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INTRODUCTION
Accreditation and Assessment as Opportunity

Wendy Sharer, Tracy Ann Morse,
Michelle F. Eble, and William P. Banks

In the fall of 2007, the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) Executive Board called on WPAs and writing instructors to respond to large-scale writing assessment and higher education accreditation. The Board's letter outlines specific actions "to help stakeholders understand" that "only effective, valid, and reliable assessments that are context-specific and discipline-based can be used to improve student learning" (Council of Writing Program Administrators 2007). These actions include learning about accrediting bodies and accreditation procedures and meeting with the Director(s) of Assessment at members' institutions. The message throughout the letter is clear: those who teach writing and those who administer writing programs need to be involved in defining the terms and setting the parameters of large-scale writing assessment so that any changes implemented in response to assessment are in keeping with what research and practice have demonstrated to be truly effective in helping student writers.

We see this collection as a resource for writing instructors and WPAs looking to answer the call to action in sustainable, research-driven, practice-tested ways. Contributions to the volume help readers to accomplish three key things:

1. Understand the goals and limits of large-scale writing assessment from both the perspective of the accrediting bodies that require it and the writing instructors and WPAs who design, implement, and, ideally, benefit from it.

2. Consider strengths and weaknesses of assessment structures and assessment-driven improvement initiatives that have been implemented at a variety of types of institutions (included are contributions from writing specialists from schools of differing sizes, student populations,

geographical locations, and writing program structures). As the CWPA points out in their letter of fall 2007, "specific stories about successful assessment processes are compelling to a range of audiences." The examples offered in the chapters that follow thus provide invaluable support for writing instructors and WPAs as they attempt to persuade other faculty and upper administrators to implement responsive and responsible assessment processes. At the same time, contributors to this collection do not hesitate to identify struggles and setbacks that they encountered in the processes of conducting large-scale assessment and responding to assessment results. The examples are useful for the support as well as the cautions that they provide to readers.

3. Use ongoing accreditation and assessment imperatives to cultivate productive campus-wide conversations that increase faculty members' ability to meet students' writing and learning needs. A benefit of large-scale assessment that receives attention in a number of chapters in this collection is the fruitful and revealing discussion about what is valued in writing across disciplinary contexts. Institution-wide assessment initiatives, then, can be occasions to discover and disrupt unstated and incorrect assumptions that "good writing is good writing" regardless of where it occurs in the university. Writing specialists and WPAs are in a unique position to lead the development of authentic writing assessment on their campuses and, through their efforts, to change campus understandings of and approaches to writing instruction in ways that have not been possible since the birth of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement.

We recognize that what is true of writing is also true of assessment: context always affects what can be effective in any given situation. In response, we bring together here a series of critical case studies of writing programs from across the country that have planned, implemented, and assessed the impact of large-scale, accreditation-supported initiatives. Some of the chapters explore writing program responses to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) requirement that member institutions design, implement, and assess a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a university-wide, five-year program aimed at improving some aspect of student learning. Other chapters explore writing-focused institutional responses to the demands of other higher education accrediting bodies. For example, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools' Higher Learning Commission requires an Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP), and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, as well as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, require institutional reviews that include programmatic assessments.

This list of accrediting agencies requiring assessment and documented improvement initiatives shows that the impetus for large-scale assessment and public accountability has moved into higher education. Many readers may recognize that we have borrowed part of our title from Chris Gallagher's (2007) book, *Reclaiming Assessment: A Better Alternative to the Accountability Agenda*, which chronicles the grassroots, context-appropriate assessments for local school districts in the state of Nebraska during the beginnings of the high-stakes testing environment of No Child Left Behind. Gallagher argues that engaging in this accountability work and focusing on local contexts is best for students and teachers when it comes to assessment and improving learning. As institutions of higher learning have increasingly been asked to account for student learning and to take action to improve their student learning, accreditation and the large-scale assessment it entails become one driver of this work. At East Carolina University, our home institution, we are witnessing first-hand the kinds of large-scale change that can result from engaging in institution-wide, context-specific assessment and accreditation processes. The work that the four of us have done as part of ECU's accreditation through SACS has substantially benefitted our program, our institution, and our students. Among other things, we have gained

- a major curricular revision in our composition program that moves the second of our required writing classes to the sophomore year and refocuses that course on the transition to writing in disciplinary contexts;
- a new, technology rich University Writing Center space;
- a new, tenure-track position for a Director of our University Writing Center;
- a set of coherent learning outcomes for our WAC program;
- a "Writing Liaisons" program: Writing Liaisons are faculty from across the university who regularly teach writing-intensive courses in their departments and who meet several times during the year with the leadership of our composition and WAC programs to ensure that students get consistent information about writing expectations and writing strategies;
- an electronic portfolio structure in which students compile writing samples and self-analyses of their own writing across their time at the institution; and
- expanded professional development opportunities for faculty.

Getting to this point has not been easy. Details about how WPAs at other institutions have used accreditation and large-scale assessment projects to bring positive change—as well as failure narratives and cautionary tales about working with faculty, upper administration, and

accrediting bodies in such projects—would likely have made our journey much smoother, but such material has not been easy to come by. Rather, it has been located primarily within institution-specific accreditation documents and assessment reports, which only some schools have elected to make publicly available on their websites. When we set out to find the most productive ways of using assessment and accreditation opportunities at our institution, there were few published accounts of how these kinds of endeavors had been pursued at other institutions. This collection helps fill that gap.

The contributors to part one consider how specialists in composition and rhetoric can work most productively with accrediting bodies in order to design assessments and initiatives that meet requirements while also helping those agencies to better understand how writing develops and how it can most effectively be assessed. Angela Crow, Cindy Moore, and Peggy O'Neill explore the historical connections between accrediting agencies and writing programs, urging readers to draw on lessons learned from past assessment mandates. The field, Crow, Moore, and O'Neill make clear, has been and must continue to be vigilant in monitoring and responding productively to assessment mandates so that our programs and our students are not held accountable to standards that do not reflect what our research has shown us about writing pedagogy and the processes of learning to write. With growing calls from the public and politicians for stronger regulation of and greater comparability across higher education curricula, our attention to accreditation processes is critical if we wish to maintain the kinds of "context-informed assessments" that we know to be most valid and useful.

One way to advocate for what we know to be good practice in assessment, Susan Miller-Cochran and Rochelle Rodrigo suggest in chapter two, is to work with and for accrediting agencies. More specifically, Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo explore the role of the "QEP Lead Evaluator," a member of the SACS team that visits institutions undergoing reaccreditation. If writing is the focus of a school's QEP—and this is often the case because writing, as we know, is essential to student learning across the curriculum—the QEP Lead Evaluator selected by SACS will, in all likelihood, be a composition specialist from another institution. Through the role of QEP Lead Evaluator, Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo explain, composition experts can share knowledge and research about writing pedagogy and writing assessment with faculty and key administrators at other institutions, thus providing invaluable external validation for and reinforcement of proposed curricular revisions and programmatic changes.

In the final chapter of part one, Shirley Rose offers an overview of the principles that have historically guided the work of regional accrediting associations and the elements that have traditionally been part of the accreditation process, including cyclical review, institutional self-study, face-to-face interaction with stakeholders, and detailed, individualized institutional reporting of accreditation results. Rose argues that collaborations like those undertaken by Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo are extremely valuable because they position writing program administrators and composition specialists within accrediting organizations that, since their origins in the nineteenth century, have spearheaded the process of determining criteria by which evolving initiatives in higher education will be evaluated. Having writing specialists involved with this work is particularly important because these initiatives, such as the recent growth of dual-credit programs that offer both high school and college credit for the same course, frequently have a direct impact on first-year writing.

The remaining two parts of the collection present case studies of how institutions have used ongoing accreditation and assessment imperatives to better meet student learning needs through programmatic changes and faculty development. Our goal in presenting these case studies is to provide concrete examples of productive curricular (part two) and instructional (part three) changes that can follow from accreditation mandates while, at the same time, highlighting and providing guidance for navigating challenges and pitfalls that WPAs may encounter within shifting, and often volatile, local, regional, and national contexts. We hope that the successes detailed within the chapters of parts two and three can be used by readers to bolster arguments for resource commitment from upper administration. In addition, contributors have included materials within their chapters and appendices that might be revised and repurposed by readers who are planning for and implementing assessment-driven change at their own institutions. At the same time, contributors have consciously included discussions of what has not gone as planned so that readers might be alert to these challenges and better prepared to respond if similar issues arise.

Within part two, chapters are organized according to the relative development of the institution's writing programs prior to assessment-driven change. The section begins with guidance for faculty who are looking to use the accreditation moment to build an institution-wide writing program from the ground up. Jonathan Elmore and Teressa Van Sickle, WPAs at Beaufort Community College, a small two-year institution in coastal North Carolina, used the SACS QEP mandate to

establish a WAC program, a writing center, and an online writing lab. As Elmore and Van Sickle explain, large-scale assessment demands can provide the spark needed to start a writing program where one had not existed before.

The next two chapters provide insight into how large-scale assessment can drive significant change to existing programs that have resisted change. Jessica Parker and Jane Chapman Vigil discuss how a reaccreditation visit from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) to Metropolitan State University of Denver, Colorado spurred change to the university's general education program, a program that had remained fairly static at this urban school of over 22,000 students for 20 or more years. The chapter recounts the composition program's journey from square one—with no stated learning outcomes, no method of collecting materials for assessment, and no system in place for conducting assessment of any kind—to robust process of assessment and, as indicated by the assessment, curricular revision and implementation of co-curricular support. Drawing from the struggles they encountered along the way, Parker and Vigil provide "pointers" for other writing instructors and WPAs embarking on an assessment journey. These tips include strategies for constructing rubrics, calibrating readers and aligning different perspectives on what "good" writing means, fostering instructor buy-in for the assessment process, and ensuring that what is learned through assessment is clearly applied through changes in curriculum, curricular resources, or faculty support.

In a similar vein, David Weed, Tulora Roeckers, and Melanie Burdick provide an in-depth exploration of curricular streamlining within the composition program at Washburn University, a public, open-admissions institution of roughly 7,000 students in Topeka, Kansas. Concerns at Washburn about institutional reaccreditation through the Higher Learning Commission led to a university-wide mandate that "all general education courses be redesigned to incorporate common assessments worth 30% of the course grade" (112). The composition program at Washburn did not have a history of standardization across sections of composition, but this mandate necessitated some level of it. Weed, Roeckers, and Burdick explain how they met the challenge of establishing a common structure for the composition program while also maintaining a good deal of autonomy for sometimes resistant instructors who were used to operating independently. The chapter details the collaborative processes the authors used to identify common course objectives and to transform those objectives into an assessment rubric. Interviews, focus groups, and artifacts collection from several pilot sections that

used the new objectives and assessment rubric highlighted for Weed, Roeckers, and Burdick the importance of involving faculty in the process of establishing shared outcomes that are broad enough to allow individual instructors some control over their pedagogy yet narrow enough to ensure that instructors and students recognize that they are participating in a larger, coherent program.

Accreditation concerns similarly propelled the development of an identifiable writing program at Onandaga Community College. It took pressure from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Malkiel Choseed explains, to lead to the creation of a WPA position, Writing Program Coordinator, in 2003. From this beginning, the teaching of writing at OCC evolved from a curriculum based on "lore" and the literary training of most faculty to one based on composition theory and writing research. Furthermore, Choseed highlights how large-scale, accreditation-driven assessment can lead to meaningful collaboration between WPAs, writing instructors, and stakeholders beyond the institution. More specifically, the alignment of writing-related learning outcomes across courses in a program, across programs in an institution, and across institutions in an educational system, such as the State University of New York system of which OCC is a part, can bring momentum and power for change to both individual institutions and to the institutional networks of which they are a part. In the case of OCC, connections Choseed made with other professionals during the processes of large-scale assessment and reaccreditation provided a foundation for additional curricular (and financial) development in the form of a multi-institutional collaboration, with funding from the US Department of Labor, aimed at preparing working adults for career changes.

Accreditation and assessment demands can also be channeled into innovation for programs that have been actively engaged with current, research-based curricular practices. For example, Karen Nulton and Rebecca Ingalls recount how they have used the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's accreditation process at Drexel University in Philadelphia to improve their composition program, a program that already embraced rhetorical awareness and a writing-about-writing approach. Nulton and Ingalls parlayed the Middle States process into an occasion to engage faculty, both within and beyond the composition program, in productive conversations about what they really value in student writing and to establish procedures for assessing the contributions that the composition program makes to students' progress toward those outcomes. In discussing their program revisions, Nulton

and Ingalls introduce a theme that runs through the rest of the collection: the fact that large-scale assessment of writing across the university can spur extensive discussion about differences and similarities in what writing is and does in different disciplinary contexts and can enable the creation of a shared vocabulary about writing and a mechanism—in this case, a reflective analysis—for assessing student achievement across writing contexts.

The final chapters in part two provide insight into additional innovations that large-scale assessment and accreditation processes can bring to schools with established writing programs. Jim Henry used accreditation pressure from the Western Association of Colleges and Schools (WASC) to establish a program that embeds writing tutors, known as writing mentors, in composition courses at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa. In addition to more individualized instruction that benefits student writers, this new program enabled faculty in the composition program to "advance financial resources for the program, advance research agendas for faculty and graduate students, and advance the program's institutional reputation and visibility" (163). Henry recounts the moves through which he and his colleagues navigated the assessment and accreditation process while also garnering financial support locally and nationally; involving graduate students in research, presentations, and publications drawn from the writing mentors initiative; and raising the institutional visibility of the composition program online, within the university's Assessment Office, and at institution-wide conferences and workshops. These moves, Henry suggests, can be adapted to other institutional contexts for similar benefits in the wake of accreditation.

Ryan Hoover and Mary Rist round out part two with details about the implementation of electronic assessment portfolios as part of accreditation-related activities in the composition program at St. Edward's University, a four-year school in Austin, Texas, that has offered an undergraduate major in Writing and Rhetoric since 1987. Not only has this program been in place for over two decades, it is currently the sixth largest major on campus, yet even this well-established program seized the moment of accreditation to make productive changes. Portfolios not only made assessment easier for the program by "tracking evaluation scores and calculating historical trends," but also brought additional benefits for students and faculty within the program and across the university (187). Through ePortfolios, multi-modal composing became a serious topic of discussion and instruction across disciplines, students' investment in reflecting on their work as represented in the ePortfolio grew, and ePortfolios were adapted with good results for faculty involved

with program assessment and for students in majors across the university as they planned for careers after the university.

Part three builds on part two by exploring examples of a common benefit fostered through large-scale assessment and accreditation processes: professional development programs that foster campus-wide commitment to writing and that focus on teaching writing in different disciplinary contexts. In chapter 11, Polina Chemishanova and Cynthia Miecznikowski present a QEP that brings together curricular change and professional development. The SACS requirement enabled the creation of a WAC program within a context of productive, cross-curricular conversations about what good writing means. Chemishanova and Miecznikowski's experience with establishing a WAC program at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, a four-year, MA-granting institution of approximately 6,000 students in rural southeastern NC, illustrates how a seemingly top-down requirement, imposed from outside of the institution, can be used to facilitate, rather than impede, faculty-driven change. Linda Adler-Kassner and Lorna Gonzalez then detail the accreditation-inspired processes through which they, in collaboration with faculty from across the University of California at Santa Barbara, developed writing assessment instruments that respond to diverse disciplinary expectations for writing. These collaborations led participating faculty to reevaluate their approaches to teaching writing as they became more aware of the variations in writing that students encounter as they take courses across disciplines and even as they take courses within the same discipline. Such revelations have, Adler-Kassner and Gonzalez explain, led faculty to request additional professional development opportunities related to writing and the teaching of writing.

In a similar vein, Maggie Debelius explores how Georgetown University's reaccreditation through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education became an occasion to engage faculty from diverse disciplinary backgrounds in discussions of what they value in writing. As part of their accreditation plan, Debelius and her colleagues worked with faculty to identify "threshold concepts" or "specific core ideas" within a discipline that are fundamental to success in that discipline. Debelius explains how this exploration of threshold concepts shifted faculty's perceptions of writing from something that can be used to test students' achievements to something that disciplinary members actively use to accomplish shared goals. The process of accreditation, then, enabled a significant change in how faculty understand writing and the teaching of writing: the perception of writing in disciplinary contexts moved from

a view of writing as a static entity that students should be taught how to replicate to a view of writing as a dynamic process that students should be taught how to participate in. This shift brought about a change in how faculty across the university viewed responsibility for writing instruction and writing assessment, with faculty in individual departments taking ownership of writing-related curricula and establishing writing assessment procedures within their own disciplinary areas.

Joyce Neff and Remica Bingham-Risher provide further insight into the potential impact of accreditation-related professional development. Two central initiatives of Old Dominion University's QEP involve faculty development: a series of workshops designed to help faculty discover strategies for using writing-to-learn and for teaching writing in disciplinary contexts, and an internal grant program that supports faculty innovation in the teaching of writing. Recognizing that changing faculty perceptions and practices is often essential to the kinds of broad institutional change called for by reaccreditation processes, Neff and Bingham-Risher suggest that other schools consider developing "Faculty Learning Outcomes" (FLOs) to supplement and complement the Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) that are often required as part of reaccreditation processes. To help other institutions with the development and assessment of FLOs, Neff and Bingham-Risher provide a draft of their university's FLOs and detail the procedure that they implemented to measure the impact of professional development workshops on faculty members' construction, revision, and implementation of writing assignments in courses across the disciplines.

To conclude part three and the collection, Angela Green, Iris Saltiel, and Kyle Christiansen write from the perspective of having finished their accreditation cycle. With their five-year impact report on their writing-focused QEP approved by the SACS, Green, Saltiel, and Christiansen reflect on the long-term, substantial impact that their accreditation-related assessment work has accomplished at Columbus State University in Georgia. Most notably, they describe and document how this work has led to "a fundamental shift in faculty attitudes about the role that writing can play in classrooms across the university" (306). Despite the fact that participation in the CSU QEP was voluntary, institutional priority given to the accreditation work, along with the careful planning and timing of implementation, enabled QEP leadership to effect the kinds of changes that a number of other institutions discussed in this collection are working toward: "Writing moved from being the responsibility of the English department to being viewed as the responsibility of all, as well as a significant mode of teaching and learning in any subject" (306).

While ultimately successful, the accreditation-driven changes at CSU did not occur without challenges. These challenges, the authors explain, are likely to be faced by others endeavoring to make similar changes at their institutions. To help others meet similar challenges, Green, Saltiel, and Christiansen provide examples of successful initiatives and assessment structures and discuss how they were able to overcome obstacles such as administrative/personnel turnover during the accreditation cycle and the inevitable and unpredictable budgetary restrictions faced by state schools in tough economic times.

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