

Synergia

1. The interaction of two or more forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects.

VOL. 28, No. 2

Newsletter of Faculty Development • University of St. Thomas

Nov.-Dec., 2009

WRITE ON!



*Erika Scheurer, English
Director, Writing
Across the Curriculum*

Writing Across the Curriculum is finally underway at UST. Our first seminar, generously funded by Faculty Development, rates as an unqualified success. I want to thank the fifteen colleagues from nine departments who formed our first cohort: Michael Degnan (philosophy), Agapitos Papagapitos, Luz Saavedra (economics), Chester Wilson (biology), Buffy Smith (sociology), Cathy Cory, Sherry Jordon, Sue Myers (theology), Craig Eliason, Julia Risser (art history), Greg Robinson-Riegler, Roxanne Pritchard (psychology), Stephanie Lohse (modern and classical languages), Susan Callaway and Suzanne Donsky (English).

Facilitated by internationally-recognized writing specialist Dr. Chris Anson, participants learned how to create low- and high-stakes writing assignments and how to align them with the learning objectives of our courses. We also learned to support student writing in process with a variety of levels and modes of faculty and peer feedback. The focus was decidedly *not* on leading participants

to a point where they would be drowning in a sea of student papers, but rather on conserving our energy and being strategic about when and how to intervene in the writing process.

Back to that “drowning in a sea of papers” image...

As I communicate with faculty members across the university and immerse myself in the vast field of scholarship on Writing Across the Curriculum, I have learned that the idea of WAC can lead to some pretty intense fears. I’d like to do a little “myth-busting”:

MYTH: If I add writing to my courses, I won’t have time to address all the material I need to cover.

REALITY: Writing Across the Curriculum assists faculty in integrating writing into courses to support students’ learning the material. Writing is not an “add on” but rather a means to better achieving your goals. For example, if, instead of giving a quiz to ensure that students have read course material, you assign a piece of low-stakes writing, you can ask more of your students: that they make connections among ideas and integrate what they have read with other readings and/or life situations.

The writing, then, enhances rather than inhibits your coverage of course material because students will retain more and engage in higher-level

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thinking.

MYTH: If I do a WAC course, I will spend all of my time grading papers. I already spend too much time doing this. I want a life!

REALITY: Just because you assign writing does not mean that you have to grade it or even always read it. In the seminar, participants learned how to design engaging low-stakes writing assignments that lead to students’ learning course material. The writing students produce can be used to enhance class discussions and activities and/or to learn skills they will need when they do higher-stakes writing, such as formal essays and research projects. For these low-stake assignments, we might just check that they are completed, do minimal evaluation (check, check plus, check minus), selective evaluation, or peer feedback.

(Cont. on next page)

Of course, higher-stakes assignments do require more feedback along the way. Chris Anson introduced us to ways of intervening (and facilitating peer intervention) during the writing process that allow us to hold student writing to a higher standard and also lead to better quality final drafts. He also showed how grading rubrics can lead to more accurate and efficient evaluation of those final drafts.

Through our careful scaffolding of low- and high-stakes writing assignments and through strategic intervention in the writing process, students learn more and we, therefore, can expect more of them. And we don't have to kill ourselves doing it.

MYTH: English is not my field. How can I teach writing?

REALITY: This fear usually arises from the equation of "writing instruction" with "grammar instruction." Grammar is just one part of effective writing—an important part, but one that should be dealt with primarily for high-stakes assignments, not with low-stakes, and after major revisions have been completed. Once the draft meets all of the other evaluation criteria (e.g. a solid thesis, evidence, analysis) only then is it ready for attention to grammar and syntax. At the seminar, Chris Anson presented ways to effectively address editing issues without covering student papers with red marks and without being an expert in grammar.

The Status of WAC at UST

The approved plan includes three categories of courses that students will be required to take before they graduate:

Two Writing Intensive courses offer students substantive and direct instruction in the writing process. Students learn foundational concepts

relevant to writing purposefully and effectively while also learning course content through their engagement in both high-stakes and low-stakes writing. These courses focus on writing as both a process and as a final product. Class cap: 20 students.

One Writing to Learn course offers students the opportunity to use informal writing to discover and explore ideas connected to course content. These courses focus on writing as a process rather than as a product. Class cap: 25 students.

One Writing in the Disciplines course offers students focused and frequent practice in writing within their major course of study. Low stakes writing assignments support high-stakes projects; the focus is on writing as a final product within the conventions of the academic discipline. Class cap: 20 students.

As the Director of Writing Across the Curriculum, I am spending the year meeting with representatives of all academic disciplines on campus to discern how WAC will fit into each department's course offerings. I am grateful for the high level of enthusiasm and support I have met with thus far; the time is definitely ripe for WAC to come to UST.

Members of the WAC Committee (Stephanie Lohse, Buffy Smith, Cathy Cory, Susan Callaway, and I) are currently working to refine the criteria and process for certifying the three levels of required courses and developing an assessment plan.

Before we can actually make WAC a requirement for students, however, many more faculty members will need to participate in WAC seminars.

Apply now!

Chris Anson has agreed to return for our second WAC seminar which will take place **January 4-8, 2010, 9 a.m. - noon**. He will cover the same topics as in the first seminar. Participants will work on courses they will teach in the 2010-2011 school year, making them Writing Intensive, Writing to Learn, or Writing in the Disciplines.

After three hours of presentation and discussion, participants will have the afternoon to work on their courses and to consult individually with Chris Anson. The drafts of the revised courses and assignments will be due in June, 2010, when Chris will provide extensive feedback.

If you have questions about the January seminar or about WAC in general, please feel free to contact me (*ecscheurer*).

Writing Across the Curriculum Seminar

January 4-8, 2010
9 a.m. - noon

Led by Dr. Chris Anson

To apply, please email Pat Alexander (pmalexander) with your name, department, the course you would like to revise, and whether it will be Writing Intensive, Writing to Learn, or Writing in the Disciplines.



WRITING TO LEARN/ WRITING TO THINK: WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AND THE UST CENTER FOR WRITING



*Dr. Susan Callaway,
English
Director, UST Center
for Writing*

How does a campus writing center support a new writing across the curriculum program? Perhaps if it is devoted to helping those who never quite got the hang of grammar finally be able to write error-free papers, it can simply proceed as usual. But UST's writing center is not, nor has it ever been, a fix-it shop for students to catch up on their editing skills or to polish their papers.

In fact, the Center for Writing's mission has less to do with final papers and more to do with the complexity of how those papers got there. In its 30-year history, we've consistently provided writers the opportunity to think. We assist students in becoming better writers by prompting them to review what they're reading, how they're interpreting a text, and what they want to say to their readers clearly and concisely.

We ask questions that prompt writers to teach us about what they're learning. We ask them about the professor's purpose and criteria for an assignment and help them identify the conventions of the field in which they're writing. We probe students for the decisions they've made about their main points and their organization. In effect, we might spend much more time talking about their ideas than

working on a draft (if the student, in fact, has a draft) because we believe good writing comes from good thinking, and good, creative thinking comes from good, focused conversation.

So we fit right into WAC's focus on "writing to learn." Best writing across the curriculum practice includes sequencing of low-stakes assignments that engage students. These assignments represent the complexity of what challenges and excites us in our own and others' research and writing in our fields. While we may despair as faculty—and students despair as well—over their poor word choices, run-on sentences, and random commas, these more mechanical issues are often symptomatic of writers' lack of analysis, synthesis, and interpretation. Errors can distract us from the deeper issues our students face that we care even more about: Are they comprehending what they read? Can they see their writing from the perspective of their readers? Are they taking the time to think?

As faculty, we are rightly concerned with all facets of strong writing, and this includes helping students become strong readers and critical thinkers. We should seize the opportunity through WAC to see the potential of our assignments to help students learn how to think and write in our disciplines. As you take on the challenges of writing across the curriculum in your own teaching, consider the Center for Writing as a close ally. It's through our many conversations with students—yours and ours—that we all encourage clear expression and genuine learning.

PROFILES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING.

Supporting Activities for Writing Assignments

By Craig Eliason, Art History

At the WAC workshop, I made plans to revise my "Modernism in European Art" course. It already had a major research project at its core, and previously considerable instruction was dedicated to writing: building a bibliography, structuring writing on a thesis, etc.

However, the workshop inspired me to rethink some of the ways I was using class time. I realized the advantage of asking myself not "What information do they need to know before they can write?" but rather "What process will they need to follow in order to write?" The workshop leader encouraged us to list the steps involved in successfully completing the assignment, and then consider "lower-stakes" supporting activities that offered the student practice at, and feedback on, these steps.

For example, instead of preaching that they better take good notes on the museum artwork about which they will be writing a paper, I could ask them to write an informal reaction and reflection piece that could be shared with small groups in the classroom. Building these supporting activities around the processes students will have to undertake to succeed has made my classroom activities more interesting and helpful.





Roxanne Prichard,
Psychology

Supporting the Writing Process

I admit I enrolled in the summer Writing across the Curriculum seminar not expecting to learn that much about how to use writing to enhance my teaching. I already used a variety of formal and informal writing assignments in every class, and structured writing assignments to include pre-writing exercises, outlines, drafts, peer reviews and revision stages. I had even worked as a Writing Center tutor. I am grateful to report, however, that the seminar significantly changed the way I think about assigning, evaluating, and coaching the writing process. During the seminar exercises, I quickly realized that I was asking students to do something (synthesize and evaluate primary research) that I wasn't spending sufficient time teaching, so I have since revised my class to include more training exercises in evaluating and writing about data. Additionally, I was appreciative of learning ways to assign more writing without also increasing my grading time.



FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK ...



Sue Chaplin
Faculty Development
Director, Biology

Writing makes me feel like writing...

During the first week of June 2009, Faculty Development sponsored two highly successful (based on attendance and evaluations) one-day workshops. The first day featured a presentation by Tara Gray, called "Publish and Flourish," in which she provided a formula for writing 30 minutes a day as a mechanism for greater scholarly productivity. The second day featured a "how to" workshop for organizing writing groups of faculty led by Nancy Hartung and me.

The seventy-one faculty who attended the Tara Gray workshops found her entertaining and inspiring. She told us "what you do first, gets done," so make writing a priority in your schedule. She advised us to examine key sentences in a paragraph to ensure its organization and clarity of purpose, and get comments from writing partners and people outside our own fields, as well as experts. Lastly, she highly recommended that faculty keep records of their writing efforts and report them to others (writing partner or writing group) as a way to motivate the writing... sort

of like reporting in at a Weight Watchers meeting.

On the second day of the workshop, Nancy and I discussed models for writing groups with the fifty-two faculty joining us. The models chosen varied considerably, but all worked well for their members, judging by the results: writing group productivity was an impressive average of 19 pages per person, with the vast majority holding to an everyday or 3-4 times per week writing session for 15 minutes or longer. Among the products reported for 14 of the participants were three grant proposals, 17 manuscripts, two conference presentations, two sabbatical proposals, and one longer-term sabbatical project. Some of the best comments about the writing groups were:

- Helped me clarify my argument and gain focus
- Made me feel more productive
- The group found missing connections in my arguments
- Helped me with motivation and made me accountable to the group for producing good writing
- Helped me get in the rhythm of writing
- Made me focus on the results, producing substance as well as pages
- I got done with my proposal *much* earlier than usual, with background and introduction much clearer and more organized.



FROM THE FACULTY CENTER FOR ELEARNING

Pandemic Planning

UST Colleges, Schools and Departments began planning in Spring 2009 for Pandemic Preparedness. That planning includes various responses to each of multiple threat levels. It offers an array of options for faculty to continue instructional activities. Increasing response levels may be required, and UST's policies and plans may change as circumstances warrant. IRT staff developed a planning guide to scale to this need, with special attention to preliminary steps.

There are a variety of strategies and supporting technologies to deliver content and instruction to students who may be absent from

class for a short period of time. It is very important to note that there are complexities with Web-based video or any other real-time content delivery. The student or faculty member may be too ill to work with real-time content and we cannot guarantee that students at home have the technology needed to receive content in real-time over the Web. It is our recommendation that faculty focus on Blackboard; the reasons for making Blackboard the first priority are:

- Blackboard is designed specifically for online course delivery and includes such features as synchronous chat; a place to store course content in an organized way; online discussions and Blog, Wiki for collaborative editing; online exams or quizzes; and more.
- Blackboard class shells are created automatically for every

active course.

- As long as the course instructor is properly listed with the class in Banner, he or she will have access to the Blackboard site.
- All students who are properly enrolled in your course in Banner will automatically be enrolled in your Blackboard site.

The Faculty Guide for Pandemic Planning (www.stthomas.edu/irt/forfaculty/pandemicplan) includes steps to take and has documentation and tutorials for Blackboard and additional information regarding technology options. If you have any questions, be sure to contact your IRT consultant.



UPCOMING APPLICATION DEADLINES FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Note that deadlines are 4 p.m. on dates below. Late applications are not accepted. All proposals must be emailed by 4 p.m. of the designated day to pmalexander@stthomas.edu. Please see the FDC website for instructions and application forms, at www.stthomas.edu/fdc.

Deadline	Grant Type	To Support Activity During:
February 1	Research Grant	Next academic year or summer after July 1
February 15	Faculty Partnership, Partnership-in-Learning	Spring of current academic year
March 1	Teaching Enhancement Grant	Summer or following academic year

Writing across the Curriculum Workshops

Deadline for registration: One week before workshops
Register by email with Pat Alexander at pmalexander@stthomas.edu
Please share information with adjuncts in your departments.

How to Effectively Use Peer Response to Student Writing

Led by Erika Scheurer (English, Director of Writing across the Curriculum)

Have you ever tried putting students in groups to give one another feedback on their essay drafts, only to have the whole thing go awry? Or maybe you've never tried peer feedback groups and would like to. This workshop—supported with materials from Dr. Chris Anson's Writing Across the Curriculum summer seminar—will provide you with tools to structure and guide the work of peer feedback groups so that they support the writing and learning goals you set for your course. Please contact Dr. Erika Scheurer (ecscheurer@stthomas.edu) for more information.

Dates and Locations for Workshops: Tuesday, November 10	Wednesday, November 11
3:30 - 4:30 p.m.	2:30 - 3:30 p.m.
BEC 101 (St. Paul)	MOH 417 (Minneapolis)

How to Respond Effectively to Student Writing in Progress

Led by Erika Scheurer (English, Director of Writing across the Curriculum)

It is late at night and you have a stack of essays to grade; you have spent hours on them and you have hours to go. As you cover each essay with marginalia and a generous end-note, you experience an existential crisis: "Why am I doing this? Will the students even read this?" In this workshop—supported with materials from Dr. Chris Anson's Writing Across the Curriculum summer seminar—you will learn how to be more efficient and strategic in the feedback you give to students. This, in turn, will help you to better support course goals and learning objectives that pertain to writing. Please contact Dr. Erika Scheurer (ecscheurer@stthomas.edu) for more information.

Dates and Locations for Workshops: Tuesday, November 17	Wednesday, November 18
3:30 - 4:30 p.m.	2:30 - 3:30 p.m.
BEC 101 (St. Paul)	MOH 417 (Minneapolis)

Synergia is published by The Center for Faculty Development, University of St. Thomas.

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The lobby area and resource room of the Center will be open from 8 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. M-F. Please stop by!

The opinions expressed in articles in Synergia are not necessarily those of the Center for Faculty Development.

Workshops Co-Sponsored with Service Learning

Transforming an Assignment

Wednesday, November 11, 2009

3 -4:30 p.m.

Room 315 McNeely

Have you been interested in trying service-learning in one of your courses but are apprehensive about changing your entire syllabus? Experiment with changing just one assignment. See how you can encourage students' engagement in the learning process by transforming one of your existing assignments into one that uses service-learning to meet its goals. This practical, hands-on workshop will provide examples from faculty in different disciplines. Participants are encouraged (but not required) to bring one of their own assignments for discussion. To register, contact Barb Baker, Service-Learning Program Manager, at 2-5380 or bebaker@stthomas.edu.

Introduction to Service-Learning

Monday-Thursday, January 11-14, 2010

9 a.m. - Noon

Room 315 McNeely

This workshop is designed for those who have little or no experience with service-learning.

Learn about the foundations and goals of service-learning and gain practical strategies for classroom and community work from experienced faculty. Explore ways to transform a course, or to offer a new course, by incorporating service learning. Both full-time and part-time faculty are welcome. For questions or to register for the workshop, please contact Barb Baker, Service-Learning Program Manager, at 2-5380 or bebaker@stthomas.edu.

Multicultural Student Services will feature *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir* for their 2010 January Book Club.

Faculty Development will partner with MSS for its fourth annual J-term Book Club series featuring local author, Kao Kalia Yang. *The Latehomecomer* is one of the first memoirs by a Hmong writer released with national distribution by a literary press, and recently received a Minnesota book Award. Says Minnesota state senator Mee Moua, "*The Latehomecomer* is a wonderful journey into the very personal experiences of its author, and it is also a story about so many of us. Reading this book is about experiencing the Hmong American transformation."

The brown bag lunch discussion sessions will run Thursdays in January (January 7, 14, 21 and 28) from noon - 1 p.m. in Room 304, Murray- Herrick Campus Center. Yang will speak on campus February 16 from 6 - 8 p.m. in the O'Shaughnessy Education Center Auditorium. She will meet with faculty for a seminar that afternoon. Students and faculty can sign up to participate in the book club by contacting the MSS office beginning December 1, 2009. Please direct questions to multicultural@stthomas.edu or call 651.962.6460.

Faculty Development will buy books for faculty who participate in at least 3 of the 4 book discussion sessions. Contact Faculty Development for a book (2-6022).

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

The Faculty Development Center is co-sponsoring the following workshops. (See p. 6 for more information on these offerings.)

Writing across the Curriculum Workshops

Led by Erika Scheurer (English, Director of Writing Across the Curriculum)

How to Effectively Use Peer Response to Student Writing

Tuesday, November 10	3:30 - 4:30 p.m.	BEC 101 (St. Paul)
Wednesday, November 11	2:30 - 3:30 p.m.	MOH 417 (Minneapolis)

How to Respond Effectively to Student Writing in Progress

Tuesday, November 17	3:30 - 4:30 p.m.	BEC 101 (St. Paul)
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Workshops Co-Sponsored with Service Learning

Transforming an Assignment

Wednesday, November 11	3 - 4:30 p.m.	Room 315 McNeely
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Introduction to Service-Learning

Mon.-Thurs, January 11-14, 2010	9 a.m. - Noon	Room 315 McNeely
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