

TEACHING WITH WRITING


THE OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY WRITING INTENSIVE CURRICULUM (WIC) NEWSLETTER

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Pre/Views

by Vicki Collins
WIC Director



In this issue you will find Part II of "What is Good Writing?" (pages 4-5), which reflects student and faculty understanding of good writing in the College of Agriculture and College of Science. One thing to note about the survey is the consistent mention of three primary concerns in good writing: grammar, organization, and content or support. A student's success or failure in these areas influences the overall quality of writing. But what *is* "good organization" in written work in a discipline? How would students at the 100/200 level know this? The essence of "good support" depends on students having knowledge of what counts as proof in a particular course. Faculty often assume students will intuitively understand these things simply because they are enrolled in the course or have an interest in the field. However, research in teaching writing indicates that teachers need to make these matters explicit in order for writing to improve.

Last fall's report on good writing in the College of Engineering (TWW, Fall '96) prompted considerable discussion in the Department of Nuclear Engineering. According to Professor Kathy Higley (NE), "As the department members talked about the survey, we real-

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High Tech, Low Tech, Fast Tech, Slow Tech

What factors should a teacher consider before deciding to use computer technologies in a WIC class? This was Professor of Animal Science Lloyd Swanson's question to speakers Scott Chadwick (Speech Communication), Bill Uzgalis (Philosophy), and Jon Dorbolo (Information Services) during the Advanced WIC Seminar on technology and writing in January. Their answers focused on making certain that technology supports learning goals in the course and is not just an add-on for its own sake.

Answering Lloyd Swanson's excellent question more fully became a focal point of my recent presentation to the National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference held in Charleston, South Carolina, Feb. 6-9. Based on current scholarship, the experience of colleagues at Oregon State, and my own work with

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High Tech, Low Tech

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faculty designing WIC courses, I have developed a heuristic or list of questions which a teacher might consider when deciding whether to include computer technology in a Writing Intensive course. The questions begin on page 3 of this issue and will be the focus of a WIC Brown Bag Seminar during the spring term (see Brown Bag schedule on page 8). All questions in the heuristic are not relevant for every course.

Current Uses of Technology in WIC Courses

Faculty considering technologies in WIC may be interested in knowing how OSU colleagues are currently using similar approaches. Computer technology is alive and well in WIC courses at Oregon State, supporting various goals of the Writing Intensive Curriculum.

Goal: Informal, ungraded or minimally graded writing is used as a mode of learning course content.

⇒ Some WIC courses use email discussion groups to respond to reading assignments or course tasks. Students may work in pairs, in groups, or as a class.

⇒ One department in the College of Engineering has required that weekly responses to case studies be submitted by email to the professor. Because the course is large, not every response is read or graded every week. According to the instructor, the computer can randomly select which papers will be read and graded each week. Students know their case studies will be read and evaluated a certain number of times during the term.

⇒ Writing-to-learn journals can be submitted electronically, but my sense is that most teachers and students prefer the

flexibility of journals written in a more portable form. A former student recently invited me to meet him in the coffee shop where he went each morning to write his response journals for my WIC class last fall, "for old times' sake," he said.

⇒ Email writing-to-learn assignments designed by Jon Dorbolo under a WIC Grant and published in the 1995-96 issues of this newsletter continue to be used across the curriculum. "DearAuthor" is particularly popular with students and faculty.

Goal: A WIC course introduces students to writing in the discipline or profession.

⇒ Students in collaborative design projects in the College of Engineering rely on computer communication to coordinate work on their projects.

⇒ Animal Science professor Tom Savage reports that he promotes professionalism in email exchanges by insisting that even quick messages be written in complete sentences, punctuated correctly, and spell-checked.

⇒ In a course called "Great Voyages: The History of Western Philosophy 1492-1776" Bill Uzgalis (Philosophy) uses hypertext on his Web pages to help students identify philosophical problems on which to base research projects. Bill's course is not a WIC course but uses WIC techniques.

Goal: Students receive instruction on the whole writing process and have opportunities to revise early drafts based on feedback received from peers or the professor.

⇒ This goal remains the lowest and slowest tech endeavor across the university. The red pen is still the technology

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High Tech, Low Tech

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of choice, despite seminar training on the ineffectiveness of marking every error on student drafts. Some faculty have found the suggestion to respond to student drafts in pencil very freeing because it gives them the option of changing their minds about a comment or a grade.

⇒ In some classes email exchange of drafts is used to facilitate peer review and overcome time and distance barriers among student reviewers.

⇒ Email also gives students the opportunity to pose questions about the assignment to the professor between class meetings.

Technology & Course Design

From the Chancellor's office on down we are hearing that technology is the answer. OSU faculty using computer technology in WIC classes would probably say, "Yes, but not the answer to every question." Let us be deliberate about the questions we raise and the ways we move into this new aspect of Writing Across the Curriculum. The following heuristic, "Asking the Right Questions about Computer Technology and Writing Intensive Courses," is intended to serve as a starting place for faculty who are considering technological changes in WIC courses. A further discussion of these questions will occur at the first WIC Brown Bag Seminar on Friday, April 11, at noon in Waldo 121.



Asking the Right Questions

About Computer Technology and Writing Intensive Courses

Questions of Technology - Teacher

Will computer technology support and enhance learning goals of a WIC course? How?

What type of electronic communication is most appropriate for the class structure, makeup, and learning goals?

How do I implement the technology?

How much time will I have to spend learning the technology?

Who will pay for the technology? For my learning time?

Am I looking at technology as a tool or as a source of new structures of thinking and writing? (techie vs. cyborg)

Who else (locally or nationally) has used technology in this way?

What software support is available in my institution? Commercially?

Again, who will pay?

How do I set up lists, manage mail, design Web pages, etc.?

Questions of Technology - Students

What are students asked to do with technology? (Assignments with very clear directions are needed)

How and where will students enter technological space?

Is the electronic work required or optional?

What experience level do students in this class have with computers?

How will beginners or students with problems get help?

Will computer technology support and enhance learning goals of a WIC course?

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What is Good Writing?

Part II in a Series

During fall term, teams of students in Writing for Teachers, a WIC course in the English Department, surveyed students and faculty in various colleges of the University concerning characteristics of excellent, average, and unacceptable writing of the college. As with the survey in the College of Engineering published in the Fall issue of this newsletter, the survey samples were small (at least ten students and five faculty at each course level), but the results suggest interesting patterns which colleges and departments may want to pursue in further conversations.

What are the characteristics of excellent, average, and unacceptable writing in the College of Agriculture?

Characteristics are listed from the most to least frequently mentioned

100/200 Level

Student Responses

Excellent Writing

Good grammar
Good organization
Interesting content
Communicates with teacher

Average Writing

Uninteresting
Weak grammar
Not well organized

Unacceptable Writing

Poor grammar
Incomplete
Disorganized

Professor Responses

Excellent Writing

Good grammar
Good organization
Follows instructions

Average Writing

Improper grammar
Illogical sentences
Poor organization

Unacceptable Writing

Poor grammar
Inaccurate content
Did not follow directions

300/400 Level

Student Responses

Excellent Writing

Good Grammar
Good organization
Communicates knowledge

Average Writing

Weak grammar
Not well organized
Poor communication

Unacceptable Writing

Poor grammar
Disorganized
Lack of desire

Professor Responses

Excellent Writing

Good grammar
Good synthesis of information/ideas
Excellent organization

Average Writing

Weak grammar
Less synthesis
Illogical organization

Unacceptable Writing

Poor grammar
Innaccurate content or misrepresentation
of facts
No organization

*Research in
the College of
Agriculture
was conducted
by Janine Luta
(05 English
Ed.) and
Cesar
Sandoval (04
Speech).*

What are the characteristics of excellent, average, and unacceptable writing in the College of Science?

Characteristics are listed from the most to least frequently mentioned

100/200 Level

Student Responses

Excellent Writing

Excellent grammar
Good organization
Good sentence structure
Good transitions
Good clarity

Average Writing

Fair grammar
Fair organization
Fair clarity

Unacceptable Writing

Poor grammar
Unclear focus
Poor organization
Weak effort

Professor Responses

Excellent Writing

Good grammar
Good organization
Strong support
Clear and concise
Strong detail

Average Writing

Fair grammar
Fair organization
Fair clarity
Fair detail

Unacceptable Writing

Poor grammar
Poor organization
Weak support
Little detail

*Research in
the College of
Science was
conducted by
Brady
Bedsworth
(05 English
Ed) and
Rick Harms
(Post Bac
English).*

300/400 Level

Student Responses

Excellent Writing

Excellent grammar
Good organization
Strong vocabulary
Strong support
Good transitions

Average Writing

Fair grammar
Fair organization
Fair vocabulary
Fair transitions

Unacceptable Writing

Poor grammar
Poor organization
Weak support
Poor vocabulary

Professor Responses

Excellent Writing

Strong content
Good grammar
Good organization
Well developed ideas
Clear and concise

Average Writing

Fair content
Fair grammar
Fair organization
Fair clarity

Unacceptable Writing

Poor content
Poor grammar
Poor organization
Underdeveloped ideas

Asking the Right Questions

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Questions of Affect and Civility

What behaviors and civilities will the class and teacher agree to use in electronic communication?

What are the community-building goals of this course? How will electronic communication help or hurt?

What level of response is expected from the teacher in terms of replying to every email message?

What level of identity/anonymity will work best for this class?

How can the electronic communication in the course be made as safe as possible?

How can technology add richness and play to the course?

How might electronic communication give voice to students who otherwise remain silent?

Questions of Fairness and Equity

Geography: Do electronic assignments favor resident students or disadvantage commuters?

Economics: Do assignments favor students with home computers over ones who must use campus computer labs? Do assignments favor students with extensive computer experience over novices?

Gender: Do assignments favor males over females or females over males?

Ethnicity: How are second language speakers affected by electronic communication assignments?

What other issues of ethnicity might affect the fairness of this course?

If serious issues of fairness and equity exist in this course, should I use the technology anyway? Do gains in learning outweigh issues of fairness?

Balance: If serious issues of fairness and equity exist for this course, should I use the technology anyway? Do gains in learning outweigh issues of fairness?

Questions of Content and Assessment

How will use of technology affect the transfer of knowledge in this course?

How will use of technology affect the making of meaning in this course?

How will use of technology affect student understanding of what counts as proof in this field?

How will technology affect student writing?

How will electronic communication be assessed for credit or for a grade? What criteria will be used?

How will electronic communication count in the total course grade?

Pre/Views

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ized that we probably haven't been clear with our majors about our expectations for written work." To address this problem, Todd Palmer (NE) organized a faculty-student seminar to discuss expectations and invited the WIC Director to facilitate. The lively session addressed issues ranging from the details of documentation to the ways in which audience affects content and voice in written documents.

I also want to invite you to make Friday lunch a WIC event during Spring term. Beginning Friday, April 11, at noon in Waldo 121, we will have weekly lunchtime seminars on teaching writing. The schedule of topics is on the back page of this newsletter. There are plans

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WIC News

Advanced WIC Seminar a Success

During winter term twelve faculty members from four colleges participated in the Advanced WIC Seminar. Participants included Carol Caughey (Apparel, Interiors, Housing, and Merchandising), Penny Diebel (Agricultural and Resource Economics), Jodi Engel (Education), Flo Leibowitz (Philosophy), Gerry Olson (Human Development and Family Sciences), Michael Penner (Food Science and Technology), Debra Rose (Exercise and Sport Science), Tom Savage (Animal Sciences), Michael Scanlan (Philosophy), Gerald Smith, (Exercise and Sport Science), Lloyd Swanson (Animal Sciences), and Bill Uzgalis (Philosophy).

Seminar topics included: Writing-to-Learn; technology in the WIC class with speakers Scott Chadwick (Speech Communications), Bill Uzgalis (Philosophy), and Jon Dorbolo (Information Services); establishing criteria for evaluating writing; collaborative writing with speaker Lisa Ede (English); and ESL in WIC classes with speaker Craig Machado (English Language Institute).

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for pizza on the first and last dates (email me by 10 am on the date of the seminar for a pizza reservation) and interesting speakers and conversations throughout the term.

If the *Teaching With Writing* series "What is Good Writing? Answers from Across the Curriculum" interests you,

join us at the WIC Lunchtime Seminar on Friday, April 18 for a discussion of the implications of this study for the teaching of writing at OSU. I also invite departments interested in this topic to follow the lead of Nuclear Engineering and plan for departmental discussions of this important issue.

About Teaching With Writing

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.

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, including 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 more information of WIC guidelines, contact Vicki Collins by email at collinsv@cla.orst.edu or consult the OSU Curricular Procedures Handbook.

Ahead for Spring Term Weekly WIC Brown Bag Seminars

All faculty interested in teaching with writing are invited to bring a lunch and gather at noon Friday during Spring Term. Feel free to enter late or leave early as your schedule dictates. All lunches will be in Waldo 121. There is a Coke machine nearby, so drinks are available.

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| Friday, April 11 | “Should WIC courses go high tech?” Bill Uzgalis (Philosophy) and Vicki Collins discuss issues related to technology and writing. PIZZA. Call 7-2930 or email Sandra Mills by 10 a.m. |
| Friday, April 18 | “What is Good Writing? Answers from Across the Curriculum.” Conversation on the survey of writing criteria in various colleges. |
| Friday, April 25 | “Good Writing Assignments from Across the Curriculum.” WIC teachers share successful assignments. |
| Friday, May 2 | “Ways to Use Writing: Exercises Assignments, and Grammar.” Cheryl Glenn shares her approach to teaching a WIC course. |
| Friday, May 9 | “Designing a Rubric for Evaluating Writing.” WIC teachers share their own rubrics. |
| Friday, May 16 | “What’s Working and What’s Not?” A chance to brainstorm, problem-solve, and share experiences with WIC courses. |
| Friday, May 23 | “Research Update: 600 OSU Students Evaluate Sources on the Web.” Scott Chadwick (COMM) and Vicki Collins (WIC). PIZZA. Call 7-2930 or email Sandra Mills by 10 a.m. |

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