but the change isn't necessarily cast in a negative or positive light. In contrast, respondents from higher education seemed to see CCSS as facilitating their understanding of the writing knowledge and experience students will enter college with:

- I teach critical writing at the college level and believe that a better understanding of the students' previous high school training will help me model the class more effectively. [college teacher, theater]
- It will impact me in terms of what students arrive in first-year writing

expecting and how well prepared they are for the variety of assignments they'll encounter. [college teacher, English]

- It has not yet, but it will in Fall 2012 when I teach a FYS [first-year seminar] course. I am very pleased to see this broad based approach to THINKING and writing. [college teacher, criminal justice]

As, at the time of this writing, 45 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories have adopted CCSS (Common Core), they indeed hold the promise of allowing college educators to have a better sense of the writing education of their first-year students, as students from states from different sections of the country will purportedly emphasize the same writing standards. This standardization may be especially helpful for colleges that enroll students and hire faculty from across the country.

### **How do you think that the new Common Core State Standards will impact students' transition from high school to college writing?**

Overall, responses to this question were positive. Some responses indicated that students should be better prepared to meet the challenges of college writing:

- I think college students' writing will become more thoughtful. [BSU graduate student, English]
- It should create a more seamless transition as the writing should be more precise and at a higher level. [secondary school teacher, subject not provided]
- I think it will better prepare them for the rigor of college courses. [high school department head, science]
- CCSS will change the nature of students' understanding of what can be accomplished in writing. I expect that in 8-10 years that entering [college] freshmen will have a better sense of the relationships of audience, purpose, and genre to writing. [college teacher, English]

Others focused on how students will be better prepared to write across the college curriculum:

- When faced with science and history reading/writing, students will be more prepared. [high school teacher, science]
- Will require students to develop and practice writing skills in many different disciplines. [high school department head, science]

Some responses from secondary school teachers focused on how the increased communication between high school and college teachers will ease the transition for student writers:

- I am hopeful that we as secondary teachers will be able to more adequately prepare students as college professors expect them to be prepared. [high school teacher, English]
- I hope it will make the transition smoother for them as college educators gain a better understanding of what level of training to expect from incoming students from MA. [secondary school teacher, special education]

Three respondents alluded to MCAS in their responses:

- My fear is that non-English teachers will rely on traditional, formulaic writing (i.e., 5 paragraph essays, MCAS style open response). [high school department head, history]
- [The transition will be] difficult at first as so much has fallen back because of teaching to test ... CCSS will bring it back and in the end transition will be much more smooth. [secondary school teacher, English]
- It would seem to make the transition more natural by exposing students to a wider variety of writing styles and purposes than MCAS has so far. This should benefit them in their first-year writing and first-year seminar courses especially, permitting them to focus more on the acquisition of college-success (study and research) skills and rhetoric rather than on composition. [college teacher, mathematics]

MCAS writing, with its focus on form over rhetoric and content, encouraged a teaching-to-the-test approach. As one high school teacher said when describing writing instruction in an urban school under MCAS, “I find in my class that I’m teaching to the test right now. I’m drilling on five paragraph essays, lots of thesis statements, transitional sentences—talking about things I’ve always talked about, but now I’m drilling constantly” (Luna and Turner 83). Writing, as described in CCSS, is richer and more varied, but at the time of this event, assessments of the CCSS have not yet been implemented,<sup>3</sup> and it is the test of standards, even more than the standards themselves, that often shape pedagogy, a concern that was raised in response to the next question.

### **What concerns do you have about the Common Core State Standards?**

As one respondent answered succinctly, CCSS raised concerns about, “implementation, assessment, time, budget.” Some of the responses spoke to the fatigue that comes with being frequently required to adopt new curriculum imposed by the state or district. As one respondent wrote:

- I’m concerned that this is just yet another trendy initiative being

driven by corporate America to force school systems and governments to spend untold millions of dollars on new texts, tests, programs, etc., only for us to find out in 10 years that students derived no benefits from it. [high school department head, English]

This response indicates a key difference in teaching at the secondary and college level. In general, college faculty have far more leverage on curriculum than do their colleagues in secondary education (a generalization that does not hold in secondary schools outside of the US; see, for instance, the faculty-led writing program described by Navarro and Chion, Chapter 4, in which teachers can opt to participate). In higher education, it is widely recognized that WAC programs developed as grassroots efforts are more successful and sustainable than those imposed by administration. The WAC initiatives in secondary education compelled by CCSS can hardly be seen as grassroots initiatives, as CCSS are adopted at the state level.

Other responses spoke to concerns that those administering WAC programs in college will readily recognize. Some of the responses focused on the issue of faculty development:

- Millions of teachers will require professional development. [respondent did not provide information on position]
- Training for the non-English teachers [will be needed]. [BSU graduate student, accelerated post-baccalaureate program]
- It may be difficult for other content areas to become accustomed to integrating literacy instruction. [high school teacher, English]

Others spoke to balancing time for content and writing:

- I am concerned that “lines” between subjects (English to math) may become more “blurred” or not defined. This may become a very large challenge when math subject content has to be eliminated to reach standards. [secondary school teacher, visual arts]

For English language arts (ELA) educators, the new challenge is in balancing literary and non-literary texts, as this respondent noted:

- Striking a balance between literature exploration and authentic assessments of non-fiction. [high school teacher, English]

The new standards for ELA emphasize expository (rather than literary) reading and writing, with 70% of a student’s reading and writing tasks to be focused on nonfiction texts by the senior year of high school (National Assessment Governing Board). This 70% refers to the whole curriculum, not just the English classroom, but ELA teachers will share part of this responsibility.

The concerns these educators express are legitimate, and indicate roles that college WAC programs can have in supporting WAC initiatives in secondary schools. Danielle Lillge, writing about the opportunities for WAC created by CCSS, states, “CCSS offer WAC advocates new possibilities for positively contributing possible solutions and professional knowledge to the challenges secondary teachers and schools face” (n. pag.). As we argued in a previous publication (Cox and Gimbel), college-level WAC programs have a wealth of experience in initiating cross-disciplinary conversations about writing, offering faculty development on writing, and guiding faculty across the disciplines in integrating content with writing. Instructors of writing-intensive courses, such as the math faculty featured in our panel discussion, can share approaches to integrating writing-to-learn and writing-to-communicate pedagogies with content-area peers in secondary schools. Instructors of first-year writing and first-year seminars often have a wealth of experience in teaching with non-fiction texts and can share this knowledge with secondary school ELA teachers. This WAC knowledge, gained over years of WAC work in higher education, is now welcomed by secondary education as they grapple with CCSS, which Lillge describes as creating a critical moment for WAC in secondary education:

Never before has secondary WAC been mandated with such wholesale scope and fervor across the United States. Whereas previous crises conversations had resulted in recommendations that allowed individual states and school districts to decide whether or not they chose to adopt these suggestions (e.g., Bazerman et al., 2005; Russell, 2009; Sheils, 1975), those states that have adopted the CCSS leave no option for school districts’ voluntary adoption. Like no other historic moment, the CCSS has required a new level of buy-in and new possibility for secondary WAC. (n. pag.)

### **What do you see as the benefits of the Common Core State Standards?**

Many of the comments on the benefits of CCSS touched on the same topics that had been raised as concerns. For example, respondents who teach at the college-level saw the new emphasis on non-literary texts and argument as positive:

- More focus on informational/content oriented texts. [college teacher, subject not provided]
- Focus on non-literary texts and argumentative writing. [college teacher, English]

Other respondents from both secondary schools and BSU saw the interdisciplinary approach advocated by CCSS not as threatening the content of disciplines, but enhancing education:

- The CCSS also invites all teachers to become teachers of reading and writing, recognizing that skills are used differently in a variety of content areas and we owe it to our students to prepare them to continue to acquire knowledge and skill independently, regardless of their future intentions for work or study. [high school teacher, English]
- It can benefit all subjects and create collaboration among teachers. [BSU graduate student, English]
- Students win a common language among disciplines and therefore transferable. [high school department head, science]
- A serious attempt to integrate learning. I think because academia is so narrowly focused with disciplines very much separated from each other that students are short-changed. The real world is interdisciplinary; academia is not. [college teacher, criminal justice]
- They foster a WAC approach—reading and writing outside of ELA is a real emphasis. They foster conversation among disciplines and levels (especially secondary—college). [college teacher, English]

Some respondents focused on the consistency created by the standards and the formative approach of the standards:

- [The standards] are detailed and apply across the curriculum. [secondary school teacher, special education]
- The uniform standard of measurement it will provide to let us compare realistically the scores of students in different states. [high school department head, English]
- Consistency at all the schools. [college teacher, English]
- The focus on college readiness (rather than high-school completion) makes this more a “formative” set of standards rather than a “summative” set of standards, which will only benefit students looking forward. It also makes intentional the idea that colleges and high schools should be in conversation with one another to smooth students’ transition. [college teacher, mathematics]

Other responses focused on the benefits gleaned from an increased focus on writing:

- Higher level thinking. [elementary school teacher, music, and BSU graduate student]

- More critical thinking and improved literacy. [secondary school teacher, subject not provided]
- A benefit to promote critical thinking, which is needed not only in educational environment but in the workforce of the nation. [secondary school teacher, visual arts]
- It focuses on the rhetorical force in writing and on writing as an aid to developing thought. [college teacher, English]

It could be that this last set of responses were prompted by the focus of the event—writing—but the benefits from increased practice with writing as a mode of learning and writing as a mode of communication, in varied genres, and for varied audiences and purposes, have long been recognized by WAC.

## CONCLUSION

From our perspective, as the organizers of this event and other secondary education-WAC programming, these responses on CCSS are useful, in that they help us determine directions for future exploration. For instance, what are the connections among writing, critical thinking, and interdisciplinarity? What kinds of activities and assignments promote writing as an “aid to developing thought” at the secondary level and college level? What can college WAC programs do to assist area school districts as they develop WAC initiatives? What can college WAC programs learn from the ways in which secondary schools develop WAC pedagogies and programs? And what kinds of cross-level events on writing can facilitate conversations on these topics?

Events such as this one are certainly a step in facilitating cross-disciplinary and cross-level discussions of WAC, but as we know from WAC lore (and also attested to by McMullen-Light, Chapter 6), a single workshop, without follow-up, does not have much impact. We are happy to report that, since holding this event, even though Michelle has taken a position at another university and Phyllis’ term as assistant WAC coordinator has ended, WAC secondary school-university collaborations have continued at BSU. Throughout the 2012-2013 academic year, the group of ELA teachers and college faculty convened by John Kucich (mentioned above) continued to meet to talk about student writing and exchange teaching materials. John Kucich graciously served as interim WAC director following Michelle’s leave, and led the third annual Transition from High School to College Writing panel event, this time featuring a middle school ELA teacher, a high school ELA program director, a BSU librarian, and the director of BSU’s First and Second Year Seminar Program (a program that includes writing-intensive themed courses taught by faculty across the curriculum).



In light of WACommunities, it would be important that these ongoing conversations about student writing include investigation into students. WACommunities is an approach to WAC that focuses not only on kinds of writing and locations of writing, but also on the writers themselves: their linguistic, class, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Regional colleges such as BSU, with enrollments drawn largely from local high schools, could learn a great deal about their students by opening conversations on issues of student diversity with colleagues from local school districts. These conversations could be especially useful in investigating linguistic diversity, as most institutions of higher education collect information about international students but not resident students who use English as a second language (L2). Regional colleges, particularly those in areas rich in immigrant communities, such as BSU, tend to enroll more resident L2 students than international students. Working with secondary education colleagues to co-investigate local L2 student populations would only benefit all involved, especially as linguistic background is important to the teaching and learning of writing.

The WACommunities approach and CCSS both open opportunities for secondary school-higher education collaborations and conversations. WACommunities, with its focus on writing across the many communities that students traverse within college, across school levels, across languages, and across their daily lives, compels educators to have a more expansive view of writing, as well as to reach out to educators teaching the same students, whether in different disciplines, different grade levels, or different institutions. CCSS, with its emphasis on writing in different content areas and, in ELA, on non-literary texts, prompts cross-disciplinary and cross-level conversations on writing, and, as argued by Lillge, creates a moment when interest in WAC is at a peak in secondary education. The panel event described in this article is but one response to the call by secondary schools for cross-level dialogue with college WAC programs on student writing. College-level WAC programs can play an important role in assisting secondary schools in negotiating CCSS, as well as interrogating these state-issued mandates.

## NOTES

1. Forty participants completed the questionnaire, representing 50% of overall participants. Of the respondents, 10 were BSU students (1 undergraduate and 9 graduate); 25 taught in K-12 (1 at the elementary level, 5 at the middle school level, and 20 at the high school level), 10 taught at the college level, and 7 held administrative positions (5 in K-12, and 2 at a college). (This number comes to over 40, as some people had multiple positions: some taught at both the middle

and high school level, some were both teachers and graduate students, and some were both teachers and administrators).

2. For each response, we have provided information about the survey participant's position, when possible. If the participant simply indicated "K-12" or that they work in both middle and high schools, we have used the term "secondary school teacher."

3. At this time, states may choose between two K-12 comprehensive assessment consortia, the partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) (to date, adopted by 22 states and the District of Columbia) or the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (to date, adopted by 25 states). (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014)

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