

TEACHING WITH WRITING



THE OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY WRITING INTENSIVE CURRICULUM (WIC) NEWSLETTER
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WIC Courses: Common Questions

(Editor's Note: Now that WIC proposal forms have been distributed, you may have a variety of WIC questions. Some of the most frequent ones are addressed here, but the answers are necessarily brief. Many of these concerns are also addressed in the WIC seminar and in the one hour WIC workshops. And WIC Director Lex Runciman is available to consult directly with department or individual faculty. If you have a WIC question that you'd like addressed in a future issue of this newsletter, send it to the WIC office, Waldo 125.)

Why writing intensive courses?

An integral part of the baccalaureate core, WIC courses are envisioned as capstone courses specially designed to involve students as working partners and participants in their disciplines. That spirit of collaboration and professional participation needs the intimacy of a relatively small group, hence the concern that WIC class enrollments be manageable. WIC courses are thoroughly discipline specific; they use writing in two ways--as a vehicle for intellectual participation and as a medium for professional communication.

Thus a writing intensive course has two hallmarks: the regular use of informal writing to provoke and ensure intellectual play and understanding, and the formation and presentation of some of that intellectual work in professional or near-professional graded documents.

Faculty members teaching WIC classes typically see their role changing from that of performer to that of catalyst and organizer.

They often find that they lecture less frequently and act more frequently as resources: professionals who understand the intellectual processes their courses require and know how to construct activities that make students active, successful participants in those processes.

More Q and A on page 2.

You're Invited... see page 2.

Elsewhere:

School: Michigan Tech
Department: Biological Sciences
Course: Physiology (with lab)

Partial List of Writing Intensive Activities:

- distribution of journal article, with students asked to read the article, to take notes on it, and to try to determine its organizational structure;
- class discussion of journal articles as reflective of the scientific method and models for lab reports;
- student analysis of self-selected journal articles, with preliminary drafts peer-reviewed in small groups;
- goals of the exercise physiology lab discussed;
- lab itself conducted;
- preliminary drafts of lab reports critiqued by students in groups of three (15 minutes);
- lab reports turned in.

Source: *Writing Across the Disciplines*, ed. by Young and Fulwiler, Boynton/Cook, 1986.

Can departments offer several WIC courses?

Absolutely. Departments can propose and offer any number of WIC courses.

What's the difference between the WIC seminar and the WIC workshops?

The seminar meets regularly, two hours a week for five weeks. Over these five weeks, seminar participants get to know and learn from each other. And faculty completing the seminar are then able to draw up to \$250.00 from the WIC budget to support travel, book or equipment purchases, or the like. Faculty participating in the seminar will finish it with specific plans for adopting writing intensive teaching strategies.

The workshops are designed as discrete, one-hour introductions to specific topics.

While both workshops and the seminar discuss the same issues, they ask for different levels of time commitment from faculty, and they provide different benefits.

I couldn't sign up for the seminar this term. Will it be offered again?

Yes indeed. If you're interested in being contacted once the winter seminar schedule has been determined, leave your name with the Center for Writing and Learning office at 7-2930.

If I teach a WIC class, does that mean I have to be an expert on punctuation and grammar?

No. But it does mean that you'll have to decide for yourself how you want to respond to student errors when they show up in formally graded writing. And once you've made that decision, it should become part of your assignment handout. But you certainly do not have to be able to spot, much less fix, every error. Even if you could do that, it would probably be time spent unnecessarily; current research suggests that marking every error doesn't help students much anyhow.

The WIC proposal form asks for copies of sample handouts for formally graded writing

assignments. Does that mean that all formally graded writing assignments should be made on paper?

The short answer here is yes. Students experience a bewildering variety of requests and assignments during their undergraduate careers and even during the same term. They need a solid understanding of what's asked of them, when it's due, its length, the required documentation format, and so on. And they need this information in writing so that they can return to it.

Written formal assignments also make a teacher's life easier. When your written assignment is clear and specific, you're more likely to get what you are in fact looking for. And if your assignment handout also specifies your grading criteria, then students can use that criteria to help them revise.

More Q and A on page 3.

**** OPEN HOUSE ****

The Communication Skills
Center has become the
Center for Writing & Learning.

Come help us celebrate
our new name!

See the new WIC office
and the newly remodeled
Writing Center.

Meet the staff and talk
with writing assistants.

Nov. 14th, 10am to 2pm.
Waldo Hall first floor.

****Refreshments served****

The WIC proposal form also asks for discussion of how students will be guided through the writing process. What does this mean?

Most ungraded, informal writing is done in one sitting--that's its nature. But presumably, longer and formally graded writing ought not to be done in one sitting. So when you talk about the writing process for a formal and graded assignment, you're talking about what writers do (or should do) in order to complete that assignment successfully.

For example, in a research course requiring a proposal, discussing the writing process would mean discussing how would-be researchers identify what they want to do, how they go about determining whether it's an important thing to do, a feasible thing to do, and so on.

In short, discussing the writing process for a research proposal would mean discussing the methods of inquiry common to researchers in the discipline. And it would probably mean identifying various preliminary steps (and preliminary assignments) as would-be researchers move from a blank piece of paper to a complete draft ready for peer review to a proposal ready to be submitted.

What are our options when it comes to giving student writers "useful response in order to revise effectively"?

The most obvious, traditional way to provide students with useful response involves teachers collecting rough drafts and commenting on them. Some teachers use individual conferences for this purpose; others simply write their comments and return the drafts. In some courses, this will still be the richest and most fruitful way to help students revise.

But there are dangers in this traditional method too. Not only is this method unworkable for larger classes and potentially exhausting for the teacher, it may not always have the effects teachers hope for. While teachers usually want to encourage independent thinking and real, substantial re-seeing, students often reduce the whole revision process to the question "What does the teacher want?" Revising then becomes a cat and mouse game

that no one particularly enjoys or finds enlightening.

A different, quite exciting option (and one which demands more of students while demanding less of teachers) asks students to respond to each other's rough drafts. Students still need to know what criteria they should use as they read each other's drafts, and teachers need to make sure that this response process is carefully orchestrated and logistically simple. The real advantage to peer response lies in its insistence that students themselves become responsible for the revision process, responsible for their own thinking and writing. Peer response is one of the topics discussed in the WIC seminar; it's also discussed in the one hour workshop "Encouraging Useful Revision."

Is participation in the WIC seminar or in the workshops limited to those teaching or planning to teach designated WIC courses?

Not at all. Though the seminar is particularly designed to address WIC course teaching, the techniques discussed in the seminar and in the one hour workshops can be applied to virtually any class.

With this issue, *Teaching with Writing* inaugurates the "Elsewhere" feature highlighting writing intensive teaching practices at other campuses. If you know of writing intensive teaching strategies used by colleagues elsewhere, we'd like to hear about it. Call the WIC office at 7-3711 or send information to Waldo 125.

If you've had good success with writing activities, let us know. Send the WIC office (Waldo 125) a copy of your handout or a description of what you've done in your classes. What has worked for you may work for others as well. Look for such examples in future issues of *Teaching with Writing*.

Are you interested in joining a writing group? If so, send us your name and indicate the kind of writing you're doing.

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