

WAC NOTES

Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

2014/2015 Volume XXIII

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Year in Review

by Jason Anderson [Chemistry & Geosciences]

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Steering Committee has been very active during the 2014-2015 academic year. With the committee's attention focused on the WAC program self-study/assessment, one of this year's major goals was to remain visible as an advocate of the importance of writing in the College community, especially the WAC Community. After MaryJo Witz's acceptance as the Interim Dean Curriculum and Program Development, Amy Burtner (English & Philosophy) took on the role of Interim Coordinator of WAC. Among her first acts, Amy spearheaded the creation of a WAC LibGuide (<http://libguides.monroecc.edu/wac>), an online repository of information about the MCC WAC program, writing in the disciplines, writing to learn, research tips, writing resources available from the MCC Library, and a variety of writing-related links and videos. As with other LibGuides available through MCC Library Services, this resource is an excellent starting point to learn more about specific topics.

In addition to increasing the profile of WAC through collaborations with the MCC Library, our partnership with the Writing Center was also expanded this year. Jean McDonough (Writing Center) organized a student student workshop in the fall semester that utilized

MCC's Custom *Pocket Style Manual*. WAC member Jason Anderson (Chemistry & Geosciences) joined Angelique Johnston (English & Philosophy) for this event, and attendees were offered an opportunity to improve their citation skills in both Chicago and MLA documentation styles. In order to spark interest in this workshop, the resources provided to the students were based on a current topic in the news: Ebola, flu, and smallpox research papers, online resources, and books. The interactive session was attended by a large crowd of students that packed the Empire Room.

The spring semester also featured another student workshop that was a collaborative effort between WAC faculty and the Writing Center. This workshop focused on student success in writing-intensive (WR) courses at MCC. WAC Steering Committee members Jason Anderson (Chemistry & Geosciences), Karen Wells (Mathematics), Mark Sample (AHPS), Mark Ricci (VAPA) provided students with an overview of the essential aspects of successful writing in their courses as well as some specific examples of the types of formal and informal writing essential to their discipline. The audience was comprised of an attentive group of students from a variety of courses, including an entire section of a course from Transitional Studies. Although each presentation was unique and discipline-specific, common themes essential to writing in any discipline were readily apparent. With writing being an integral example of high impact practices and a central tenet of successful communication, the role of writing as a vehicle to develop critical thinking skills was naturally a theme embedded in this workshop.

Finally, since the focus of the WAC program is to provide assistance and professional development for faculty, Amy Burtner led workshops for the TCC and for the First Year

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Faculty Series. These workshops focused on writing as a shared endeavor among faculty, and on the benefits of writing to learn pedagogy in all courses.

It has been a busy and productive year for the WAC Steering Committee. We hope that next year is just as rewarding.

A Word from the Interim Coordinator

by Amy Burtner [English/Philosophy]

A year ago at this time, I and my Steering Committee colleagues were assisting MaryJo Witz, our then-newest WAC coordinator, in assembling that edition of WAC Notes. It had been a year of transition, and we were recounting our accomplishments and preparing for the year to come under her leadership.

A month later, during more transitions at the College, she was tapped as Interim Dean of Curriculum and Program Development and I stepped in as interim coordinator for WAC. It has been a pleasure and an honor to do so, made all the more so by a fantastic committee of hardworking, dedicated WAC faculty and by continued support from the College. MaryJo has been on my speed-dial throughout the year as I settled into this role.

As Jason Anderson has illustrated above, WAC has been

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very busy this year, both in front of and behind the scenes. As the longitudinal data show [see page 7], WAC and our WR offerings have held relatively steady, despite this time of declining enrollment. We are heartened by the mention of writing and WR courses as the College looks to revamp General Education and Liberal Arts, and we wave our banner with pride and gusto as one of the long-established "high impact practices" here at MCC—and have been doing so long before it's become hip to refer to such things.

This summer and the coming fall will bring the hunkering-down into data and surveys and examples that constitute a program evaluation/self study. It's been a positive year of planning, partnerships, and programming.

I look forward to some rest, and then return.

2014-15 Outstanding WAC Faculty Award Winner

by Amy Burtner [English/Philosophy]

This year's recipient of the Outstanding WAC Faculty Award went to a department: Anthropology/History/Political Science/Sociology. The WAC steering committee honors the work of all members of AHPS for their move last year to obtain permanent WR status for every course they offer. The effort was launched and guided by then-chair Nayda Pares-Kane, who encouraged faculty in four disciplines to reach agreement about WR pedagogy. By embracing the values of WAC at the department level, the faculty in AHPS show how a commitment to student engagement and learning drives collective action.

The award was presented at the Employee Recognition Ceremony on May 27. Interim chair Susan Belair accepted the award on her department's behalf. Congratulations!

Bridging Learning to Write and Writing to Learn

by Katie Leite [ESOL/TRS]

Did you know that ESOL courses are writing intensive? Our philosophy is that students learn English by using it when they are motivated to communicate. Before non-native English speaking students can be expected to communicate accurately in English, they must first become fluent. Language acquisition is a process that can take a long time. Therefore, in order to help our students speed up the fluency process, our program requires massive amounts of reading and writing. In some of our ESOL classes, students are expected to read nearly 1,000 pages and write 10,000 words.

Each semester, the MCC ESOL Program serves more than 250 diverse students learners from countries around the world. Most are immigrants or refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Burma, China, Congo, Cuba, Dominican Republic, India, Iraq, Nepal, Somalia, Turkey, Ukraine, Sudan, Vietnam, and various West African countries. Sometimes as many as 15 different ethnicities and languages are represented in one class.

Students are diverse in every other way as well: age, educational background, and educational goals. Some students come directly from high school; others have been in ESOL programs in the community; some have studied a lot of English in their countries. There are students who have had professions in their countries and wish to update their skills or change careers. Younger students are searching for the career that fits their personalities and values. Others participate in the program just to enhance their English skills. Whatever the goal, all students want to improve their English and continue on their chosen path as quickly as possible.

There are three skill levels in the ESOL Program. All of the core courses are integrated skills classes with a strong focus on reading, writing, and summarizing. In our lowest level, we focus on "learning to write." Students learn grammatical structures and cultural and rhetorical conventions of American English. However, they also begin "writing to learn" by personally responding to topics related to American culture, history, and current events.

As we move to higher levels, students continue "learning to write" through researching, paraphrasing, and summarizing. At the same time, they use their newly acquired language as a vehicle for "writing to learn." For instance, they demonstrate understanding of their chosen research topics by evaluating, synthesizing, and presenting ideas from multiple non-fiction texts.

If you are interested in learning more about the ESOL Program curriculum, or if you have any questions about the academic support services available for all non-native speaking students at MCC, please contact the ESOL Program Coordinator, Katie Leite, or the ESOL Cross Cultural Counselor, Don Beech.

"Language acquisition is a process that can take a long time [...] In some of our ESOL classes, students are expected to read nearly 1,000 pages and write 10,000 words."

Grammar Across the Curriculum: MCC's Style Guide Initiative

by Angelique Johnston [English/Philosophy]

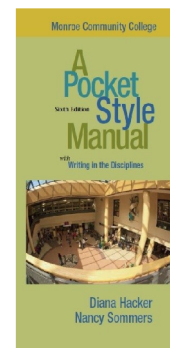
Grammar can be sticky; some rules stay with us for life. Consider “I before e except after c”: it rhymes and its memorable character holds up. We may even remember “unpack your adjectives” from the 70’s Schoolhouse Rock! series. But grammar rules can be sticky in an alternate way: they often confuse and evade students. Memory lapses and bad habits form. Students may recall parts of speech, or rote memory tricks, but many lack the deeper understanding to apply these rules with consistency. How do we help? Grammar teachers know quite a lot about how to teach grammar well. Michelle Navarre Cleary, Associate Professor and Associate Dean of Curriculum at DePaul University, writes specifically about what we know about grammar instruction in her 2014 Atlantic article “The Wrong Way to Teach Grammar.” She reminds us that “A century of research shows that traditional grammar lessons... don’t help and may even hinder students’ efforts to become better writers.” So what’s the right way? The research is clear: in context, often, and with support. Helping students with grammar is a recursive process and we have the tools to teach and re-teach it if we keep at it. The grammar lessons that “stick” in the long-run are those taught in the context of students’ actual writing for a course, any course, and more than once or twice to really have staying power.

This makes good sense and it can translate to good practice with some clear resources and cross-curricular communication. The English and Philosophy Department’s style guide initiative is one such mode for communication and shared resources. The initiative started in 2014 with the custom style guide, *A Pocket Style Manual*. Maybe you’ve seen it on campus or have students currently using it. We sold 2,150 copies, which surpassed our benchmark of 2,000, and this included 54 class sections in Fall 2014 and 80 class sections in Spring 2015, including all TRS 200 sections. The collaboration began with faculty who knew the book and already used it. It spread to interested Writing Across the Curriculum faculty, the Writing Center, the library, Transitional Studies and English as a Second Language, the Center for Academic Reading, and is open to anyone on campus with a

vested interest in helping our students improve as writers.

The custom style guide will be available for bookstore order again in 2015-2016, so that a consistent resource is available to all students at MCC. Our eventual goal is to transition to a completely open access/Creative Commons version in Fall 2016 to coincide with the kick-off of the Academies. The Composition Committee is working with Mark McBride and Lumen Learning to move away from big publishing house monopoly and towards lower costs for students. *A Pocket Style Manual*, which costs students \$40 retail, is a good deal, but we feel it can be even better. Professors Angelique Johnston and Amy Burtner, in collaboration with composition and WR faculty, are working on building a homegrown style manual to be printed in house for about \$5 a printed copy and free online. The cost difference has the potential to save students money, a lot of money. Collectively, students spent \$86,000 on this text this past school year; if we replace it with the in-house style manual, collected and authored by MCC faculty and OER materials, it will reduce textbook costs to our students by \$75,000.

Sound like something you might be interested in being a part of here at MCC? All are welcome to join in help with the project. Working groups to review OER materials and collect and pull together Creative Commons grammar, citation, and research materials will commence in Fall 2016 in anticipation of an online as well as printable resource for all faculty to use and share openly. Feel free to contact me (ajohnston@monroecc.edu) to learn more or join our efforts.



Introducing Our Newest WAC Steering Committee Members

Mark Ricci [VaPA]

by Pamela Fornieri [ESOL/TRS]



Mark Ricci loves to write. He started his career as a sports journalist at a small daily newspaper, The Evening Tribune, in Hornell, NY. After three years as a journalist, he earned his M.A. in Communications from SUNY Brockport and, as a graduate student, soon discovered that he enjoyed teaching. He started his teaching career as an adjunct instructor at MCC (and Brockport and St.

John Fisher) in 2009, and was hired as a full-time faculty member at MCC beginning Fall 2013. As a communications generalist, Mark has taught a number of different courses, including COM 101, COM 120, SPC 141, and SPC 142.

When I asked Mark to describe writing intensive courses, he said they are “not revolutionary” in terms of completely changing how he teaches. Since there are writing components in all COM and SPC courses, moving to a WR designation is not a tremendous leap. Currently, only his SPC 141 course is WR-certified, but he would like the COM courses to be as well. With the diverse student body at MCC, Mark sees different levels of writing and develops individual writing plans with each student. Mark mentioned that WR courses encourage him to reflect on his teaching and validate the power of writing as a tool for understanding, learning, and engaging with new ideas. He finds it satisfying to help students establish their voices in writing.

Informal assignments include blogs, reflective analyses, and weekly application assignments. The formal writing assignments are varied and creative. In COM 101, students analyze their own media dependency in a media deprivation assignment, in which they live media-free for eight hours and write a 4-8 page paper about that experience. In COM 120, students explore their online identities and digital footprints. In addition, they formally analyze print advertisements and look at them through different lenses and theories. In their formal writing, students must incorporate outside sources, as well as format their work using either MLA or APA conventions. For SPC 141, students write an observation paper where they make guesses about interactions based on nonverbal cues.

Mark lives in Henrietta with his wife Brittany and almost two year-old daughter Gianna. He still writes and publishes, connecting his passions for writing and sports. Have questions about major sports? Just ask Mark. By the way, he’s also a huge Dolphins’ fan!

Vestina Turner [Nursing]

by Kathleen Borbee [Business]



Vestina Turner accepted the opportunity to become part of the WAC Steering Committee after another nursing department faculty stepped down. She has been a full-time faculty member in MCC’s Nursing Department for five years. Before coming to MCC, Vestina was employed by Unity Health System for over fifteen years. Vestina’s

undergraduate education began right here at MCC—with her A.A.S. in Nursing in 1991. She went on to earn her B.S. and M.S. in Nursing from Roberts Wesleyan.

Vestina has seen many changes in the healthcare field during her nursing career, and she is acutely aware of the importance of writing in this field since she believes it has taken on a minor role in some areas. With the advancement of the electronic patient chart, the healthcare professional does not always need to know how to write, as long as the correct box is checked.

To Vestina, this could translate into fragmented care being provided to the patient. She is concerned that the professional—perhaps even unknowingly—will start to address the patient in the same way that they address the chart: by putting a check on the task and moving on. “I am afraid the art of caring will be lost,” Vestina says.

This became evident several years back when she needed to address the documentation of a patient care tech. Notes Vestina, “My interaction with him occurred during the time electronic documentation was being implemented on the unit, so documenting in a paper chart was still required. This high school graduate was in fact functionally illiterate.”

Since the Nursing curriculum has designated their courses WR, Vestina has noticed both positive and negative outcomes. First time nursing students are certainly surprised about the amount of writing required for the program, and initially her students sometimes complain about this requirement. However, when the emphasis is placed on the importance of documenting how they cared for their patients, and how writing enhances critical thinking, students complain a little less and eventually come to understand why it is so important.

Longitudinal Data

Compiled by Karen Wells [Mathematics] and Amy Burtner [English/Philosophy]

Table 1
Writing Intensive (WR) course section counts per semester, and total number of unduplicated WR courses per year, for Academic Years 2011-12 through 2014-15.

Semester	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-2015
Fall	609	478	624	620
Intersession	0	0	0	2
Spring	545	558	545	555
Summer	111	98	123	N/A
Total WR Courses	1265	1134	1292	1177

Table 2
The number of unduplicated students taking WR courses per semester, for Academic Years 2011-12 through 2014-15.

Semester	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Fall	8486	7309	8061	7930
Intersession	0	0	0	53
Spring	7743	7524	6940	7208
Summer	1595	1271	1563	N/A

Table 3
The number of MCC faculty teaching WR courses by semester, for Academic Years 2011-12 through 2014-15.

Semester	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Fall	194	152	209	201
Intersession	1	0	0	2
Spring	169	178	181	177
Summer	55	41	56	N/A

Source: Andreu, A. (May 2015), *Writing Intensive History 2011-2015*, IR, Total pp. 1

Writing Across the Curriculum Steering Committee

Amy Burtner, English/Philosophy, Interim WAC Program Coordinator

Jason Anderson, Chemistry

Kathleen Borbee, Business Administration/ Economics

Pamela Fornieri, ESOL/TRS

Mark Ricci, Visual and Performing Arts

Verdis Robinson, History (AHPS) and DCC liaison

Mark Sample, History (AHPS)

Vestina Turner, Nursing

Karen Wells, Mathematics

WAC Notes began in 1990, the brainchild of Stasia Callan, Professor Emerita of English. Since then, it has served as the formal vehicle for communicating the efforts, initiatives, and accomplishments of the WAC program each year.

Originally published in print two times a year, *WAC Notes* is now published at the close of the academic year and distributed primarily in digital format.

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The WAC Steering Committee invites your feedback and input. We also welcome your proposals for new WR courses to support what is a clear message from employers: to send them employees who can communicate effectively in writing.

Please see our website for information and a link for getting your courses WR-certified: <http://www.monroecc.edu/depts/wac/>