The Future of Writing

The media theorist Marshall McLuhan once wrote: the age of writing has passed, we need a new metaphor. While the Campus Writing Program does not consider writing to be a past activity, it does recognize that we face new challenges in the age of new media when we teach writing. Students who leave the university find jobs where they engage with online communication, where they simultaneously work with visual and textual information, and where they have access to a variety of information they must navigate and sort through.

The overall challenge pedagogy faces is not learning the newest application or the most widely used application, but learning how to teach generalizable skills relevant to the 21st century: search, using visual and textual writing, collaborating in online spaces, making connections among disparate information, networking, and other related items.

Workshops

If you are interested in integrating more technology into your WI course or learning more about teaching revision, sign up for the CWP workshops at: https://etapps.missouri.edu/cwp/event
What is a blog? A blog – or weblog – is a writing space. Writers “post” entries that are organized by days as well as by keywords (tags) that the writer assigns to the post. Blogs allow for daily entries, the ability to link to other writings, and the ability to respond to other writings (in the body of a blog post as well as in the comments section of a post).

For several years, educators have been trying to figure out how to use blogs in their classrooms. Because blogs are writing spaces, Writing Intensive instructors might find them useful for teaching writing in specific disciplines.

If I read a blog from my discipline, what will I find? Will I find the same quality or introspection that I would find in a journal from my field? Will the conversation be at the level of a conference I attend? Maybe. Maybe not. Blogs are used for professional writing, but not always in the same way that we write for various professional outlets. That is not necessarily a bad thing. We want students to learn how to write for a variety of situations and contexts, the way we do as well. To be effective, blogs do not have to mimic our professional publications.

With blogs, students can learn a great deal about:
- The importance of daily writing (the best writers write often).
- How to respond to each other’s work and ideas (a key component of writing).
- How to give feedback through response (essential for teaching revision).
- How to share work with the instructor without waiting until the day the assignment is due (instructors and students can interact on the blog).
- How to be a part of or create a community of like-minded writers (there are many blogs on like-minded subjects).

In any given blog from your discipline, you will find writers engaging with a variety of ideas, texts, people, and other items. Academic Blogs - http://www.academicblogs.org/wiki/index.php - provides links to a number of academic blogs. Among these blogs, we can find many examples of disciplinary writing.

If I am in physics, for instance, and I read a physics blog, I will find:
- People reading articles – scholarly and popular – regarding physics and discussing them.
- People discussing the latest news/events in physics.
- People balancing their professional and personal lives.
- People sometimes not talking about physics at all.
These are all elements of a community of scholars. Scholars engage with a variety of ideas, sometimes directly relevant to their work at hand, sometimes not. These are also the “things” one engages within a given field. These are the “things” we teach students to engage with so that they may become more knowledgeable about their field and thus contribute to it.

While a blog may not replicate all disciplinary writing, it still can be used to teach students how to engage with activities relevant to disciplinary writing.

Blogs also teach students fundamental concepts regarding audience. While instructors should recognize privacy concerns (and blogs can be as public or as private as you want them to be), when students are aware that their work will be read by an audience, they spend more time paying attention to issues regarding organization, content, grammar, and style. To be taken seriously, they will realize, writers have to keep in mind that someone is reading their work.

You can find more about specific types of blogs at:
- Blogger.com – a free blogging service where the content is hosted with Blogger.
- Wordpress.com – a free blogging service where the content is hosted with Wordpress
- Wordpress.org – a free, downloadable blogging platform that you can install locally at MU.

The CWP can help you setup blogs for your classroom for personal or professional use. Contact the Director, Jeff Rice, for further information.

The University of Missouri hosts many blogs that feature student and employee writing:
- MyMissourian (http://mymissourian.com). Journalism students run this user contributed site.
- Interface (http://interface.missouri.edu/). MU’s Web Communications’ blog.
- Campus Writing Program (http://cwp.missouri.edu/). The Campus Writing Program’s website is a blog.
- The Missouri Review (http://www.missourireview.org/tmr-blog/). The prestigious literary magazine runs a blog.
- Live Wire (http://livewire.missouri.edu/). MU Web Communication’s blog on university life.
On May 1, 2009, The Campus Writing Program hosted the first ever 20/20 Awards. This award honors faculty who have taught 20 semesters of WI courses over 20 years at MU. Without the dedication and commitment to WI instruction that these faculty have demonstrated, the CWP would not be ranked among the nation’s best programs today. The CWP depends on faculty in order to deliver quality writing instruction to students throughout the curriculum. We are immensely appreciative of the faculty’s work over these years.

**20 Years / 20 Semesters of Teaching WI**

**20/20 Award Recipients**
- Greg Casey, Political Science
- Marilyn Coleman, HDFS
- Roger Cook, German
- Miriam Golomb, Biology
- Jean Ispa, HDFS
- John Kultgen, Philosophy
- Elaine Lawless, English
- Clarence Lo, Sociology
- Michael Porter, Communication
- Michael Ugarte, Spanish
- Randall Vessell, Parks and Recreation
- Laurel Wilson, Textile and Apparel Management

**Faculty being honored**

Greg Casey receives an award

Past and present CWP Directors
Faculty Roundtable on TA Management

By Catherine Chmidling

This past spring the Campus Writing Program hosted a roundtable for WI instructors who work with multiple graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) in the course of managing their large-enrollment WI classes. While GTAs are vital to maintaining a workable student-teacher ratio and handling the high volume of to-be-graded materials in large-enrollment WI classes, GTAs also come with their own added responsibilities for the supervising instructor.

GTA Appointments and Training

The roundtable attendees described a range of experiences regarding GTA selection or assignment. The need for several GTAs for any given large-enrollment course as well as large departmental graduate student populations means that WI faculty may find themselves working with graduate students they do not previously know and/or whose areas of academic emphasis varies greatly from the faculty member’s own. While GTA selection procedures vary between departments, GTA appointments are often made in the mid- to late-spring for the following academic year, with some made as late as a couple weeks before the start of the semester.

Coupled with 9-month faculty appointments and the high likelihood of faculty and graduate students’ absence from campus over the summer, faculty have little time to meet extensively with their future GTAs for course planning and GTA training.

The Graduate School offers a one day GTA training workshop and CWP offers another specifically for WI GTAs. Both workshops are offered the week before classes start. The workshops provide relatively standardized training, though they aren’t required and need not be repeated after any fixed length of time. GTA training workshop attendance relies on departmental encouragement and graduate student interest and availability. These opportunities, while highly beneficial, are still limited to a single day apiece, and likely do not provide sufficient reassurance to WI faculty and comprehensive training for newly appointed WI GTAs.

Another issue of common concern to GTA-supervising WI faculty is graduate student writing skill and grading ability. Although some graduate programs offer a disciplinary technical writing elective, such writing-oriented courses are not necessarily required as part of graduate degree plans. Graduate students more commonly acquire disciplinary writing skills through exposure to good and poor examples from the body of disciplinary literature, as well as through feedback and grades on graduate writing assignments. This technique of implicit absorption presents some potential pitfalls in graduate student instruction. The first possible problem with implicit learning expectations is that graduate students may remain unaware of variations in writing style or text manipulation tactics as they focus (rightly so) on the content of the disciplinary material they are assigned.
Second, faculty employment of implicit absorption of writing skills precludes graduate students acquiring an explicit, organized understanding of the specific rationales behind disciplinary stylistic conventions, as well as familiarity discussing advanced writing in grammatical terms.

Graduate students' own writing skills and comprehension of grammar become a greater concern when they are given the responsibility of grading undergraduate writing. This can lead to calls for increased graduate student training in style and grammar principles. Writing scholars argue that rereading, rethinking, and revising a piece of writing will have more impact on resolving problems with grammar and vocabulary issues than rote instruction. Stanley Fish recently called for writing technique drills, though he advocates against grammar rule memorization (http://fish.blogs.nytimes.com/, August 31, 2009). Individual disciplinary styles are too varied to allow any comprehensive discipline-specific writing training outside the disciplines themselves.

Norming

At the roundtable, faculty reported their concerns over grading consistency. GTAs require additional management investment from the supervising faculty member regarding lab/recitation instruction and grading standards. One mechanism many WI faculty use to support equitable grading across multiple graders is norming. Supervising faculty and their GTAs individually grade selected papers and then discuss their impressions of the sample paper(s) until the group can come to a resolution on the paper assessment(s).

Other WI faculty may not require complete accord on the sample paper(s) but will calculate and discuss lab/recitation averages, ranges, and standard deviations. GTAs must them be prepared to defend outlier grades they assign.

Lab Instruction as Professional Training

At the CWP Roundtable, Sandy Crews described her philosophy for mentoring the group of GTAs who assist with her Management course. To motivate her TAs, who plan to go into business rather than teaching, she tells them to think of the supervisory duties of the lab instructor role as if it were a business management role. Graduate students, in turn, receive managerial experience while teaching.

Vice Provost Jim Spain described how he delegates GTA grading. Students propose topics of interest within the parameters of the course topic (Societal Issues Facing Animal Agriculture) and are assigned to related groups. GTAs with experience or interests in those topic areas choose which to work with and, along with Dr. Spain, are responsible for grading. Each grader, therefore, is comfortable with the material.

Building Student Investment in the Writing and Revision Process

To generate student engagement – a roundtable concern - Dr. Spain organizes assignments and editions for the student papers he assigns in his WI Animal Science course. Rather than terming his paper divisions as “rough/first draft” and “revision,” Dr. Spain uses “edition” to emphasize his expectations of writing quality during the revision process to undergraduate students who may have little previous experience with professional writing.

Dr. Spain scaffolds assignments throughout the semester. Once the students' individual paper topics have been approved, he requires them to submit reference lists. He then requires students to submit full sentence outlines of their papers. Students later turn in both a first edition draft and a prefirst edition, to provide evidence that each student has reread and proofed their first edition paper. GTAs mark the first editions for organization, content accuracy, logic and clarity.

For the second edition, students revise their first editions based on their GTA's comments. Dr. Spain assigns each student 3 anonymous peer papers (from their same interest group) for review, to be commented on using the assignment grading criteria. The student reviewers receive points for providing thoughtful, useful reviews, as rated by the papers' authors. The peer-review grades of the three copies of each student's second edition are averaged to provide a second edition grade. Any peer-review grades more than one standard deviation below the other two are dropped, while any more than one standard deviation above the other two are retained. Throughout the second edition peer-review process Dr. Spain emphasizes the assignment's direct modeling of the professional writing experience. Dr. Spain has compared student grades on the first and second editions and found that the first edition grade is a very strong predictor of the second edition grade. A third edition of the paper is optional. Students may choose to take the percentage of points they have accumulated through the second edition as their third edition final grade.

Participants in the roundtable found these examples helpful for their own work. The CWP will continue to offer such events for instructors of large courses. If you would like to participate, please contact us.
Assessing the University of Missouri’s Campus Writing Program: What To Do

Bonnie Selting

In 1988, the *WPA: Writing Program Administration* journal published an article written by Milton Glick, Dean of the University of Missouri’s undergraduate school. Dr. Glick’s article, titled “Writing Across the Curriculum: A Dean’s Perspective,” discusses the origin of the University of Missouri’s (MU) Campus Writing Program (CWP) and its value to the university. In it, he states, “The development of this program is affecting the entire campus in ways that go far beyond the issue of student composition competencies. The Campus Writing Program has become symbolic of the potential for improved teaching and active learning on this campus, and it has become a rallying point for [concerned] faculty who feel that the university needs to return to its traditional function of teaching students how to think as well as what to think.” Glick reminds us that when we integrate “writing-to-learn” and “learning-to-write” theories and practices into cross-campus disciplinary learning objectives, students are better able to give meaning to learning, beyond memorization and bubble tests. In light of such support from a faculty “rallying” to improve student learning, MU’s Campus Writing Program (CWP) quickly established itself as something more than an effort to improve writing. As Glick states, it became for many, “a beacon for a renaissance of responsible teaching and of the excitement of demanding high quality activities from students.” The excitement of bringing new teaching methods into the classroom improved faculty morale and put the University of Missouri “on the map” as having successfully established and maintained a solid, faculty-led system that challenged students to think and write more skillfully. And now, more than 20 years later, CWP remains strong and highly respected both locally and nationally. It is, once again, listed in *The U.S. News and World Report’s* top twenty writing programs in the nation.

Many universities have instituted such “Writing Across The Curriculum” (WAC) systems only to have them eventually cease to exist for reasons that vary from disinterested/resistant faculty to ill-advised administrators changing financial allocations. Because WAC concepts contain valuable pedagogical ideas, it is worth asking why some ideas are successful while others are not. Of course, strong faculty support and consistent funding signify the most obvious criteria needed for success, but when WAC programs are assessed what other elements also must be looked at?

Assessing WAC

Traditionally, those who assess WAC programs set great store in finding answers to questions of student achievement (do they write better in a WAC milieu?) and to programmatic concerns. These two elements work circuitously—if the program is well run the students learn what is expected. If the students are doing well, the program is probably well run. Typically, Rhetoric and Composition scholars who are well acquainted with WAC’s purposes and methods carry out these assessments, and historically, goals of these assessments have been connected to issues of “good” and “bad.” Is this a “good” program? Does it accomplish its main goal, i.e., are students writing and thinking better than before writing was incorporated into the courses? If so, how is this occurring? Admittedly, this is a simplified description of hours, days, and years of intricate, scholarly assessment projects, but the point is this: over and over again the same conclusions have been drawn. These conclusions allow us to say that WAC programs are valuable and that we are probably doing our job correctly because enough assessment findings demonstrate the following:

- Students who write a lot over an extended period of time do better than students who do not.
- Students who study in institutions where financial support is readily available do better than those who do not.
- In and out of school, students write for different audiences, and programs must take this point under consideration.
- Students do not learn writing in a progressive, linear fashion (I do this first. Then, I do this. etc.).
- Allowing students to revise after reader feedback is essential.
- Students who learn how to revise do better over time.
- Students learn writing from a variety of situations and contexts (class, media, other students, what they read inside and outside of school).
- Students (like all writers) do poorly in one situation and do well in another situation.
A primary question is: how and what do we assess in relation to WAC programs and why? Do we need another assessment that restates what we already know? Why not ask about/assess what hasn’t already been asked and answered? Based on these questions, CWP at MU decided to design an assessment project not aimed at whether the program is “good” or “bad”; or whether students are writing better, thinking smarter, and learning content more efficiently. Rather, we are conducting a two-year assessment plan during which we will take “snapshots” in areas contextually related to writing intensive activities, and we will use our findings to inform the work of the Program. As Dr. Jeff Rice, CWP Director and originator of the assessment plan explains, the idea is not to evaluate what is good or bad, although that may happen as data is examined and interpreted. It is to improve our ability to see what our program looks like—in all its disparate areas. To do this, we ask some of the same questions as traditional assessment projects, but we also make this our own project by designing questions that, we assume, will lead us to the pictures we need to see. We ask (among other questions):

• What kind of assignments are given in WI courses? In which discipline?
• What kind of media are used?
• What are the expectations?
• Where do students write?
• How do students write?
• Why do students write?

• How can these questions allow us to learn more about our work?

Specifically, the six areas to be studied are as follows (from Rice’s forthcoming presentation to the Campus Writing Board):
• Level Expectations - suggested lower/upper division requirements for WI
• Course size - study of WI course sizes
• WI/non-WI Comparisons - difference in work
• WI Course Evaluations - student perception
• Student Writing – samples from specific courses and faculty perception
• Public Writing – study of writing students do outside of classes

As Rice contends, this sort of assessment allows CWP to gather the type of data from each area of study that provides us with a picture of WI instruction at MU. We think of this assessment as a “networked-based study in which each area is a node in a network. When viewed in relationship to the other nodes, we will see the points of connection (the moment of insight) and get an understanding of the overall network that is WI at MU (Rice). Thinking of this project in terms of networks is a viable way to make sense of it because, as Rice says, “We live and work within networks. Work is distributed across different tasks, people, and spaces, and we make connections among these areas.”
“To understand a body as large as the CWP—300 courses offered annually, over 10,000 students enrolled in WI courses annually, faculty from disparate disciplines participating—“we have to look at parts of that distribution and then draw assumptions about the overall connectivity occurring” (Rice). This reasoning drives CWP’s unique assessment project.

All assessment is an assumption: it provides a collection of data, analysis, and assumptions based on analysis. A snapshot, too, is an assumption. The CWP will take snapshots of various WI activities. We will then draw assumptions about WI at MU from an overall examination of the snapshots together. When viewed together or networked, these snapshots will teach us something about Writing Intensive courses at MU that we don’t currently know.

The CWP begins with an assumption (as already defined by our disciplinary studies): Exposure to writing in at least two courses over four years is an improvement over not having any exposure to writing. Thus, we don’t need to prove that two courses makes students better writers. We can assume they do (and we can assume that even more courses will make students even better writers).

The CWP will publish the results from this study when it is completed, and it will offer analysis regarding the assessment’s progress during the time period it is being conducted.

Assessment Research

Some citations from previous studies on writing assessment. We no longer need to show that more writing produces better writing. We now need to show how students write and why.

“Our research bears out taking such a broad, multidimensional view. Development entails both movement along certain continua (e.g., ability to handle more complex reasoning) and developing a facility with a broader range of uses of writing and language. This perspective argues against a curriculum that focuses too exclusively on one function and genre, for instance, a solely subject-focused, ostensibly ‘objective’ academic essay” (Curtis & Herrington 2003).

Lunsford et al. collected over 6,000 pieces of writing at Stanford over a two year time period in order to pose the conclusion that students write for multiple audiences in multiple ways (2005).

Haswell found that, in a study of 64 writers, as students moved from freshmen to junior status, their overall performance improved (based on holistic scoring of work) (2000).

Malcolm Gladwell, in his recent Outliers, puts tasks like writing within a similar context: If you do something a lot, you become good at it. He calls this “practice.” What differentiates smart people from one another (regarding success), Gladwell writes, is the devotion to practice. His calculation: 10,000 hours make you really good at some activity.

I.e., if one writes a lot over many years, one gets better at writing.
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