



THE WORD

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AT YORK COLLEGE

FREE - TAKE ONE!

[HTTP://WWW.YORK.CUNY.EDU/WAC](http://www.york.cuny.edu/wac)

MARCH 2011

TOOLS FOR COLLABORATION: *CONNECTING WAC AND THE WRITING CENTER*

BY: LAUREL HARRIS

In collaboration with faculty across the disciplines and with the Writing Center, the six Writing Fellows are designing a series of discipline-specific Infosheets for writing-intensive courses at York. Discipline-specific Infosheets break down writing assignments and disciplinary requirements into accessible, easy-to-read sheets for students within the discipline and tutors outside of it. They are designed to empower students and tutors to understand the unique conventions and forms of the discipline.

Heather Robinson, Assistant Professor of English and former Writing Center director, and Laurel Harris, Writing Fellow, presented this collaboration at the International Writing Centers Association conference in Baltimore on November 4, 2010. Heather discussed the need for discipline-specific support materials in Writing Centers, citing the

prevalence of tutors working with students outside their discipline and the discipline specificity of student writing concerns like organization and development. Laurel then exhibited a series of discipline-specific Infosheets that she has designed for Professor Nicholas Grosskopf's Health Education Program Planning course and has edited with Writing Center tutor Devi Singh. The presentation was well-received, with the faculty, administrators, and undergraduate peer tutors in attendance remarking that they could use such support materials on their own campuses.

The other Fellows, Alberto McKelligan, Janice Capuana, Elizabeth Alsop, and George Fragopoulos are currently designing and piloting discipline-specific Infosheets for Professor Bonnie Oglensky's Social Work course, Professor Maria Elena Pina Fonti's Nursing course, Professor Xiaodan Zhang's Sociol-

ogy course, Literature Review for the sciences, and for the Writing 300 required course. These sheets will expand upon a general series of Infosheets addressing common writing issues across the disciplines designed by a previous group of Fellows. In addition to the general series of Infosheets, the discipline-specific Program Planning Infosheets are currently available online at <http://www.york.cuny.edu/wac/for-students> and at the Writing Center in AC-1C18. The web site and Writing Center can be consulted for additional sets of Infosheets as they are finished. Faculty who are interested in having a set of Infosheets designed for their writing intensive courses for students and tutors to use can contact WAC coordinator Jonathan Hall at jhall1@york.cuny.edu or Writing Fellows coordinator Shereen Inayatulla at sinayatulla@york.cuny.edu for more information.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- *CONNECTING THE WAC & WRITING CENTER*
- *CETL READING WORKSHOP*
- *A CULTURE OF WRITING*

WAC PROGRAM NOTES



Dr. Shereen Inayatulla

We want to welcome Dr. Shereen Inayatulla to the faculty of the English Department at York College, she comes to us from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. She will be stepping into the position of Writing Fellows Coordinator. She specializes in Composition and Rhetoric, and over the last decade, she has taught English in a variety of international contexts ranging from college writing courses in Canada and the US to secondary-level language courses in Japan's public school system.

WAC Coordinator is Jonathan Hall - Assistant Professor English jhall1@york.cuny.edu



WORKSHOP

BY: GEORGE FRAGOPOULOS

What do we talk about when we talk about reading?

What does the act of reading represent for students?

And how can faculty help students become astute critical readers and better analytical thinkers?

On February 17, writing fellows George Fragopoulos, Elizabeth Alsop and Janice Capuana discussed some of these issues in a workshop, "Teaching Effective Reading Strategies: Helping Students Explore Complex Texts." The workshop was co-sponsored by the WAC Program and by York's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), and brought together faculty mem-

bers from a wide arrange of disciplines and academic practices.

Activities such as reading and writing, the workshop suggested, should never be taken for granted. As Maryanne Wolf wrote in *Proust and the Squid*, "We were never born to read." Wolf argues that we must learn a process, reading, that we are not biologically wired for as humans. One of the objectives of this workshop was to explore a variety of useful strategies for helping our students to read new disciplinary texts critically.

A number of interesting discussion points were raised during the workshop, including one by a professor of mathematics who asked to what extent reading may be applicable in a class where traditionally there is no conventional

"reading" to speak of. One possibility suggested was that reading could also be understood as a much broader metaphor for the undertaking of critical examinations, and that even a class in mathematics could benefit from assignments that asked students to "read" math as a language of sorts. For the last-half of the workshop, faculty were asked to read a discipline-specific text and respond to it with a learning-to-read exercise such as freewriting, scanning, and double-entry method. Such practice exercises were meant to give those in attendance an idea of how certain reading-response methods could be used to help students understand complex texts.

THE ROLE OF THE INSTRUCTOR IN GROUP WORK: MORE HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Thursday, April 7, 2011
12:00 - 2:00pm

CETL Office (AC 4EA1)
Light refreshments will be served

What kind of group work is most effective in the classroom? How can collaborative learning improve students' comprehension of course material and writing skills? How can we encourage students to accept more responsibility for their own learning? In this workshop, we will explore techniques for implementing effective group learning in the classroom and will demystify this important teaching tool by offering concrete methods for achieving productive group work. Participants will be invited to contribute their experiences and expertise on group work.

Co-sponsored by the York Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning & The Writing Across the Curriculum Program

WHAT MIGHT A CULTURE OF WRITING LOOK LIKE?

BY: MICHAEL J. CRIPPS

Writing Across the Curriculum often purports to promote and develop a “culture of writing” on a campus. I’ve never really been sure what that sort of culture would look like on the ground.

- More students writing in more classes?
- The number of courses with some designation as writing in-

tensive?

- Widespread faculty involvement in writing instruction in courses throughout an institution?
- Healthy submissions to on-campus student publication venues?
- Something else, or a combination of evidence?

I’ve always been somewhat uncertain about what I’d accept as

signs that a campus has developed such a culture; at least until recently.

In 2008 I advocated for York to participate in the 2009 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the 27 supplemental writing questions developed with the Consortium for the Study of Writing in College. My aim was to get some comparative perspective on what our students do with writing in

classes. Accustomed to seeing data showing that York is “not yet” on par with her sister institutions, I was not confident we’d find signs of a writing culture on campus. This despite a robust set of writing requirements for graduation, a decade of WAC, several student publication venues on campus, and more. Call it skepticism, I suppose.

IN THE WORDS OF RICHARD DAWSON FROM **FAMILY FEUD**, “SURVEY SAYS”...

FRESHMAN WRITING ASSIGNMENT MEAN SCORES:

During the current school year, for how many of your writing assignments have you done each of the following?	York ¹ Mean	CSWC ² Mean
Brainstormed to develop ideas	3.86**	3.51
Talked with instructor about ideas before draft	3.41**	3.03
Received feedback from instructor about a draft	3.99***	3.36
Visited a campus-based writing or tutoring center	2.44**	2.03
Proofread your draft for errors	4.3	4.28

Response Options
 No assignments (1)
 Few assignments (2)
 Some assignments (3)
 Most Assignments (4)
 All assignments (5)

Significance: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001
² Consortium for the Study of Writing in College
¹ York Response Rate: 16% (CUNY: 13%; Peer: 18%)

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement 2009 Mean Comparisons – Consortium for the Study of Writing in College

These are impressive mean score differences in some of the most important elements of the writing process, with most of them highly significant and all of them pointing in the desirable direction. On a potentially less upbeat note, York students seem to proofread their work at the same rate as freshmen across the country. (But I’ll take that finding any day of the week, and twice on Sunday!) The day I saw these data I started saying that York has a culture of writing.

When I looked at another set of responses, those having to do with good writing instructional practices, I really had no choice but to “feel” like the faculty teaching freshmen also participate in this culture of writing!

FRESHMAN INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

MEAN SCORES:

These mean scores are less dramatically different from the national mean than are the first set of scores. But there is no denying that York freshmen report that their instructors employ best practice writing instructional techniques that meet or exceed the use of such practices nationally.

The strength and directionality of these mean score differences blew me away, and I’m paid to be a cheerleader for writing and for writing instruction. Live and learn.

During the current school year, for how many of your writing assignments has your instructor done each of the following?	York ¹ Mean	CSWC ² Mean
Provided clear instructions	4.24**	3.93
Explained the learning goals in advance	4.05***	3.71
Explained in advance the grading criteria	4.14*	3.85
Asked you to do short ungraded writing	3.02*	2.7
Asked you to give feedback on a classmate’s draft	3.16	3.03

Response Options
 No assignments (1)
 Few assignments (2)
 Some assignments (3)
 Most Assignments (4)
 All assignments (5)

Significance: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001
² Consortium for the Study of Writing in College
¹ York Response Rate: 16% (CUNY: 13%; Peer: 18%)

Source: National Survey of Student Engagement 2009 Mean Comparisons – Consortium for the Study of Writing in College

PLEASE NOTE that many faculty work with writing fellows either in developing a new wi course before it is taught or in developing support materials / workshops, etc. while the course is in operation. If you are interested in working with a writing fellow, contact Writing Fellows Coordinator Shereen Inayatulla at SINAYATULLA@YORK.CUNY.EDU.