Winter 2011 - Print Version

Teaching With Writing: The WIC Newsletter

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Pre/Views: Clarity, Strong Content, Depth of Insight...
Here are the top ten qualities identified by this group:

1. Clarity

2. Strong, accurate content

3. Depth of insight

4. Effective organization

5. Ideas fully developed

6. Appropriate to the assignment

7. Conciseness

8. Fully documented

9. Appropriate for audience

10. Effective sentence fluency

For the whole list, click this link. What are your top ten?

All faculty may have a chance soon to contribute their rankings as part of an upcoming review of writing in the Baccalaureate Core. What are your top five, top ten? How would your students know that? How does your feedback and reward system reinforce what you value? If it doesn't, should it?

One way departments can reward good writing is by nominating an undergraduate in the major for the WIC Culture of Writing Award in the discipline. Check out information on the award in this issue. Save your best student writing from winter term!

Lisa Ede is a champion of excellence in the teaching of writing. By interviewing her in this issue, we mark and celebrate her thirty years at OSU, years in which she has made extraordinary contributions to student writing on this campus and years in which she has become a nationally known scholar in the field of Rhetoric and Writing. Lisa was the first director of WIC at OSU and has always been a friend of the program, as she led the Center for Writing and Learning and partnered often with WIC to promote strong writing for our students. This conversation between Lisa Ede, Travis Margoni (WIC Assistant Coordinator), and Michael Shum (WIC GTA) conveys Lisa's passion for the teaching of writing. I hope you will feel inspired toward the better teaching of writing, as I was when I read it. Thanks, Lisa!

Also in this issue you'll find ideas on peer review adapted from a paper by OSU graduate Student Matt Hagan. When Matt is not studying American literature and writing his thesis on Cormack McCarthy, he teaches WR 121, where he is always looking for better models for peer review.

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Lisa Ede: Reflection on 30 Years of Writing and Rhetoric
Travis Margoni: Would you reflect for a moment on how writing was taught thirty years ago when you first entered the field? You've surely experienced some changes.

Lisa Ede: I was thinking about when I was a graduate student TA in 1973 and 1974. At that time, the teaching of writing was quite often decontextualized and form-oriented. It was during the time I was a TA and a beginning assistant professor that attention to the writing process first developed, so one of the things I've seen over the course of my career is a focus on the writing process going from being something new and exciting and even controversial to something that became dominant and part of our scholarly and theoretical assumptions and practices.

Many of the practices that were developed initially in first-year writing have become institutionalized, not only in first-year and advanced writing courses but also in writing across the curriculum. If you look at our (first year) writing program, for instance, or if you look at the requirements for WIC courses, process is central, and informal writing-to-learn activities, revision, and peer response are all accepted practices. So I think the

teaching of writing has been very significantly transformed. Currently, there is much more attention to socio-political and other kinds of contexts among teachers of writing. It would have never occurred to me as a graduate student or a new assistant professor to think of using the term "literacy" in terms of the teaching of writing—literacy not just in the popular general sense of basic writing skills, but the richer sense of literacy as a socially-, politically-, economically-, culturally-constructed kind of activity. So that is another significant change.

But the writing process really served to bring a lot of unity and to create a very strong sense of consensus about how writing should be taught.

TM: What shifts have you seen in your scholarship since you began working in rhetoric and composition studies, and how has your research changed or evolved?

LE: When I first began publishing, and when Andrea (Lunsford) and I published "Audience Addressed, Audience Invoked," which is our most reprinted work, I think as a scholar I had the really wonderful sense of being part of a fairly coherent field where the majority of scholars were working on issues that were related primarily to the teaching of writing. As the field has become more professionalized —I see this as both a kind of benefit and a loss—it has become as specialized as any field. So there are people doing highly theoretical work, and people doing work in digital and online literacies, and people doing work in the history of rhetoric and people doing work in all of these areas. There is an astonishing richness in that, but sometimes I miss the strong shared focus on the teaching of writing. It's quite possible to be successful as a scholar in the field and not teach any writing classes, or teach only graduate students in high-level courses.

Having said that, I have to say in my own research I've become engaged with feminist studies and critical and cultural studies, so I think that my own research follows and tracks this kind of specialization. In the 1980s, I was certainly a very strong feminist. Nevertheless, at that time I wouldn't have looked to feminist studies for insight into my work on the teaching of writing or what I was about as a scholar. By the 1990s and beyond, I was reading a lot of work in feminist theory and other areas that was profoundly important to me. But I have tried in my own work to keep pedagogy and the teaching of writing at the center of my work as a scholar.

TM: Have you seen shifts in your own pedagogy during this time?

LE: I actually have an example for you. I published a book called Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location (2004), and one of the things that it tries to do is to look at what the field has gained or lost as it has become professionalized, particularly in the context of scholars who are authorized to speak for the majority of teachers of writing who lack that kind of scholarly authority. Situating Composition also raises questions about what constitutes progress in a field committed to pedagogical as well as scholarly action. In one of the chapters, I actually retrieved and reviewed every course description for every writing class I taught at OSU from 1980 to the present. This was a profoundly humbling experience. My first course description said simply: "This course will focus upon the fundamentals of expository prose. Although we will spend some class time reviewing basic language skills, the main emphasis will be on the more complex art of essay writing." That course description now seems hopelessly traditional and out of date. That was in 1980.

Compare that with the first paragraph of my most recent course description:

What does it mean to be a writer? What is the relationship between the languages we speak and write in our home communities and the writing we do at school or on the job? How do writers learn to function in diverse (and sometimes conflicting) communities? What does it mean to have authority as a writer—to be considered literate in a particular community—and how do writers gain (and maintain) such authority? What role do textual conventions, and the assumptions underlying them, play in this process? What options do writers have if they wish to resist these conventions?

Obviously, this reflects a much more complex understanding of writing and the teaching of writing, and this is just the first paragraph of a longer course description.

TM: Stark contrast.

LE: I think this also connects with WIC. If I think about my pedagogy broadly, not just in first-year writing classes or advanced writing classes (i.e., WR 512—Current Composition Theory or ENG 495/595—Language, Technology, and Culture), I teach them all basically the same way, in the sense that I'm very concerned about student affect and emotion and their engagement with the text. I try to think about the course structure from the perspective of my students' experiences and interests. I try to build in opportunities for revision and for long-term development of and commitment to a project over time. We can't teach all classes like WIC classes, but in terms of thinking in powerful and productive ways about student learning, WIC asks us to think from the perspective of students but also of the discipline too. When I'm teaching WR 512, I want the students to be engaged and committed, but I also want them to interact with the scholarly works in my discipline. It's a mutual negotiation.

Michael Shum: Have you seen any shifts in the way that students, over the past 30 years, have changed? Are they more receptive to this kind of pedagogy? Or, generally, are they more interested in writing, or less interested?

LE: Students now generally come to the university with an understanding of the writing process and with the expectation that they will do a draft and they will revise. They in general have experienced peer response, and so, in comparison with thirty years ago, that's a good thing. But I have lived and worked through at least two purported huge literacy crises, and I really haven't seen any significant changes in what students bring to the two universities I've worked in—SUNY Brockport and OSU.

My sense also is that the hardest thing about teaching writing is getting students to move beyond one of two views: first, that writing involves filling in a form that somebody else devised that doesn't make any sense, like lab reports or the comparison-and-contrast essay; and second, the notion that writing involves "psyching out" the teacher, which in some cases I am sorry to say it does in the academy. The hardest thing is getting students to understand that they can have something to say, that they can use writing as a means of learning, that they can use writing as a means of expressing themselves.

Currently, in the academy and in the public at large, there is this notion that Oh these students are writing online; they're twittering; they don't know how to do academic writing. I see this as somewhat alarmist and think we can actually use the writing they do on-line to build bridges. We can get them thinking about the writing they do on-line and how they tweet to a friend differently than they e-mail a professor. So I haven't seen these significant declines in students' literacy. I think the challenge in teaching writing is the basic challenge of education: to get students to care about their education and not just think: I want to get a degree, get a good job, and make a lot of money.

TM: Can we turn to talking a little bit about your own writing? In The Academic Writer, you say there are three types of composers: heavy planners, heavy revisers, and sequential composers. Which one are you?

LE: If you don't mind, I'll say a little bit about how I developed that taxonomy. When the writing process was first developed, there was often, unfortunately, an overly-rigid application of the writing process. The notion was that everyone would benefit from free-writing; everyone would benefit from multiple revisions. One of the influences of the Writing Center on me, and also my own teaching, was that I became very aware that some students are not natural free-writers and that some students do a lot of the work of writing mentally, rather than on paper or at the computer. In the Writing Center we see clearly that students approach writing in different ways. I wanted my textbook to acknowledge this diversity, so I actually made up those categories for the very first edition of Work In Progress, which was published in 1989. Interestingly, no one has ever challenged these categories—to me at least. As for my own composing preference, I am a sequential composer: I spend roughly equal amounts of time planning, drafting, and revising.

TM: Has that changed over time? Have you worked your way into being a sequential composer, or were you born a sequential composer?

LE: No, actually that's very interesting that you say that. When I was an undergraduate, I wrote just painfully slowly and was a perfectionist and in that sense, I was a heavy reviser. But when I became a professor and I needed to publish, I did a kind of self-study of my own writing process. And I discovered at least two things: 1) I was revising way, way too early and trying to perfect my writing as I went, which did not allow me to develop my ideas in a productive way; and 2) I was, surprisingly enough, too disciplined; I wrote too long, often writing myself into a deep, dark writing block. The most concrete thing that I learned from my self-study is how to tell when to stop working in any given writing session. I learned to end a drafting session before I had written myself into a block and when I could still articulate the most important questions I needed to think about before writing further. Do I need more evidence here, or do I need a transition? Do I need to provide an example? I don't always do this now, because I can do it mentally, but for many years, I would write these kinds of question out. That would be the last thing I would write. One of the things I discovered was if I posed these questions to myself and went to bed, I would often get up the next morning and know the answer.

TM: You and Andrea have a new book coming out called Writing Together: Collaboration in Theory and Practice. Is that in the spring?

LE: Actually, it's coming out in the fall (of 2011). Bedford St. Martin's, who publishes both Andrea's and my textbooks, has a professional series where they publish scholarly work, including collections of previously published work by various authors. Our book is part of that series, but it's unusual in that it is about seventy percent previously published work and thirty percent new work. The book's five sections focus on our experiences writing together, on audience, on rhetorics and feminisms, on collaborative writing, and on writing centers. Each of these sections ends with a new essay where we look back at our scholarly work and try to say something about the arc of that work.

These new essays are an effort at self-critique, something that has been important to Andrea and me. The new essay in the audience section looks at the question of audience in our current age of new digital and online literacies. We also have a new essay where we write more frankly than we ever have about our own experience as co-authors, what we've had to negotiate and what some of those issues are. One of the things that came to us when we were working on this collection was that our two most substantial bodies of work— on audience and collaboration —have, thanks to contemporary on-line social media, more or less merged. They now seem like one project, where you can't think about audience without thinking about collaboration.

TM: That's a very powerful point.

LE: The other thing that we discovered working on this is that Andrea and I both—I have thirty years of writing center work and she has twelve years directing the writing center at Stanford— realized that all our scholarly commitments are profoundly embodied in writing center work, which is collaborative, which questions the status quo, and which is open to feminist perspectives that challenge cultural and academic hierarchies and norms. When we originally conceived of the collection, we didn't have a section on writing centers. But that in a way this is where all the work comes together, the experience of writing center work, so that's the final section.

TM: Well, final thoughts on what interests you for future scholarship?

LE: Right now, in the past year I've revised my textbook, which is coming out in December 2010, and Andrea and I've worked for two years on this collection, so I'm at that point writers get at where my first response is "Oh

no! Not another book! I'm not even thinking about that." I am grateful, though, to find myself with new interests. If you had asked me ten years ago if I would be teaching a course called Language, Culture and Technology and would be studying Facebook, YouTube, and on-line literacies, I just couldn't have imagined it. One thing I especially love about this topic and course is that my students are in many respects the experts—not necessarily in scholarship but in digital and online practices—so I'm always learning from them. That has certainly been the most rewarding aspect of my work as both a scholar and a teacher.

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Three Approaches to Peer Review
While there's no one right way to conduct a peer review, considering multiple methods might inform instructors of ways in which peer review might work best in their courses.

Structured response is a common approach to conducting peer review, providing students with a set of criteria or a checklist of questions that guide response. An instructor might use PQP, or Praise-Question-Polish, in which students begin with positive responses, move to a problem they identify in their peer's writing, and then suggest a plan of action for the recipient to implement into their revisions. Gloria A. Neubert and Sally J. McNelis (1990) suggest that such a structuring device for response can help novice writers "focus on the task at hand as well as maintain a positive attitude toward the critique process" (52). It should be noted that, as Mara Holt suggests in "The Value of Peer Criticism," worksheets and checklists may be approached by students in the same way they might approach a short answer test (384). To avoid answers that are too brief and general, it is important to provide structured response cues that focus on both the goal of the assignment and an individual writer's or responder's concerns.

 Full class and small group workshop models for peer review are common in a variety of writing courses as well. While workshop models are more traditionally associated with creative writing, D.R. Ransdell, in "Class Workshops: An Alternative to Peer-Group Review," argues that workshops can be a useful approach in other writing courses (32). Workshops are typically a group setting in which verbal and written critique is given; it is dependent upon students' exchanging drafts in a previous class. The advantage of this setting, notes Ransdell, rests in how the "public platform… nudges students into working harder because they have more at stake" (36). He suggests that his students "might not care what I think, but since they don't want to seem unskilled in front of their peers, they work hard to create strong drafts" (36). Work-shopping a piece in front of the whole class or in front of smaller groups has the added advantage of creating a more public audience and giving students a sense of audience that goes beyond the instructor. However, instructors should also take into account how the workshop might intimidate some writers and how it might foster a sense of competition rather than cooperation, which is what collaborative learning and critical pedagogy often resist.

Finally, a teacher might choose a cumulative approach to peer review that extends the process of responding beyond one class period in a way that lets peer review become a regular focus of classroom practice. One example of this is given in Holt's "The Value of Peer Criticism." Using suggestions from Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, Holt's model for peer reviewing expands peer response to a series of take home essay responses that can last up to a whole term or semester. Holt's model asks students to respond to each other via a combination of essays describing a peer's paper, essays believing and doubting the writer's material, as described by Elbow, and directive response essays that make suggestions for revision. Holt promotes this "cumulative approach [because it] gives students a chance to learn the various stages of the peer-critique process slowly enough both to understand it and to adjust emotionally to its increasing complexity" (387). A cumulative model like Holt's has the added benefit of allowing for the time and effort it takes to developed in-depth responses to writing, and, most importantly, it offers students a chance to fill various roles as a responders, which may allow students space to identify and refine their individual strengths as responders. Such a model, while the most promising in its theoretical consistency, has the drawback of taking more time than may be possible within the overall workload of a given course.

The most practical peer review approach for faculty across the curriculum depends on the needs of a course, the goals of an assignment, the size of a class, and the amount of time an instructor is willing and able to devote to peer review. Adapting a proven method of peer review to a specific course is always recommended.

Works Cited

Holt, Mara. "The Value of Written Peer Criticism." College Composition and Communications. 43.3 (1992): 384-392. MLA International Bibliography. Web. 25 October 2010.

Neubert, Gloria A. and Sally J. McNelis. "Peer Response: Teaching Specific Revision Suggestions." English Journal. 79.5 (1990): 52-56. JSTOR. Web. 2 November 2010.

Ransdell, D.R. "Class Workshops: An Alternative to Peer-Group Review." Teaching English in the Two Year College. 29.1 (2001): 32-42. ERIC. Web. 6 November 2010.

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WIC Spring Lunches 2011
"Interpretive Methods: Connecting Your Students to Your Content"

Friday, April 15

Bob Lillie, Geosciences

Bob Lillie will share his ideas on teaching students to interpret disciplinary content for the public. Professor Lillie is interested in presenting to the public in parks, museums, and other free-choice learning settings. He is the

author of numerous books, including *Parks and Plates: A Geology of our National Parks, Monuments, and Seashores* (2005).

Waldo 121, 12-1 p.m.

"Collaborative Writing: What Does it Look Like, How Does it Happen?"

Friday, April 29

Liz Delf, English

John Parmigiani, MIME

Collaboration almost always sounds good in theory. But how do we make it happen? Why do students resist? How can the workload be evenly distributed? Liz Delf and John Parmigiani share their experiences leading group projects in Business Writing courses and Engineering capstone courses.

Waldo 121, 12-1 p.m.

"Ethics and Writng Across the Curriculum"

Friday, May 6

Claudia Ingham, Animal Sciences

Janet Tate, Physics

Instructors typically agree that students must have an ethical foundation in any discipline, but we may not specifically address ethical aspects of writing in academia and the workplace. Janet Tate and Claudia Ingham join us to share their insights on incorporating an understanding of ethics in WIC courses.

Waldo 121, 12-1 p.m.

"Adaptable Strategies for Successful Peer Review"

Friday, May 20

Barb Lachenbruch (Wood Science and Engineering), Travis Margoni (WIC, English), and Mike Shum (WIC, English) lead an exploration of the various forms of peer review, a discussion on how peer review can be adapted to meet the needs of any writing course—even online.

Waldo 121, 12-1 p.m.

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WIC Culture of Writing Awards
Several departments appoint selection committees for their writing awards. In Fisheries and Wildlife, for example, students in all courses with a major writing assignment are eligible for the WIC Culture of Writing Award. The department chair forwards the Culture of Writing Award announcement by e-mail to all faculty, and reminds instructors to save the best papers. The selection is made by a subcommittee appointed by the department's Resident Instruction Committee, and the award is given at the Department Spring Fete, one day before graduation.

While several departments do not have any written, formal criteria for the award, Fisheries and Wildlife faculty consider three main areas: style and format, appropriate for a professional journal; content, integration, and critical thinking; and grammar.

Please encourage your department to participate in the WIC Culture of Writing Awards program, and contact WIC Director Vicki Tolar Burton at vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu if you intend to give an award in your discipline.

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WIC Faculty Seminar Participants
   » Terry Adams (Teacher & Counselor Education)
   » Edward Campbell (Naval Science)
   » Fina Carpena-Mendez (Anthropology)
   » Ruben Casas (English/Ethnic Studies)
   » Marisa Chappell (History)
   » Finn John (New Media)
   » Yevgeniy Kovchegov (Mathematics)
   » Barb Lachenbruch (Wood Science)
   » Misty Lambert (Agriculture)
   » Lori McGraw (Human Development)
   » John Morris (Business)
   » Lech Muszynski (Wood Science)
   » Jennifer Parke (Crop and Soil Science)
   » Sarina Rodrigues (Psychology)
   » Dan Stone (Economics)
   » Holly Swisher (Mathematics)
   » Mark Walsh (Mathematics)

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