

# TEACHING WITH WRITING

THE OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY WRITING INTENSIVE CURRICULUM (WIC) NEWSLETTER

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## PRE/VIEWS: INVEST TWO HOURS IN IMPROVING YOUR WIC COURSE

*By Vicki Tolar Burton, WIC Director*

Imagine the quality of writing you would like your students to do. Now recall the writing they actually do. How can you bridge the gap? On Wednesday, February 14, from 3-5 p.m., you are invited to a workshop gathering focused on improving WIC teaching and learning through an exercise of guided self-assessment.

Using self-reflection, small group discussion, and goal setting, participants will have an opportunity to assess teaching and learning in their individual WIC courses and envision designs for change.

Why take on self-assessment when the Baccalaureate Core Committee is conducting a formal review of WIC this year? The main reason is that while the Bac Core Review examines syllabi for consistency with WIC Guidelines, the workshop gives faculty a chance to consider deeper issues of teaching and learning. So I invite all interested faculty who teach WIC classes (and those who use WIC approaches) to gather with me on February 14 for an afternoon of reflection and conversation about teaching, learning, and writing.

## Arguing for Complexity: Discovering Common Ground in the WIC Classroom

*By Anna Harrell, English GTA*

Most college instructors would probably agree that good argumentative writing is characterized by a clear—but complex—position, a recognition and understanding of other points of view, valid reasoning, detailed support, and focused writing. Yet too often, the argumentative essays students write are unbalanced and un-nuanced, leaving teachers frustrated, making the argument seem like the most difficult and least rewarding form of writing to teach. But rather than giving up on teaching argument, we need to reexamine our teaching practices, looking for ways to more fully prepare our students for writing argument, discovering methods for helping them invent and present complex thought.

As we will see, argument is more complex and nuanced than defending a thesis; rather, it is a way of engaging complexity, of understanding more fully the self and the other and the world we inhabit. As Emmel, Resch and Tenney argue in their introduction to *Argument Revisited; Argument Redefined*, argument is best understood as “inquiry,” a process of moving “parties from disagreement to negotiation, and if not to accord, then at least toward an understanding of what their differences are and why they exist” (xiv). Likewise, John Gage suggests that our task as teachers is to enable students “to see their intellectual differences from others not as rhetorical occasion for persuasion by any means, but as fruitful ground for mutual inquiry” (17). Understood as inquiry, argument is no longer simply about defending one’s position, but about reaching an empathic understand-

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ing of the various positions and world views that support those positions. Viewed in this light, our task as instructors is to find the best methods for teaching argument as inquiry; as I will attempt to show in this essay, applying the principles of Rogerian rhetoric can provide students with a rich method of inventing arguments that fully engage the complexities and nuances of any issue worth arguing about.

Based on the work of psychologist Carl Rogers, the Rogerian argument calls for a non-confrontational approach to argument.

Before supporting their own positions on an issue, students are asked to listen deeply to the other side (or sides), summarize the other position in non-biased language, and ask questions of the other side before asserting their own position. The Rogerian argument helps students seek common ground, encouraging them to recognize the complexity and validity of multiple viewpoints. In 1970, Young, Becker and Pike introduced Rogerian rhetoric to composition studies, outlining four basic stages for the Rogerian argument:

1. An introduction to the problem and a demonstration that the opponent's position is understood.
2. A statement of the contexts in which the opponent's position may be valid.
3. A statement of the writer's position, including the contexts in which it is valid.
4. A statement of how the opponent's position would benefit if he were to adopt elements of the writer's position. If the writer can show that the positions complement each other, that each supplies what the other lacks, so much the better. (283)

These principles of listening and understanding before asserting seem to proponents of Rogerian rhetoric to

provide a way of reducing "tension and personal threat, thereby increasing opportunities for understanding to the point that individuals may be willing to risk changing their positions" (Teich "Introduction" 5). This possibility for change occurs both in the party traditional rhetoric would attempt to persuade and in the one doing the persuasion because empathic understanding takes place on both sides. It is this empathic "attitude," as Maxine Hairston points out, that is central to Rogerian rhetoric (376).

As instructors know from reading many one-

sided student essays, teaching our students how to reach an empathic understanding of opposing viewpoints can be a daunting task. Understanding another's position, as Carl Rogers says, means "to see the expressed idea and attitude from the other person's point of view, to sense how it feels to him, to achieve his frame of reference" (29). Thus, Rogerian rhetoric encourages students not only to understand the other's idea or position, but also the

*Rogsonian rhetoric, with its emphasis on empathic listening and understanding in an attempt to find common ground, provides some of the best methods we have for teaching the argument as inquiry in WIC courses because the principles of Rogerian rhetoric help our students learn to understand and value multiple viewpoints. This essay presents Rogerian rhetoric, highlighting its emphasis on listening, understanding and finding common ground, as well as presenting several informal activities instructors can use in the classroom. This article is intended to share helpful theory and practice with WIC instructors, encouraging them to use Rogerian rhetoric as a tool to help their students write more complex arguments.*

reasons the other has that idea. As Doug Brent explains, effective use of Rogerian rhetoric means that students "learn how to imagine with empathy and how to read with empathy," which means not only imagining another's point of view, but thinking "carefully about how another person could hold views different from one's own" (78). In other words, Rogerian rhetoric goes beyond summarizing opposing positions to understanding differing world views. Rogers's rule for this deep listening is: "Each person can speak up for himself only after he has first restated the ideas and feelings" of the other to the first person's satisfaction (30). This active listening and summary not only makes the first speaker feel understood, thus opening him/her up to the possibility of

change, but it also makes the second speaker revise his/her original position (Rogers 30). When this revision occurs, the second speaker has a more complex view of the issue at hand.

*"The purpose of Rogerian rhetoric is not to win an argument or even to persuade another person to change, but rather to find common ground on which both parties can build the best possible solution to the issue."*

The purpose of Rogerian rhetoric is not to win an argument or even to persuade another person to change, but rather to find common ground on which both parties can build the best possible solution to the issue (Coe 95). As Carl Rogers himself observes, it is a "perversion" of his thinking to use Rogerian principles in order to win an argument (Teich "Conversation" 55). Written Rogerian rhetoric states the other's position near the beginning; as Richard Coe suggests, Rogerian rhetoric makes "empathy a prerequisite to assertion" (88). The emphasis in Rogerian argument, then, is on "mutual communication" and understanding, "and the goal of the writer becomes one of facilitating change by striving for mutual understanding and cooperation with the audience" (Bator 429). In short, Rogerian argument seems to emphasize the rhetor and the audience changing together, through mutual understanding and common ground.

What strikes me as most beneficial about the Rogerian argument is that it requires students to listen and understand first, before beginning to state their own position. It almost seems common sensical that the best place to begin invention for argumentative essays is listening and summarizing, for only after our students understand what is at stake in any given issue can they have an informed position on that issue.

Because it calls for empathic understanding, Rogerian rhetoric seems to address most closely the problem of tunnel vision our students seem to have in writing argument. As Lynch, George and Cooper acknowledge, our "students have learned to argue vigorously and even angrily, but not think about alternatives, or listen to each other, or determine how their position may affect others, or see complexities, or reconsider the position they began with, or even to make connections across a range of possible disagree-

ments" (61). Our task as instructors is to diffuse the anger, helping them think about alternatives, listen to each other, understand the effects of their positions, etc. In short, we need to reverse this trend of lopsided arguments by taking the blinders off our students' eyes and helping them see the full range of complexity surrounding any topic. Employing the principles of Rogerian rhetoric as a method of invention (Brent 83) is a promising way to help our students gain perspective. In listening to others' views and striving to understand those views, our students will discover what they have to say; their own arguments will be more complex and nuanced because, before stating their own positions, they will have already recognized some of the complexities and difficulties of the topic. The goal is not to win an argument, but rather to reach common understanding as a way of gaining knowledge (Brent 85). It is not that Rogerian rhetors never state their own point of view; rather, they state their own view after listening to and understanding the other's point of view, thus attempting to construct a more complete picture and a more complete knowledge by combining the two views.

To give our students practice in seeking common ground and listening empathically, instructors can use a variety of informal activities. One such exercise, detailed more fully by Doug Brent, is a public, in-class Rogerian discussion. After students have generated a list of controversial issues, the teacher chooses one and asks students to identify themselves with one side or the other. Then two volunteers, one from each side, begin the discussion, with "student A stating an argument, student B restating that argument in summary form, and student A agreeing that the summary is correct or attempting to correct it." Once student A is content with the summary, student B can state his or her position (79). The teacher's role in facilitating this discussion is to make sure that students are trying to accurately, empathically summarize each other's views, using non-biased language. Brent suggests that students practice Rogerian discussions face-to-face several times before they move on to Rogerian discussions of writers "who are not present" (81).

Private in-class Rogerian discussions can follow the same pattern as the public discussion. After the teacher assigns students to work in pairs, one student in each pair will state his/her position, the other

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student listening closely, then summarizing the position to the first student's satisfaction before stating his/her own position. Once each pair has reached some common ground, they write—in brief—their initial positions, revised positions and common ground position on a piece of paper. Then, again in writing, students individually reflect on the process of reaching common ground, how they felt during the process, how their position changed through the process, and how satisfied they are with the common ground position.

After allowing students several attempts to practice face-to-face Rogerian discussions, the teacher can shift the focus to written arguments, asking students to read a published argument and summarize the piece of writing. Doug Brent suggests having students try to imagine a mental portrait of the writer in an order to understand the writer's views, the person behind the paper (82). After writing a portrait of the original author and a summary of the work, students would then individually write a letter to the author, incorporating their empathic understanding of the author and the author's opinion into the letter, attempting to discover common ground with the original author. Instructors using journal writing as an instructional tool can incorporate this same technique into journal assignments, asking students to write a Rogerian response in their journals.

Defining argument as inquiry requires us to reassess our methods of teaching argumentative writing. Rather than teaching students how to seize ground, how to write a convincing, persuasive paper that includes other views mainly to refute those views, we need to help our students find common ground with the people holding those views. Although I'm sure Rogerian rhetoric is not a cure-all for one-sided arguments, following Rogerian principles promises to do much for deepening our own understanding of our students' views and our students' understanding of others' views.

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## WIC Goes Online

What web sites will help students with writing? What is the latest on documentation of online sources? How can I convert an existing course to a WIC course? What projects have been funded by WIC grants in the past? All these questions and more are answered on the new WIC website: [www.orst.edu/dept/WIC](http://www.orst.edu/dept/WIC). The web design was done by freelance web designer, Stephen Chovanic, who can be reached at [designplane.com](mailto:designplane.com). Readers are invited to send favorite quotations about writing and suggestions for the web page to [vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu).

## BCC to Review WIC Courses Winter Term 2001

The OSU Baccalaureate Core Program, as approved by the Faculty Senate, charges the Baccalaureate Core Committee with the task of periodically reviewing approved baccalaureate core courses. The purpose of the review is to ensure that a course that currently satisfies a baccalaureate core requirement in a particular area but was approved some time ago has evolved over time so that it continues to meet the current baccalaureate core criteria for that area.

During Winter Term 2001, the Baccalaureate Core Committee (BCC) will be reviewing all courses that were approved for the WIC area of the baccalaureate core before January 1, 1996. There are approximately one hundred such courses. Material for the review process will be sent to each department chair. The departmental responses are due back in Academic Affairs on January 29, 2001.

One key element of the review is a short (two-page) assessment describing how the course under review satisfies the current criteria for a WIC course. It is expected that departmental chairs will ask faculty members who have taught the WIC course under review to write those assessments. That means that many of the readers of this newsletter will be involved in the review. If you are asked to help with the review and have any questions about the review materials and what is really being asked, please contact either John Lee (Chair of the 2000-2001 BCC at 737-2003 or [john.lee@orst.edu](mailto:john.lee@orst.edu)) or Vicki Tolar Burton (WIC Director at 737-3711 or [vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu)).

The BCC is aware that the review process will involve significant faculty time and effort. We have tried to design review materials that are clear and ask only for information we need to complete our task. We appreciate your efforts in teaching and supporting the WIC program and welcome any comments you wish to send us.

## Eighteen Faculty Complete WIC Training

The WIC Seminar for faculty during fall term addressed issues of particular interest to participants, including the teaching of writing, designing good assignments, and responding to and evaluating student writing.

The participants attending the Fall 2000 WIC Seminar were: Rich Adams, Agricultural and Resource Economics; Lyn Baker, Mathematics; Michael Beachley, Speech Communications; Cindy Bower, Bioresource Engineering; Teena Carnegie, English; Rick Finnan, ELI; Julie Green, Art; Michael Gutherless, EOP; Mo Healy, History; Sarah Henderson, Political Science; Kater Hunter-Zaworski, Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering; Alana Jeydel, Political Science, Wayne Robertson, Center for Writing and Learning; and Sandra Woods, Civil, Construction, and Environmental Engineering.

### About *Teaching With Writing*

**Editor:** Vicki Tolar Burton

**Assistant Editor:** Anna Harrell

*Teaching With Writing* is the newsletter of the Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum Program. As part of the Baccalaureate Core, all OSU students are required to take an upper division writing intensive course in their major.

The content of the WIC courses ranges from radiation safety (for Nuclear Engineering majors) to golf courses design (a Horticulture option). While subject matter differs by department, all WIC courses share certain commonalities defined by the Faculty Senate:

- Informal, ungraded or minimally graded writing is used as a mode of learning the content material.
- Students are introduced to conventions and practices of writing in their discipline, and the use of borrowed information.
- Students complete at least 5000 words of writing, of which at least 2000 words are in polished, formal assignments.
- Students are guided through the whole writing process, receive feedback on drafts, and have opportunities to revise.

For complete information on WIC guidelines, contact Vicki Tolar Burton by email at [Vicki.TolarBurton@orst.edu](mailto:Vicki.TolarBurton@orst.edu) or consult the OSU Curricular Procedures Handbook.

## 2001 WIC Department Development Grants—Request for Proposals

The WIC Program will fund from five to fifteen Department Development Grants this year. The maximum award per grant will be \$2500.00. Requests which include options for matching funds are preferred, and requests for less-than-maximum amounts may be given preference. Three types of grants are available, and all three encourage the participation of WIC seminar alums. Departments which involve WIC seminar alums in the proposed grant activity will have a competitive advantage for receiving funds, as will proposals that involve curriculum planning for including writing throughout the major. Proposals are due in the WIC office by February 26, 2001. For an extension, contact Vicki Tolar Burton at [vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu).

### WIC DEPARTMENT DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

These grants are designed to foster the goals of writing across the curriculum (WAC), in general, and of OSU's writing-intensive curriculum (WIC), in particular. Therefore, the criterion on which proposals will be evaluated is the extent to which the proposed activity will further integrate writing into the curriculum of OSU students. Three kinds of grants are available, but applications need not conform to only one type; feel free to overlap categories if necessary. Though awarded to a department as a whole, the grants are meant to particularly benefit those faculty who are actively involved in discussions of teaching with writing and who teach WIC courses, possible WIC courses, or other courses using writing activities. Multiple proposals from the same department are acceptable and will be reviewed equally; however, there will be an attempt to fund as many departments as possible. Proposals should be two to three pages in length and should be sent directly to the WIC Program office, Waldo 125. Please call Vicki Tolar Burton, 7-3711, for additional information and discussion.

### Stage One Grants—Development *within* a Department

**Purpose:** To support faculty within a department who are interested in developing new courses and teaching practices or in modifying current courses and teaching practices to include more teaching-with-writing techniques. Preference may be given to plans for developing new WIC courses or for troubleshooting current WIC courses.

Stage One proposals should specify the following items:

**Activity:** Describe the proposed activity (issues to be discussed, problems to be addressed) which the requested funds would facilitate. While some activities may primarily involve an individual, it is assumed that there will also be some level of departmental discussion. For example, funds might be used for: organizing departmental retreats, workshops, or discussions; buying faculty release time.

**Schedule:** Specify the time line anticipated for completing the activity, achieving the results, and submitting a brief report.



**Personnel:** Identify participating faculty, particularly the WIC seminar alums who are involved in the activity.

**Budget:** Project how the money will be used.

**Results:** Identify anticipated results in terms of a starting point and an ending point. Where is your department now in terms of WIC or WAC, and where do you hope it will be at the conclusion of the funded activity? In other words, specify not only what is being built but also the foundation upon which the department is building.

**Report:** While a brief report will be expected, there will not be a uniform deadline this year for those reports. Please set a report deadline in accordance with the schedule you propose.

### **Stage Two Grants—Development *amongst* Departments**

**Purpose and Activity:** To support cooperative writing curriculum development and teaching-with-writing activities amongst departments and across disciplines. For example, funds might be used to support: mentoring groups; activities regarding interdisciplinary writing such as legal writing, scientific writing, writing and environmental studies, writing and ethics, etc.

Stage Two proposals should specify the activity, schedule, personnel, budget, results, and report information as described above, making the obvious descriptive adjustments needed to address activity amongst and between departments and not simply within a department.

### **Stage Three Grants—Seeking Outside Funding**

**Purpose and Activity:** To provide seed money which will help departments apply for more substantial funding for WIC/WAC activities from sources outside the university.

Stage Three proposals should identify the schedule, personnel, budget, results, and report not only for the fund-raising activity supported directly by the WIC grant but also for the activity which would be supported by the outside funds if the proposed fund-raising is successful.

## **Attention Faculty in the College of Science**

Because of growing demand for WIC courses in your college, grant proposals for developing WIC courses in the Life Sciences will receive special consideration.

## WIC EVENTS

### WINTER 2001

- Monday, Jan. 8* Departments receive packets for Baccalaureate Core Committee Review of WIC courses approved before 1996.
- Friday, Jan. 19* WIC Pizza Lunch, 12-1 pm, Waldo 121  
**So Your WIC Course is Being Reviewed.** Information and help with the review materials. John Lee, Chair, Baccalaureate Core Committee, and Vicki Tolar Burton. Email reservations to [vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu) by 10 am on Friday.
- Friday, Jan. 26* WIC Pizza Lunch, 12-1 pm, Waldo 121  
**So Your WIC Course is Being Reviewed, Procrastinators' Version.** Information and help with review materials. Email reservations to [vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu) by 10 am on Friday.
- Monday, Jan. 29* **DUE DATE FOR DEPARTMENTS TO SUBMIT MATERIALS FOR BAC CORE REVIEW OF WIC COURSES APPROVED BEFORE 1996.** Send materials to Curriculum Coordinator, UAP, Snell Hall.
- Friday, Feb. 2* WIC Pizza Lunch 12-1, Waldo 121  
**So You're Thinking about Applying for a WIC Grant.** See sample proposals, discuss your ideas with the WIC Director. Email reservations to [vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu) by 10 am on Friday.
- Wednesday, Feb. 14* Faculty Workshop, 3-5 pm, Waldo 121.  
**Improve your WIC Course in Two Hours: A Self-Assessment Workshop.** See Pre/Views column on page 1 for more information. Email reservations to [vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu)
- Monday, Feb. 26* **WIC GRANT PROPOSALS DUE BY 5 PM TO WALDO 125.**

### Coming Spring Term: Introductory WIC Seminar for Faculty

Five Wednesdays beginning the third week of Spring term, 3-5 p.m., faculty can learn approaches for teaching with writing and teaching Writing Intensive Courses. Interested faculty should request that their department chair send an email nomination to [vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu](mailto:vicki.tolarburton@orst.edu).