Upcoming WIC Events

Spring 2008

Friday, April 18:
Adding Exhibits and Graphics to the WIC Experience
12-1 p.m., Waldo 121

Friday, May 2:
The Google Generation Does Research: Student Proficiencies for Information Literacy
12-1 p.m., Waldo 121

Friday, May 9:
Change Five Things: Strategies for Teaching Revising, Editing, and Proofreading
12-1 p.m., Waldo 121

Wednesday, May 21:
Using Writing in Content Courses
12-3 p.m., Kidder 274

Friday, June 6:
Writing Across Borders: A Discussion with International Faculty Members
12-1 p.m., Room TBA

In This Issue

Information literacy update

Oregon educators develop eight competencies for students transferring into universities

Travis Margoni
WIC GTA

Nearly two decades ago, the American Library Association's Presidential Committee on Information Literacy reported that, "Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn." The Committee asserted that in order to be informate literate, "a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

Since that time, information literacy has grown to become a focal point—however broad—for curriculum development and learning outcomes. The Oregon State University Strategic Plan, announced in 2004, noted that "at no time in our history has the ability to absorb, understand, and evaluate information been so important."

The OSU Valley Library adopted its Undergraduate Information Literacy Competencies in August 2005, stating that a student with competence in information literacy: I. Recognizes when information is needed; II. Finds information efficiently; III. Learns from information gathered; IV. Uses information effectively and ethically.

Expanding the identified competencies was the goal of the Oregon Information Literacy Summit II, held at OSU on Nov. 16, 2007. The Summit included community college, university, and college humanities faculty, writing faculty, librarians and information technologists, coming together to discuss student needs in the area of information literacy. Following the summit, educators continued to work on a list of proficiencies for students ready to move into upper-division coursework.

Summit participants concluded that students who are information literate and ready to begin upper-division coursework can:

1. Identify gaps in their knowledge and recognize when they need information.

2. Find information efficiently and effectively, using appropriate research tools and search strategies.

3. Evaluate and select information using appropriate criteria.

Pre/Views: Come for lunch and learning

Vicki Tolar Burton
WIC Director

In a recent conversation, WIC instructor Dave Gobeli (College of Business) made the case that using effective exhibits (also called "graphics" in some disciplines) should be a part of instruction in Writing Intensive classes. Exhibits are an important part of Dave's course, BA 469, Strategic Management. I agree that students must learn to recognize when a graphic is needed, design it effectively, and say something sensible about it within the written text.

Drawing on his years of experience in industry and teaching, Gobeli kicks off the WIC spring lunch series on Friday, April 18, with his presentation, "Adding Exhibits and Graphs to the WIC Experience." Details for sign-up and for the whole series are on page 4. The spring lunch seminar series is free and open to all faculty.

"Change Five Things," on May 9, is a response to faculty requests for more strategies for teaching students to revise and edit. In a season of change, this seminar uses "change" as a verb with objects. Change what? We'll suggest many elements students can change to improve a piece of writing.

The lunch on May 2 focuses on the new Oregon Information Literacy proficiencies and asks this question: What if every upper division student at OSU, including transfers from community colleges, were proficient at certain identified research tasks? What other proficiencies might be added in the WIC course? How would our courses change?

Two other special events are

Photo by Travis Margoni

Educators from colleges and universities around Oregon met at OSU on Nov. 16 for the Information Literacy Summit II. Their work led to the Information Literacy Proficiencies.

Proficiencies, continued

Continued from page 1

4. Treat research as a multi-stage, recursive learning process.

5. Ethically and legally use information and information technologies.

6. Recognize safety issues involved with information sharing and information technologies.

7. Manipulate and manage information, using appropriate tools and technologies.

8. Create, produce, and communicate understanding of a subject through synthesis of relevant information.

The proficiencies were compiled and presented by OSU WIC Program Director Vicki Tolar Burton at the Feb. 8 meeting of the Oregon Writing and English Advisory Committee (OWEAC), a statewide curricular organization.

Valley Library Head of Reference Services Ruth Vondracek helped to organize the Information Literacy Summit and is looking to extend the project in the future. "[The information literacy proficiencies] give both community colleges and four-year colleges and universities something that they can take back to their campuses and say, here are the things we want to see in students heading into different areas of study," she said. Developing a means of assessing whether or not students meet these competencies will be left to colleges and universities, should they wish to do that.

At OSU, the Valley Library collaborates with the Center for Teaching and Learning in "Research Assignments that Work," a class offered once each year, in designing assignments around information literacy competencies. Vondracek said additional courses or forums may be announced in the future.

OSU Composition Coordinator Sara Jameson said the WR 121 course has included an information literacy component since 2002, and the English Department has discussed how information literacy can be incorporated into all writing classes. "Information literacy is an essential component of our WR 121—not only 10 percent of the grade but also in all the assignments—understanding audience, credibility, etc.," she said.

While Vondracek said the English Department "has a natural affinity toward the writing and research," the larger goal is to "encourage these proficiencies across the curriculum."

Trendspotting: student errors examined

Travis Margoni
WIC GTA

Students these days don't write like they used to. In fact, they may write better. According to Andrea A. Lunsford and Karen Lunsford, students are writing "longer, more complex work for their college courses (more than twice as long, on average, as essays written in 1986)—without a significant increase in the rate of error."

In 2005 and 2006, the two professors—Andrea A. Lunsford, the Director of Rhetoric and Writing at Stanford, and Karen Lunsford, an associate professor of English at UC Santa Barbara—collected samples from first-year composition students and updated the 1986 research that led to a list of the 20 Most Common Errors made in composition courses, which was published in 1988.

Robert J. Connors and Andrea A. Lunsford collected 21,500+ papers from 300 first- and second-year composition instructors across the country, and analyzed "a carefully stratified sample of 3,000 randomly chosen papers," identifying the 20 most frequent errors across the sample in their 1988 *College Composition and Communication* article.

Since that time, the evolution of word processors with spell check has had a profound impact on student writing—so much that the number one error found in students' writing during 2005-2006 is the use of a *Wrong word*. In 1988, *Wrong word* was fourth on the list of 20 Most Common Errors. Lunsford and Lunsford explain: "First, with the help of technology, spelling errors have dramatically declined. But the study also found that wrong-word errors—for example, the kind that result when a student spells 'definitely' incorrectly and allows a spell-checker to change it to 'defiantly'—are the new number one error." This error also includes mistakes such as the common misuse of their/there/they're.

The former most common error is now number two on the list, *Missing comma after an introductory element*. An example of this type of error occurs when a comma is mistakenly left out following the word "class": *After class three students asked the professor why points were deducted for grammatical and mechanical errors.*

The third most common error on the new list was not noted at all on the 2006 list, *Incomplete or missing documentation*. Lunsford and Lunsford explain that this error is an indication that college students are doing more complex writing assignments that require documentation. "In 1986, no documentation mistakes appeared in the top twenty because students were writing personal narratives or were doing close readings of a literary text. Today, students are writing research-based essays and arguments, which demand at least some use of sources—and hence a completely understandable increase in errors related to the use of those sources."

Fourth on the revised list is *Vague pronoun reference*. As Andrea A. Lunsford explains in *Everyday Writer*, there are two types of mistakes under this category: one occurs when there are multiple words a pronoun might refer to; the second occurs "when the reference is to a word that is implied but not explicitly stated."

Here is an example of the first type of vague pronoun reference: *Before the student defended the instructor's claim in class, she felt they were unable to agree.* The vague "she" makes it unclear whether the instructor or the student felt they were unable to agree. The error can be corrected by replacing "she" with, for example, "Dr. Miller."

An example of the second type of pronoun error is as follows: *The student dropped the course after receiving a C on his paper. This is why he switched majors.* It is not clear whether the student switched majors because of the grade, or because he dropped the course.

Spelling errors are fifth on the new list, followed by *Mechanical error with a quotation*. For example, students often misplace a comma outside of a quotation mark: *One researcher called this finding "irrelevant", but it clearly highlights the impact of climate change.*

The seventh most common error is the *Unnecessary comma*, which speaks to the fact that many students may not fully understand the construction of complex sentences.

Unnecessary and missing capitalization is the eighth most common error, as students often confuse proper and common nouns. Indeed, it can be confusing that when referring to a specific committee on second reference, for example, the word should be treated as a proper noun. Correct usage is as follows: *She attended the OSU West Wing Service Committee's meeting last night. The Committee's next meeting will be held in two weeks.* A general reference to committee work would not be capitalized, and may be used as such in sentences preceding the word's treatment as a proper noun: *Jennifer's instructor assigned her to report on the work of a university committee.*

Missing word is the ninth most common error, followed by *Faulty sentence structure*. In the Spring issue of Teaching With Writing, we will address the second half of the updated list of 20 Most Common Errors.

Common Errors

1. Wrong word

2. Missing comma after an introductory element

3. Incomplete or missing documentation

4. Vague pronoun reference

5. Spelling (including homonyms)

6. Mechanical error with a quotation

7. Unnecessary comma

8. Unnecessary or missing capitalization

9. Missing word

10. Faulty sentence structure

WIC Spring Lunches

Friday, April 18

"Adding Exhibits and Graphics to the WIC Experience"
Dave Gobeli (College of Business)

Business Professor Dave Gobeli will discuss how he teaches students to design and integrate visuals/ exhibits in technical writing. *Waldo 121, 12-1 p.m.*

Friday, May 2

"The Google Generation Does Research: Student Proficiencies for Information Literacy"
Valley Library Librarians and Faculty

Faculty and librarians will gather to discuss the Oregon Information Literacy Proficiencies proposed as necessary for students to conduct research in upper division college courses. How might students who have these proficiencies be better WIC writers? (See story on page 1) *Waldo 121, 12-1 p.m.*

Friday, May 9

"Change Five Things: Strategies for Teaching Revising, Editing, and Proofreading"
Vicki Tolar Burton (WIC)

How do we teach revising skills? How do we get students to care about them? Vicki Tolar Burton will lead the discussion, which will include the twenty most frequent errors made by student writers. *Waldo 121, 12-1 p.m.*

Wednesday, May 21

"Using Writing in Content Courses: A Collaborative Workshop with OSU-Cascades Campus" (Teleconference)
Vicki Tolar Burton (WIC)

Meeting for 3 hours, seminar participants will learn effective ways to use writing in content courses. Discussions center on ways to use minimally graded writing to stimulate learning, ways to design compelling formal writing assignments and respond to them effectively, and ways to help students revise. In addition, the seminar gives faculty the opportunity to discuss teaching with colleagues from other departments and disciplines. Participants complete the seminar with many ideas for incorporating writing in their courses. *Kidder 274, 12-3 p.m.*

Friday, June 6

"Writing Across Borders: A Discussion with International Faculty Visitors"
Vicki Tolar Burton (WIC)

We will view the film "Writing Across Borders" along with guest faculty from Yemen and discuss issues of teaching writing to international students. The Yemeni visitors are here as part of a World Bank grant for development of teaching. *12-1 p.m. Room TBA*

Pre/Views, cont.

Continued from page 1 on the schedule—and all faculty are invited. On Wednesday, May 21, we will have a three hour collaborative tele-workshop with the faculty at Cascades Campus. For a short refresher/introduction to WIC strategies, please joins us (Kidder 274). We welcome Corvallis faculty, even if you can only come for an hour. Pizza at noon on both sides of the Cascades.

Finally, on Friday, June 6, WIC is hosting a screening of Writing Across Borders for both OSU faculty and Yemini faculty visiting OSU on a World Bank grant. The place for that event is tba. Time is noon to 1 p.m..

Free pizza at each event. Please make an e-mail reservation by 4 p.m. the day before the event: vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu. All are welcome to attend.

WIC Culture of Writing Awards

Instructors, please remember to save your best papers from winter term, and encourage your department to honor its best student writer with the 2008 WIC Culture of Writing Award in your discipline. Student winners receive $100—half of which is awarded by the WIC Program, and half from the department.

The name of the award is department specific; for example, the WIC Culture of Writing Award in Political Science. The award can be given for any paper written in an undergraduate course in the department, not only WIC courses.

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, with a May 15 deadline to submit 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.