Making WAC Work for Students; Making it Less Work for Faculty

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WAC Origins

“Extended habits of written expression cannot be influenced in [one term]” -- they need to be fostered over time (Alvin C. Eurich, NCTE, 1931)

“What your students need is not more instruction in writing but a few teachers of geology who are capable of describing not only geological phenomena but also of teaching their students how to think consecutively and logically about geology” (Oscar J. Campbell, *English Journal*, 1939)
WAC Benefits: students

- Practice writing as a process (revision and drafts)
- Expand writing skills across contexts & genres
- Develop transferable literacies (reading, writing, research/information literacy)
- Deepen meta-analytical skills from reflection
WAC Benefits: faculty

- Engage more fully with students
- Deepen your students’ understanding of disciplinary knowledge through writing
- Monitor what your students do and don’t understand
- Fulfil the mandate of higher education: educate!

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WAC Challenges: Faculty

- Time
- Students’ varied skills levels
- Students resistance to writing
- Grading content and writing skills
- TIME!

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TIME!
Making WAC Work for students

- Develop a program-wide community of practice with shared values and goals (& language to discuss them)
- Scaffold learning within classes and repeat practices across classes (e.g.: writing as a process)
- Identify and teach the language and threshold concepts of the program, and the specific discipline of the class
Threshold concepts

Liminal stage

- Writes drafts when told to do so
- Uses writing as a way to learn when it is assigned
- Participates in peer review
Liminal stage

- Writes drafts when told to do so.
- Uses writing as a way to learn when it is assigned.
- Participates in peer review.

Threshold concepts

Absorbed

- Conceives of writing as a process that includes revision.
- Makes notes while thinking & planning.
- Seeks feedback on writing from peers.

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Threshold Concepts

Explanatory

Transformative

Integrative

Provisional (& bounded)

Irreversible

Troublesome
Shared language about writing/ threshold concepts

• Writing is a process of drafting and revising
• Writing is a mode of learning and exploring
• Writing is a conversation
• Reading is an active practice
• Each discipline has specific concepts and genres
Making WAC less work for faculty

- Focus on program-wide Threshold Concepts
- Use ungraded Write-To-Learn assignments
- Social annotations of Reading - google docs, hypothesis.is, group work
Making WAC less work: focus on one Threshold Concept

- Everything is a draft; writing is a process
- Brainstorm an idea in writing, then talk
- Revise a tweet -- 140 characters is difficult
- Write a response to feedback on papers
Making WAC less work: ungraded write-to-learn

- Write a question, read it aloud
- Explain a principle to your neighbor
- Restate the thesis in 140 characters
- Single-issue peer response
Making WAC less work: social annotation of readings

Hypothesis: learn what your students understand as they read (write-to-learn)

http://web.hypothesis.is

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NARRATIVE OF THE THIRD VOYAGE, 1498-1500 (EXCERPT)
CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS

I have always read that the world comprising the land and the water was spherical, and the recorded experiences of Ptolemy and all others have proved this by the eclipses of the moon and other observations made from East to West, as well as the elevation of the Pole from North to South. But as I have already described, I have now seen so much irregularity, that I have come to another conclusion respecting the Earth, namely, that it is not round as they describe, but of the form of a pear, which is very round except where the stalk grows, at which part it is most prominent; or like a round ball upon part of which is a prominence like a woman’s nipple, this protrusion being the highest and nearest the sky, situated under the equinoctial line, and at the eastern extremity of this sea...
Sustainable WAC

- Faculty development, shared resources, conversations
- Community amongst the faculty
- Shared values about the teaching of writing
- Scaffolding learning (formal or informal)
- Shared language about writing / threshold concepts
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DISCUSSION
Thank you for coming,
And thank you to the faculty and students on the panels!

If you have questions about BMCC’s Writing Across the Curriculum Program, or want more suggestions for write-to-learn or other WAC activities, please email **Holly Messitt** (hmessitt@bmcc.edu) or **Rifat Salam** (rsalam@cuny.edu)

Or email me at sjamieson@drew.edu