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## Teaching With Writing

**Fall 2012_Print Version**

# Teaching With Writing: The WIC Newsletter

## Pre/Views

By Vicki Tolar Burton, WIC Director

What do OSU students mean when they say a professor does "PowerPoint Karaoke"? (As you might guess, it is not a good thing.)  To find out, read our interview with Associate Director of Technology Across the Curriculum (TAC), Jon Dorbolo, entitled "Web Writing, Textual Mash-Ups, and Death by PowerPoint: A Conversation with Jon Dorbolo."  Jon shares his views on the intellectual cost of PowerPoint's default setting, which reduces everything to bullet points.  He also discusses teaching online and suggests ways to use visual tools like mind-maps to help students comprehend the structure of articles they are reading and to structure their own writing.

Speaking of technology, have you ever wished you could take notes on a pdf you are reading on your tablet or phone?  In "Taking Notes on Your Mobile Device," OSU librarians Uta Hussong-Christian and Stefanie Buck share their favorite apps for this function.

Of the many teaching strategies offered in the five week WIC faculty seminar, which ones are faculty most frequently taking back to their classrooms?  Read "Change Three Things" to find out what our eighteen fall 2012 participants said.  What three changes would most improve the way you teach writing?

Finally, I want to remind all teachers of WIC courses that the Bacc Core Committee begins Category Review this spring with review of Writing Intensive courses in the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences, Business, and Public Health and Human Sciences.  Unit assessment leaders and individual faculty can learn more by attending one of our Assessment Workshops winter term.  The workshop will be offered twice: Wednesday, January 16, 1 to 3 pm and Thursday, January 31, 2 to 4 pm.  I am also available to meet with units or colleges about assessment best practices for collecting data for submission.  For the complete schedule of category review, see the Office of Assessment website.

## Web Writing, Textual Mash-Ups, and Death by PowerPoint: A Conversation with Jon Dorbolo

By Allen Sprague

As a frequent collaborator with WIC, Technology Across the Curriculum (TAC) Associate Director and philosophy instructor Jon Dorbolo sees connections between the teaching of writing, his philosophy pedagogy, and the uses of instructional technology. When he began at OSU in 1987, Jon found that students in his introductory philosophy course were bored with the content, so he began assessing students' philosophical interests and assigning readings based on those interests. Some students read Plato and Thomas Hobbes while others read St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. His goal to enhance the students' learning experience came with an exhausting paperwork load. Through what he described as "pure happenstance," Jon realized he could use an early form of the web called Mosaic to deal with the paperwork problem. By 1994, he was teaching his philosophy course completely online. Jon continues to teach online while working with TAC to improve the use of technology at OSU. The WIC team recently sat down with Jon to discuss teaching writing online and using technology to teach visual literacy. What follows are excerpts from a longer interview.

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### Jon Dorbolo, Associate Director of TAC, Oregon State University

### Education

Ph.D. - Philosophy, University of Oregon, 1987

B.A. - Psychology and Philosophy, University of Delaware, 1980

WIC Faculty Seminar, 1999

Current Courses: ALS 199 – Special Topics: future.tech; PHL 201 – Introduction to Philosophy

**Favorite Writer:** William S. Burroughs. He's a writer who takes language very seriously and tries to engage with it on a social level. Burroughs' writing process included taking different existing texts, cutting them up, and assembling new paragraphs, which would create completely different meanings.

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### WIC and TAC Connections

**WIC**: Can you talk about the connections between TAC and WIC?

**Jon**: Technology Across the Curriculum owes its heritage to WIC. When we started developing TAC, we called it something else completely. The idea was to develop system-wide faculty support for technology. We tried different ways of going about it, but we were developing this out of the blue. We had to pitch the idea during a budget crisis. I remember WIC Director Vicki Tolar Burton had returned from a writing conference and heard about a TAC program at George Mason University. She said it sounded kind of like what we're trying to do and that TAC might be a good name. I thought Writing Intensive Curriculum and Technology Across

the Curriculum were similar concepts. We made Technology Across the Curriculum to focus on aspects that were commonplace to all disciplines. So, in that sense, we were modeled after WIC. Vicki was one of the first champions of our project.

**WIC**: Is there still collaboration going on?

**Jon**: Yes. Since then, we've worked with WIC to help develop their technology capabilities. We've also had newsletter articles on using Word and PDF as writing tools, and we get technology into WIC as Vicki sees appropriate.

### Writing in the Disciplines: Content and Structure

**WIC**: You mentioned earlier that your use of technology helped you individualize course content. How does this work in your philosophy course?

**Jon**: [In PHL 210] the content is geared to each group. Typically, the activities involve interacting with other people, posing problems to them, and getting into a discussion. Students bring those interactions back as data and compare that to what they have been reading. Then they give an account. This becomes a basis for comparison and analysis.

**WIC**: How does the analysis work?

**Jon**: Well, I'm more interested in them being able to identify cases of the same thing. They would read a theory—say egoism—and then watch a presidential debate to try to recognize an egoist argument being made. I want them to see that philosophy isn't just an abstract thing.

**WIC**: What writing difficulties do your philosophy students face?

**Jon**: I've learned that students who have never done philosophy before are confronted with a number of challenges. The first is the vocabulary. All of us know that if you enter a different discipline from your own, the vocabulary sounds strange. We very seldom give our students the vocabulary to start, especially when giving them a writing assignment.

Now, you two teach writing. I teach writing to a degree, but really I'm using writing to teach something else. What I've come to understand is students get stuck when they have to write in a structure they don't understand. They've never written this way before. Each discipline has its own writing format. Then they struggle with the content. It's alien to them—what do you mean we're thinking about thinking? When you're confronted with both not knowing the form and not knowing the content, you have almost no way into the writing. I've learned to at least take control of the format. Then they can fill in the content. An example of this from the WIC faculty seminar is the rhetorical précis, which I've used for years. The format is very systematic, but the content is absolutely open. The form actually liberates students' ideas because they're not hung up on it.

### Writing Online

**WIC**: What have you noticed as particular challenges students face when writing online?

**Jon**: Learning to write for the web, with in mind that a person will be reading from the computer screen, is challenging because you have to write with concision. It's not hard for someone to learn to write with concision if they put their mind to it. The difficulty is doing that without losing depth. How do you write a web page so the set of relationships is still available to the person?

**WIC**: How can we teach web writers to keep this depth?

**Jon**: I've been involved for some time with trying to look at links between pages, or content, as conceptual relationships. An example of something that's linking content rudimentarily well is Wikipedia. It's hard to go to a Wikipedia page and not link onto something. It's one of the few places you can find with several references. If there are not enough references, the page is flagged.

One classroom activity is to have students write and edit Wikipedia pages. Of course, all of our students can edit Wikipedia pages. But, if we give students an assignment in which they find a Wikipedia page that's lacking—in reference or veracity—and edit it, that's an interesting way of writing online.

**WIC**: Are there other forms of online writing that you have incorporated in your courses?

**Jon**:One example is chat writing. If people are chat writing online, is there a way to use chat in an informed, critical, and elegant fashion? Is there really good chat writing? For example, I have my students read Plato in dialogue form. My students struggle with the dialogue. They find it very difficult to read, so I would have them write a dialogue. I remember one fellow writing a Platonic dialogue in chat with a friend. He took the chat transcript, edited it, and turned it in. It was remarkable. I gave it back and said this was the most sophisticated chat I had seen. Not only is writing happening in this iterative fashion between individuals, it's simultaneously many individuals at once. It's a different kind of writing. Yet, I think any kind of writing could be good writing if we applied our principles of good writing to it. This includes chat writing.

### Ownership of Writing and the Web

**WIC**: Can you say something about issues of ownership online and teaching writing?

**Jon**: The history of text has been a progression towards the individual ownership of the means of production. Now, it's difficult for the system to manage this sense of property because everyone is a video producer. All you have to do is grab a video online, mix it, and put it back. An emphasis of writing instruction for a long time has been about having your own voice. [Jon discusses making mash-up videos as an example of having your own voice]. Teaching people the possibilities of producing their voice with elegance, responsibility, and clarity is more important now than it maybe ever has been.

**WIC**: Can you give us an example of reproducing something to produce a new voice?

**Jon**: The rhetorical moments that have the greatest power in our history have done that kind of revision and redaction found in mash-up videos. Think of Barack Obama's big speech that got him elected 4 years ago, "Yes We Can." He's directly referencing the Declaration of Independence and pulling fragments of it into his speech. If you take pre-existing sources and re-phrase them with different intent, then they have their original power along with new power.

**WIC**: Barack Obama even called from past texts visually as well. He was constantly being compared to Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy.

**Jon**: Martin Luther King was channeling Moses. In a sense, the idea of a socially embedded and interwoven textual conversation is in all of our writing, too. If you are going to write at a scholastic level or communicate to your culture, you're going to embed it in somebody else's work.

### Visual Literacy

**WIC**: This might be a good moment to transition to visual literacy because one thing we are talking about is a nexus between textual elements and video elements. WIC teachers tell us that integrating visuals into text is a challenge for students. We hear that TAC is developing a program to address that challenge.

**Jon**: Right now, TAC is developing a visual literacy education program. Using visuals in writing is a way of depicting relationships that readers are not able to pick up from the text. For example, my students struggle with seeing relationships between parts of a text. They read through a philosophical essay and don't see relationships between the paragraphs, sentences, or concepts.  In trying to get at these relationships, using concept mapping and mind mapping as a visual means enables us to show explicitly relationships between parts.

This makes me think of PowerPoint. PowerPoint is so ineffective for many people because the default is to use bullets and bullets are a misguiding depiction of relationship. TAC had a client come to us one time and ask for PowerPoint help. He had the history of his discipline, the major contributors, and the major theories in his presentation. Every page had bullet points. If you do it in this way, everything appears like it has the same form of relationship. Whereas if you make the history a timeline, you can clearly see the historical moments happen along the line. Compare that to an organizational tree of the important contributors. No one would mistake the relationships represented there for the relationships represented on the timeline. Yet done as bullets, you couldn't tell them apart. I fear that when we use bullets, we lead people to think there is only one form of relationship. One thing to do is open up the range of relationships, which can be done visually.

**WIC**: We hear this term "Death by PowerPoint." Can you explain what this term means?

**Jon**: "Death by PowerPoint" comes out of business. PowerPoint was designed initially for Microsoft Office to increase business productivity. It was not designed for education. Death by PowerPoint means a series of slides that fail to communicate their ideas, so they have lost the meaning (that's the death part). Here at Oregon State, undergraduates talk about PowerPoint karaoke. This refers to the instructor standing with his or her back to the class reading slides of text. Very often, this is text taken from the book.

TAC is looking at doing something completely different with lecture visuals than delivering text. We're working really hard to provide our teaching and learning community with modalities of projection that support the learning environment and support teaching in ways different than just delivering the text. We have webinars, workshops, and consultations designed around that major goal.

**WIC**: What do you see as the biggest recent changes in TAC?

**Jon**: We just opened the faculty collaboration zone on the third floor of Waldo Hall, next to TAC, for faculty to come together and use. I'm also excited about the way in which the research function of TAC is rapidly growing. TAC continually researches the technologies we use and implement. We've recently re-located our offices next to the Center for Teaching and Learning to build a relationship with CTL. The goal is to align the pedagogy supported by CTL and the technology supported by TAC into one single process.

**WIC**: Thanks, Jon, for sharing your experience and ideas with the WIC faculty.

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### 'Change Three Things': WIC Seminar Faculty Revise the Teaching of Writing

By Zach Pajak

The Fall 2012 WIC Faculty Seminar had aboard an astonishing group of instructors.  An especially warm and communal group, their eager nature helped us chart an impressive richness of insights for what is possible in WIC courses and the writing classroom.  In short, their students are lucky to have them, and they helped make the WIC seminar a lively learning experience.

This year, WIC Director Vicki Tolar Burton closed the last seminar by asking participants to each identify and share three things they plan to change or experiment with in their teaching as a result of taking the seminar.  Many participants responded that they are already implementing their newly-learned WIC-based approaches to teaching. Here are some of their responses:

Finally, we would like to recognize and thank all of the 2012-13 WIC Faculty Seminar participants for their enthusiasm and investment in promoting writing across the disciplines:

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**Taking Notes on Your Mobile Device**

By Uta Hussong-Christian and Stefanie Buck

Mobile devices like tablets and smartphones are awesome! You can surf the web and read a book and check your email and do so many other fun things to distract you from your work. They can, however, also be very productive tools. In addition to apps like Pages (word processing app) and Keynote (presentation app) there are a range of apps to help you do your research. As researchers, we read many journal articles in the PDF format and we want to take notes on what we read and highlight certain key passages.  Decimating the tree population so that you can print out and mark-up all the articles you want is not a very environmentally friendly option. A smart phone is great for reading the latest novel as you wait for the bus in the pouring rain, but reading PDFs is next to impossible. The Tablet is a much better choice not only because of the screen size but also the apps that let you manage your research and take notes on what you are reading. So here are two apps that let you do exactly that: GoodReader (http://www.goodiware.com/goodreader.html) and iAnnotate (http://www.branchfire.com/).

While iAnnotate is available for both Apple and Android devices, GoodReader is currently only available for Apple devices. In addition to robust annotation and highlighting features for OCR documents, freehand notes can be added to non-OCR documents. Both apps allow for file syncing to multiple online cloud file storage services like Dropbox or Box (among others), and access to WebDAV servers is also possible. Because files opened in either of these apps are stored locally on the tablet device, constant connectivity to a wireless or data network is not required for productivity. So whether you are flying across the country, sitting in the passenger seat on the driving commute to Corvallis or waiting at the doctor's/dentist's office, you can be reading and taking notes. One small downside to both apps is that they are not free. However, the $9.99 for iAnnotate and $4.99 for GoodReader really does seem like a small price to pay for the huge boost in mobile productivity.  Happy annotating!

Don't forget that the OSU Libraries website is available for mobile devices (http://m.library.oregonstate.edu/). You can conduct your research, search the library catalog, and get research assistance all on your mobile device. And then annotate away!

**Re-Launching Departmental Writing Guides**

By Allen Sprague

As a follow-up to our spring 2012 individual conversations with faculty in the twelve departments that have developed a writing guide for their students, WIC recently hosted a lunch for faculty interested in updating and/or increasing usage of their guides. The lunch conversation focused on how the guides can most effectively address student writing needs within the disciplines. Attendees mentioned several challenges that the guides might address in a revision:

Attendees brainstormed ways of addressing these challenges:

The biggest challenge attendees identfied is finding time and people to update the writing guides. Moving forward, the WIC programs will be looking for resources to support the revision of the OSU Departmental Writing Guides.

**New Baccalaureate Core Website: Bookmark It!**

OSU finally has an informative website dedicated to the Baccalaureate Core.  With an abundance of information and tools for students, faculty, advisors, and families, you will want to make this site a favorite.  Especially check out the brand new Bacc Core Playlists, which are themed lists of courses (mostly Perspectives and Synthesis) inviting students to shape their own Bacc Core experience.  Faculty who would like their Bacc Core Perspectives or Synthesis course added to a playlist should email vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu indicating the features of the course that make it a good fit for a particular playlist.

In winter term, the Bacc Core Committee will be hosting 2 Assessment Workshops especially for teachers of WIC courses that will be undergoing Category Review by the Bacc Core Committee in 2013. The 2013 review includes all WIC courses in the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences, Business, and Public Health and Human Sciences. The workshops will be held on the following dates:

Reminder: Keep a copy of outstanding Fall term WIC papers to nominate for WIC Culture of Writing Awards in the Disciplines during Spring term.

**CONTACT INFO**