

TEACHING WITH WRITING

THE OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY WRITING INTENSIVE CURRICULUM (WIC) NEWSLETTER

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PRE/VIEWS

By Vicki Tolar Burton, WIC Director

When I was three years old, I surprised my family and friends by informing them that my name was not Vicki Tolar but Vicki Wicki Wacki Woo. In retrospect, this self-naming seems strangely prophetic: My name is still Vicki, and I direct the WIC (Writing Intensive Curriculum) program, which is a local version of WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum). All that was missing was the Woo, which was taken care of by OSU Mathematics Professor Bob Burton, who wooed me so successfully that we were married on November 27, 1999. My new name reclaims my family name and celebrates my marriage to Bob. I let go of Collins with respect and high regard for Gary Collins, whose name was mine for more years than not.

So Vicki Tolar Burton is my new name, but you still have the same old WIC director.

I also want to name and recognize the faculty who completed the Introductory WIC Seminar during the fall term. They are: David Anderson (Air Force ROTC); James Blumenthal (Philosophy), Chris Corwin (Art); Jesse Ford (Fisheries and Wildlife); Tom Gallagher (For-

Pair-A-Dice Regained: Multi-Writing as Imaginative Reality

By Robert Davis and Mark Shadle,
Associate Professors of Writing and English,
Eastern Oregon University

The following article describes an approach to Writing Across the Curriculum that is employed at Eastern Oregon University. The authors' ideas about "multi-learning" have possible applications in many courses, from those in the lower division to departmental capstone projects.

Education, for so many new students who rapidly drop out of school, is a gamble. Knowing this, we began experimenting six years ago at Eastern Oregon University with a way of writing and thinking that would encourage students to not only go beyond writing requirements in their courses, but also address the increasing pressure to quickly turn students likely to drop out of school into lifelong learners. Beginning with our Writing 206: Applied Discourse Theory course, we helped students discover topics that were connected to their personal lives.

Then we tutored and interviewed them in order to help them learn more about their topics in ways that helped them create projects using multiple genres, disciplines, cultures and media. While students were first resistant to this idea—especially with worries about evaluation of very different kinds of works—they responded with remarkable projects that began to integrate what they were learning not only in the area of their major or across disciplines, but also in their off-campus lives.

These projects we simply called "Multi-Writing," and we slowly extended the approach to other English-Writing courses, including Writing 131: Exploratory Writing; Writing 225: Argument and Persuasion; Writ-

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ing 330: The Electronic Word; and English 390: American Folklore. Through WAC and Oregon Writing Project workshops, we introduced Multi-Writing to other K-college teachers across our campus, throughout our region and state and on to presentations at national conferences.

In an article for the *Oregon English Journal* (November, 1998), we showed some of the ways a single Multi-Writing project can often satisfy a number of benchmark evaluations for K-12 teachers. We co-wrote this article with Oregon Writing Project high school teachers we had introduced to multi-writing, and with one of our former student multi-writers, who had become a high school teacher. In a forthcoming article from *College Composition and Communications* (February, 2000), we outlined our students' projects in detail.

Here we don't want to focus on ways of describing the effects and goals of using Multi-Writing in a particular course across the disciplines (e.g. a Government 101 course that used it so well last year on our campus). Rather, we hope to imagine, in what may be seen as a utopian or playful way, some projects we can envision being done with Multi-Writing in courses that cross disciplines. This thinking is a direct response to Writing Across the Curriculum workshops we have done for new faculty here at Eastern Oregon University each year.

Interested in the idea of Multi-Writing, new faculty have often asked us to help them imagine occasions that might make good use of Multi-Writing. So the list of potential courses and projects below is offered to begin this process and generate discussion not only about the pros and cons of multi-learning, but to seed the clouds gathering in the mind of faculty to consider both the kinds of teaching they might do and the kinds of work they would like to receive.

Consider the following:

- A course taught as physics, art criticism and/or religion, and entitled "Still Moving," uses the physics of

Einstein, personal narratives, film criticism of "action movies," art criticism of Jackson Pollock's "action paintings," cultural critiques of magazine and television advertisements for cars, and Zen meditations and photographs from Japanese gardens in American cities to show how motion is at the core of stillness and stillness central to motion. Multi-writing projects in this course might begin with personal narratives about moving or about living long in one place, and next offer additional pieces in various genres (critical essays, dialogues, letters), from different points of view critiquing and questioning these narratives.

- A course taught as music, biology and/or psychology, and entitled "I See What You Hear." The focus upon hearing combines a discourse on musicianship as a form

of reading-of-the-ears—one that absorbs influential compositions and sounds and then makes the next the ear demands—with discussions of the biology of hearing and reflective interviews with both the deaf about the loss of hearing and the blind about its compensatory effects. Multi-Writing projects in this course might suggest that while our culture tends to valorize the sense of sight and images, the ear can be the most intellectual of sensory organs. A revision could form around Dianne Ackerman's description of

synesthesia in *A Natural History of the Senses*, in which one sense is metaphorically inscribed as another.

- A course entitled "Opening the Pod: Facing Your Alien" examines the second through fourth day of parenthood, from sociological, psychological, biological and artistic perspectives. Multi-Writing projects might, for instance, search for parallel patterns of development in the body and brain, and the bodies and mindsets of the parent or parents. Alternatively, they might look back at the same newborn(s) a month or a year later.

A curriculum using learning community models—like the coordinated studies classes at Evergreen State College in Washington—makes it clear that courses like

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those above can and do successfully exist. But what happens when such interdisciplinary Multi-Writing is taught by a faculty member in a particular discipline? What do we do about the student who knows more about the actual workings of physics than her writing teacher, who is sponsoring the project in a class examining the rhetoric in the sciences? Or the student who understands the importance of physics for the project, but lacks some of the necessary training?

In either case, the faculty member or student can seek the assistance of a physicist or other scholars in disciplines relevant to the project. But whether such expertise is provided, these student projects are less about a definitive answer or stance than about the excitement of learning. This doesn't mean, however, that students aren't rigorously researching and experimenting. Most discover their first appreciation of theory in this Multi-Writing, because they see the immediate usefulness of it in their project.

Finally, are such projects beyond undergraduates? We have found they are not. Consider the following examples of actual student Multi-Writing projects:

- Judy Cornish's 80-page project on the ideas and perspectives of "islands" which used several dozen genres (e.g. essays, poems, quotations, aphorism), many disciplines (e.g. rhetoric, history, biology, philosophy), several cultures (e.g. America, Canada and the Caribbean) and various media (e.g. maps, photos, sheathed inserts) to meditate upon the poet John Donne's metaphor of individual-as-island.

- Shirley Crabtree's project on fleas, which discusses this pest as the ultimate survivor, using biology, history, cultural criticism, literary analysis, and creative writing. The project focuses especially on human beings' conflicted and often extreme interactions with the flea, including carnivalizations such as the flea circus and many attempts at mass extermination, often motivated by group hysteria or paranoia. Despite these, though, the flea prevails and still rides our dogs. The project includes a victory statement by the fleas, who are laughing.

- Jan Harris' project on the color blue, and blue's implications for, and manifestations in, psychology, physics, sociology, music, visual arts, comparative religion, and fashion. Jan's project was prompted by reading *Blue*, by Belinda Recio, part of a series of books on primary colors. Jan's project is some way outdid the original

"... our secret motive for asking them to do this work is that we enjoy reading it."

because of her personal commitment: Jan saw blue not as one color in a series, but as her favorite color, a key color in American culture (blue jeans, blues music), and as a visual door into spiritual awareness.

As "multi-writing" has expanded across the disciplines, it has also expanded in the lives of student authors. We find our students continuing to supplement and revise their projects even after they have been assessed. Some students have revised class projects into senior capstone projects. Others have completed several linked projects for different courses. Others, however, have revised old projects and made new ones for no course assignment, but simply for their own interests. Even students who have graduated write to tell us about the Multi-Writing they are doing now.

We are happy for our students, but our secret motive for asking them to do this work is that we enjoy reading it. The projects often dazzle us. Even the least successful usually have memorable components. They show us the intelligence and creativity of our students, which, unfortunately, sometimes remain hidden using more common approaches.

For us, there is no going back. The long-shot of Multi-Writing projects has paid off. The show us each quarter that the world as it is and might be are deeply entwined, and that student research must constantly wrestle with the need to use personal and academic interests and skills to study, interrogate and shape a world we share.

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est Resources); Shawna Grosskopf (Economics); Steve Hannigan-Downs (Exercise and Sport Science); Michael Parkhurst (Political Science); Ed Schmisser (Agriculture and Resource Economics); Susan Shaw (Women Studies); and Anne Marie VanDerZanden (Horticulture). These folks constituted a particularly engaged and engaging group, with much lively exchange of ideas about teaching and writing across the disciplines.

Our colleagues at Eastern Oregon University, Rob Davis and Mark Shadle, who have participated in WIC workshops at OSU and are interested readers of this newsletter, have contributed the lead article in this issue (see page 1). Davis and Shadle describe a form of writing they call "multi-writing," which they claim has had great success in diverse courses at EOU. It is good for us to share ideas about teaching writing.

In this issue is an announcement of the Advanced WIC Seminar to be offered during winter term. All faculty who have completed the introductory seminar prior to Fall 1999 are eligible and encouraged to enroll. Past participants have found the advanced seminar an invigorating environment in which to re-examine WIC approaches in the light of their actual classroom experiences.

I also want to encourage OSU faculty to consider applying for a WIC Department Development Grant (Proposals due Monday, February 21, 2000). The WIC Request for Proposals will be forwarded through department chairs and heads. If you do not receive the RFP or want more information, contact Sandra Mills at 7-2930.

**Proposals for WIC Grants 2000
Due Feb. 21**

Faculty interested in applying for a WIC Department Development Grant for the year 2000 are invited to apply by February 21. A request for proposals is available from Sandra Mills in 125 Waldo Hall. Past successful grant applications are available for perusal in the WIC office by appointment.

**Advanced WIC Faculty Seminar
Offered Winter Term**

Faculty who completed the Introductory WIC Seminar prior to fall of 1999 are eligible to be nominated for the Advanced WIC Faculty Seminar to be offered during winter term 2000. Topics will be geared to the interests of the group; tentative topics include the role of technology in WIC courses and student writing, collaborative writing projects, improving the quality of formal writing assignments, and more writing-to-learn.

The seminar meets from three to five p.m. four Wednesdays, beginning January 26, 2000, and ending February 16, 2000. Interested faculty should ask their department chair to send a nominating e-mail to vcollins@orst.edu by January 18, 2000.

About Teaching With Writing

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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 VCollins@orst.edu or consult the OSU Curricular Procedures Handbook.