



# WAC NOTES

## Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

2015/2016 Volume XXIV

Image: modified; Nic McPhee/ flickr [CC BY-SA 2.0]

### Year in Review

by Amy Burtner [English/Philosophy]

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Steering Committee spent the 2015-2016 year doing much behind the scenes: administering faculty and student surveys about WR courses; researching other institutions' WAC programs; digging into our own IR data; having conversations and continuing outreach with other campus offices/programs; approving some new WR course proposals; recertifying WR courses; and beginning a new Trib series to highlight faculty members' WR teaching practices. Committee members were also busy individually with projects that tie in with their WR teaching. From Gen Ed assessment (where student writing is used as the assessment tool), to global and distance education initiatives, to STEM conferences, and more, WAC Steering Committee members wear many hats and stay active with their own writing and professional communication. They are models for their students and their colleagues in this regard.

The year began with a change: after several years on the WAC Steering Committee, Jason Anderson [Chemistry/Geosciences] stepped down to work on grant-funded curriculum writing projects. His colleague Ryan Clemens has taken his place as our liaison for the natural sciences. You can read more about Jason and Ryan in this newsletter.

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The fall 2015 semester ended with sadness: Stasia Callan, who spearheaded the creation of WAC at MCC, died. Tony Leuzzi's tribute (on page 2) is a testament to her vision and her legacy.

The new Trib series, titled *All WRite: WAC in Practice*, came out of a desire to maintain campus visibility and to showcase the excellent work faculty members are doing in their WR courses. Four articles were published during the spring 2016 semester:

- ["Writing Across the Curriculum in the Sciences"](#) by Ryan Clemens
- ["Writing Across the Curriculum in Speech and Communication Courses "](#) by Mark Ricci
- ["Writing for the Health of It"](#) by Vestina Turner
- ["Writing in a Math Class? Seriously?"](#) by Rachel Santiago and Karen Wells

We plan to continue this series for fall 2016 and beyond, and welcome submissions by any WR faculty member who has nifty strategies for infusing more writing into content-based courses.

Finally, some highlights to share about MCC's WAC program from research gathered during these past months:

- ▶ MCC and RIT are the only area institutions to have a separate Writing Across the Curriculum Program. We are the only community college in the area (as well as among our usual benchmarker CCs) to have a WAC program;
- ▶ Outside of English, the courses with the highest number of WR sections offered each semester are Biology and Nursing;
- ▶ From fall 2012 - summer 2015, 34,121 students have enrolled in WR courses at MCC [excluding ENG 101, the number is 28,038].

## ***In Memorium: Stasia Callan Remembered***

by Tony Leuzzi [English/Philosophy], WAC Coordinator from 2002-2013



Image credit: TYCA (2012)

On December 10, 2015, the MCC community lost one of its most impassioned and dedicated faculty members: Stasia Callan. As a former Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Coordinator, and as someone who worked alongside Stasia for many years, I am saddened by her death yet grateful to work in an environment that has been irrevocably shaped by her vision.

Stasia's many contributions include the creation of ENG 230: "Comparative Mythology"; her development of several on-site study abroad courses; and her sustained involvement with the New York State Council of English's Two Year College Association (TYCA). However, it is for her commitment to writing as a viable mode of teaching and learning that she will best be remembered at MCC.

In spring 2003, when Stasia was honored with an Outstanding WAC Faculty Award, I acknowledged her accomplishment in *WAC Notes*: "Stasia has contributed so much to intellectual life of the college that her receiving this award recognizes not only of her outstanding contributions to WAC,

but acknowledges her vitality and dedication as a teacher, mentor, and colleague." Stasia's initial interest in WAC was on-trend, if not slightly ahead of the times: during the late 1980s, WAC and other writing-to-learn initiatives were springing up at colleges throughout the country. Stasia's attempts to create and implement a WAC-based program model at MCC was met with some administrative and faculty resistance. However, through sheer persistence, and her presentation of incontrovertible evidence regarding the value of writing-to-learn strategies, she swayed the naysayers. By the early 1990s, WAC was born at MCC.

In the years that followed, Stasia helped build the program from the ground up, establishing "Brown Bag Lunch" workshops for teachers to share assignments and discuss writing-intensive pedagogy, and frequently bringing in experts who understood WAC's impact on higher education in national terms. Although Stasia eventually stepped aside as the program's first Coordinator, she continued to champion the WAC mission and adapted writing-intensive exercises into all of her courses. She also understood the importance of critical writing and research. To this end, she co-authored (with Carolyn Wendell) an invaluable writing research guide that was adopted for classroom use by several professors in the English/Philosophy Department.

From a more personal standpoint, Stasia proved to be a nurturing mentor who helped guide me, as well as other junior-level members of faculty, towards a more secure position at the college. I know I am not alone when I say her legacy lives on through all of her endeavors, and most crucially through the existence of WAC at MCC.

## 2015-2016 Outstanding WAC Faculty Award Winner

by Ryan Clemens [Chemistry/Geosciences]

Faculty who implement Writing Intensive (WR) in their courses play an integral part in making the Writing Across the Curriculum Program a success. Their devotion and dedication help sustain our efforts to keep WAC thriving at Monroe Community College (MCC). Fifteen years ago, the WAC Committee created an annual award to honor an individual faculty member who has made a significant contribution to fostering student writing skills through courses designated as WR. The Committee takes great pleasure in recognizing **Dr. Jason Anderson**, Associate Professor of Chemistry, as the 2015-2016 recipient of the annual Outstanding WAC Faculty Award.

Jason became a full-time, tenured-track instructor at MCC in the fall of 2009. Since 2010, he has taught organic chemistry which is writing intensive. Understanding the significance of writing in the sciences, Jason places an emphasis on writing to learn, particularly in the use of informal lab writing to enhance the writing skills of students. His strategy of teaching scientific writing has evolved over the years. When he first began to teach organic chemistry he focused on introducing more pre-lab informal writing for the laboratory assignments. As a direct result of these changes, he noticed improvement in student preparation for lab and in their formal lab report. During the last couple of years he has been involved in an NSF-funded collaboration with RIT which has involved changing the laboratory curriculum of organic chemistry to a guided-inquiry design. Instead of traditional expository labs, the students primarily conduct guided-inquiry lab modules that continually reinforce experimental techniques, concepts, and writing in science. This approach to lab is an excellent showcase of how informal writing is used not only to understand concepts but also as a tool for improving writing skills. The modules are structured in a way which allow students to become familiar with cognitive skills such as classification, summary, and compare and

contrast, which are later re-worked into the formal reports. Jason also has restructured the formal writing exercises in the lab. Instead of writing reports that include an introduction, procedure, results, and discussion sections for each report, Jason focuses on individual aspects of the formal report as the semester progresses. By the end of the semester, students are capable of writing full lab reports more easily because they have learned each component separately throughout the semester.

Not only has Jason been involved in teaching a writing intensive course, he has also served, until recently, as a member of the WAC Steering Committee. As the only WAC Committee member from the natural sciences, he has served as an important voice in promoting writing in the sciences. Jason has always been willing to go the extra mile in his Committee responsibilities. Throughout his time on the committee he helped plan and execute numerous faculty and student workshops in support of the mission of WAC.

In short, Jason has been a true champion of writing across the curriculum and his receiving this award serves as a recognition of not only his contributions to WAC, but also an acknowledgment of his commitment and dedication as a teacher and colleague. Please join the WAC Steering Committee in congratulating Jason on this well-deserved award.

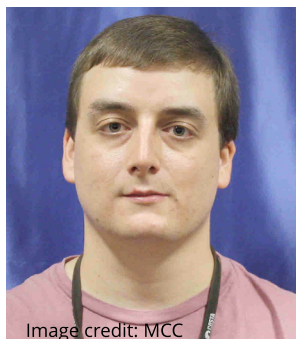


Image credit: MCC

## Introducing Our Newest WAC Steering Committee Member

### Ryan Clemens [Chemistry/Geosciences]

by Kathleen Borbee [Business Administration & Economics]



Ryan Clemens accepted the opportunity to become part of the WAC Steering Committee after another Chemistry and Geoscience faculty stepped down. He has been a full-time faculty member in MCC's Chemistry and Geoscience Department

for four years. Prior to coming to MCC, Ryan was a tenured faculty member in the Alabama Community College system and taught at Marion Military Institute. He has been teaching at the Community College level for eight years. He was born and raised in Northeast Alabama by his grandmother who had a large influence on his choice to teach. She was a retired high school teacher and received her degree in Chemistry from the University of Alabama in 1944. Ryan attended Northeast Alabama Community College for two years, then transferred to the Virginia Military Institute where he received a B.S. in Chemistry. From there he went on to graduate school at the University of Alabama and received a Ph.D. with a focus on natural product synthesis.

Ryan is relatively new to WR courses – he taught one WR course in Organic Chemistry during the fall 2015 semester at MCC. However, he has been emphasizing writing in his classes for some time as a way to learn the subject matter that he teaches, and his experience with the specifically designated WR course sparked his interest in serving on the WAC Committee and in future writing intensive courses. He anticipates teaching both the lab and lecture portions of Organic Chemistry as WR courses.

He believes that while students may be fearful of the WR designation or have a perception that the class may be more difficult, students ultimately find that a WR course can be very beneficial. Since writing is an art that requires practice, a WR course gives students the venue to hone their skills. In fact, in Organic Chemistry, students typically are much better prepared for writing, and in many cases do not even realize the course is writing intensive. For some reason, lab reports are not perceived as being the same as writing an essay for an English class. This is probably due to the fact that writing in the sciences can be more technical than in other courses. When the emphasis is placed on the importance of documenting their lab results, students benefit by not only improving their writing skills, but also by enhancing their critical thinking skills. Students complain a little less and eventually come to understand why writing is so important.

Ryan is excited to be on the WAC Committee and looks forward to helping promote writing across the curriculum among faculty and students.

## Writing Across the Globe and the Curriculum

by Gale Lynch [Director of Global Education & International Services]



Image credit: MCC

"What is global education anyway?" I've been asked by numerous people over the years. The term global education sounds nice and seems to be self-explanatory, but what is it exactly, and more to the point for this publication, what does it have to do with writing across the curriculum?

Global education involves thinking critically about our connections with people, places, systems, world views, and practices around our world. It is local as much as it is international. Dawn Michele Whitehead, senior director for global learning and curricular change at the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), writes that "global learning . . . reflects the full scope and substance of engagement with learning in and about the world [and] shifts the focus from a specific location or culture to larger issues that affect many parts of the world in interconnected ways." Similarly, writing across the curriculum involves thinking critically through the practice of writing, whether formally or informally. It also crosses all academic disciplines and engages students so that they see and understand connections to different themes and ideas. Students get to know themselves better through writing just as they get to know themselves better by encountering different cultures.

The parallels between global education and writing across the curriculum are apparent to me in part because of my experience living abroad. As a junior in college, I studied for 9 months in Tokyo, Japan. Although I had studied Japanese, I couldn't speak it and my host parents spoke even less English than I spoke Japanese. On top of that, each day I was confronted by new and different customs, transportation, food, scenery. It was exhausting, overwhelming and invigorating all at the same time. How did I manage to stay the full

school year, to gain conversational fluency in Japanese, to learn to eat all parts of the fish, navigate the subways, adapt to collectivist thinking, and ultimately communicate with others? Where did my resiliency come from?

Hindsight reveals that I not only survived but thrived in my junior year abroad because of family, faith, good friends, excellent teachers, and the kindness of many Japanese people. But one thing that surely helped was writing – in particular, writing letters home and maintaining an academic journal. I was able to think through what I was experiencing and write my best guesses about on why things were the way they were. I had to explain things for which my family had no context to understand. I absorbed new concepts and internalized my learning. (I also discovered a love of *bunbogyu* (Japanese stationary stores) and 0.38 nibbed pens - see below.)

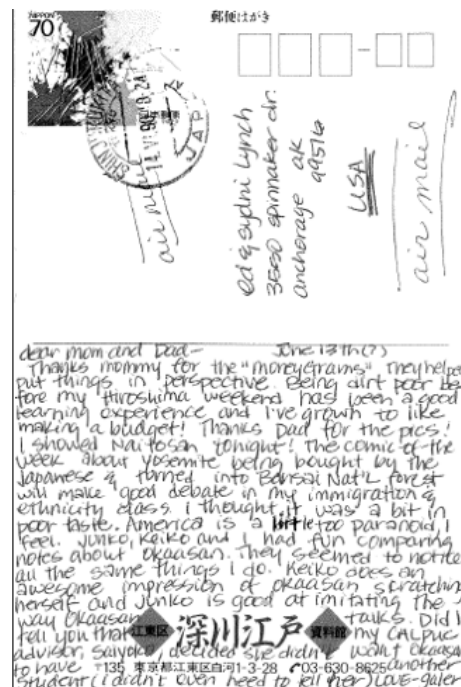


Image credit: Gale Lynch

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[Cont.]

My postcard home illustrates the power of global learning and writing to learn. It reflects the power of high impact practices on students' learning and lives. I am passionate about global learning and about writing because of my personal experiences abroad and because I have seen the effects of these practices on students. As educators we want transformational experiences for our students; incorporating global learning, writing, research, internships, learning communities, service learning, and collaboration into curriculum and co-curriculum are all methods to ensure this happens.

At MCC one example of this is Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) whereby our faculty and students work with faculty and students from another country to engage in academic cross cultural collaboration. Students are challenged to examine their cultural norms and beliefs as they virtually interact to accomplish an assigned goal.

They often video chat with each other through Skype and must communicate via writing in order to complete the assigned task. Students communicate using English, yet because they are collaborating with students who speak English as a second or third language, they learn the limitations of language and are challenged in much the same way I was living in Japan.

Critical thinking, discovering self, internalizing learning, identifying our connections to others and the world are all elements students will gain through global education. The same can be said of writing across the curriculum and other high impact practices. As Director of Global Education and International Services I look forward to working with faculty to make these goals a reality.

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## Did You Know?

- In Fall 2015, the latest data available, international students comprised .9% of MCC total enrollment.
- The Fall 2015 headcount for the ESOL program was 225, 131 of which were international students.

Data sources: IR Internal Data: *Enrollment by Geographic Area* and *Headcount by Academic Program*

## ESOL VOICES: Student Spotlight



### Mohammad AlFayad

*Mohammad AlFayad grew up in Damascus, Syria, where his family settled after becoming refugees when Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria in 1967. He obtained a degree to become an elementary school art teacher; however, he left his home country during the midst of the Syrian Civil War. He dreams of a future where his family and his country are safe from the oppressive government. He graduated from MCC in 2015 with an AAS in Tooling & Machining.*

*Mohammad AlFayad, 2015*

### The Blue Wristbands

We watched as the Arab Spring spread through Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, but we never thought that it would make its way to our homeland of Syria. Our government told us that our community was strong, and that a revolution would never have a place in our land. What they really meant was that the government's secret service agents knew about our every move and we would be foolish to even dream about change in our country. Little did we know that the long, cold winter had begun to thaw and our spring was about to bloom.

There were news stories on Al Jazeera about our government regime kidnapping and killing children in Dera'a, and citizens filling the streets to protest. Gossip about the events filled the streets in Damascus. The government television channels showed us that everything was normal and there were no protests. The government had completely destroyed the city of Hama in the 1980s when there was protesting, so we were all scared to see what would happen now. Fear had been planted for 40 years in our hearts. Even the whisper of the word "freedom" was met with bloodshed, but we had been trained to believe that it was for the good of the country. I did not know that the President we supported would commit crimes against humanity, or that I could become one of his victims.

In our college, all the teachers were government workers. They told us that we had to meet at a famous mosque in the middle of Damascus on a Friday, or we would be punished. When we arrived,

the teachers gave us blue wristbands and said that if anyone in the mosque said anything against the government, we should respond by chanting pro-government mantras to drown out the opposition. If anybody videotaped us, we should immediately attack them. This seemed so wrong. We were regular individuals and it was not our job to attack other people. How could they be telling students like us to do this? I could feel that the government was setting regular citizens against each other, when we were really all the same. Would they turn all the citizens into killers to keep their position of power? I tried not to think about it.

When I emerged into the sunlight after Friday prayers, I saw two large groups standing on opposite sides of the street. On one side were regular civilians, some of whom had been sitting near me inside the mosque. On the other side of the street, I saw a huge group of police. It is normal to see police everywhere in Syria. There are a lot of them on all the corners, usually oblivious to everything around them, smoking their cigarettes and lazily balancing their guns on their shoulders. This group of police was different. They all had helmets, shields and sticks. They stood in straight lines, very organized, and ready to fight. All the students from my school were standing behind them, as we had been told to do. Without even a second thought, I walked over to stand with my people, the regular civilians. Once in the group, I turned to face the opposing group of policemen and classmates, my head held high.

We stood quietly as the police yelled at us to go home, shouting threats and beating their sticks

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[*The Blue Wristbands, cont.*]

against their shields. Then, a voice from our group of citizens shouted "Freedom! Freedom!" More voices joined in, repeating "Freedom! Freedom!" Soon, we were so loud that I could feel the beating of the words through my chest. It was the best moment of my life. Every fiber of my body was beating with the word that had always brought fear to my heart. The rhythmic beating stopped and was overtaken by a roar of shouts from the other side. The huge crowd of police and government supporters, including my classmates, ran straight at us like an old war movie. I was frozen. My heart was with the protesters, but the blue wristband on my arm said I was with the government.

The police ran past me, missing me by a hair, but they didn't touch me. I felt they were like dogs running behind their prey. I didn't move, so they did not run behind me, but they chased the other protesters down. I turned and followed the chaotic crowd. As I ran, I saw four policemen standing above a protester on the ground, beating him with their sticks, kicking him with their boots. There was so much blood that I could not tell where it was coming from. One of the old men from the mosque was on the ground with police officers standing over him. His thick eyeglasses were laying on the ground, not far from his swollen face. Even as the police sticks landed all over his aged body, his hands searched the ground as he cried out "Please, my glasses. You can do whatever you want to me, but all I want are my glasses." Officers were dragging bloody, broken bodies off to their cars to be detained.

I got home unharmed, not because I was lucky, but because of the blue wristband on my arm. I was grateful that I was not sitting in a prison with my ribs broken, but deep inside, I was feeling like a coward. I stood with the protesters, but I was not brave enough to stay them to the end, or to face the fate that so many of them suffered that day. I just froze and disappeared into the crowd. When I

returned home, I turned on the TV. That night, the government news cameras were in the same street where I saw people being beaten and bleeding. They showed that the streets were empty and peaceful. They said that the reports of a protest were a lie and nothing happened there that day, and anyone who believes that there had been a protest was an anti-government terrorist.

They had made their agenda clear. The regime's goal was to label the peaceful freedom-seekers as terrorists so they would have free authority to exterminate us all. I felt a target on my head. I felt a target on the roof of my family's house. We were now labeled as terrorists and were active enemies of our ruthless government because we now understood the truth about the 40-year-old regime. I had no choice but to continue with the simple, peaceful demand of "Freedom! Freedom!" My country's future had come to a tipping point right in front of me, and my options were to stay safe and watch it fall, or risk my own future to watch it rise. That night, the blue wristband lay at the bottom of the trashcan, cut into a dozen pieces.

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*ESOL Voices* a collection of stories written by ESOL students at Monroe Community College. Thanks to Katie Leite and Pamela Fornieri, ESOL Program faculty, for sponsoring the journal. We in WAC are honored to highlight the excellent writing that their students are doing.



## Longitudinal Data

Amy Burtner [English/Philosophy]

**Table 1**

Writing Intensive (WR) course counts per semester, duplicated and unduplicated, and total number of WR courses per year, for Academic Years 2012-13 through 2015-16.

Semester	2012-13	2013-14	2014-2015	2015-2016
Fall	478 [324]	624 [408]	620 [419]	621 [409]
Intersession	0	0	2	7
Spring	558 [380]	545 [363]	555 [381]	546 [380]
Summer	98 [76]	123 [93]	109 [64]	104 [N/A]
Total WR Courses	1134 [780]	1292 [864]	1286 [866]	1278 [N/A]

**Table 2**

The number of unduplicated students taking WR courses per semester, for Academic Years 2012-13 through 2015-16.

Semester	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-2016
Fall	7309	8060	7929	7838
Intersession	0	0	53	192
Spring	7542	6941	7220	6902
Summer	1270	1563	1349	N/A

**Table 3**

The number of MCC faculty teaching WR courses by semester, for Academic Years 2012-13 through 2015-16.

Semester	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-2016
Fall	113	168	165	148
Intersession	0	0	2	6
Spring	140	140	144	143
Summer	41	56	39	N/A

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

Welsh, A. (June 2016) *WAC Statistics for 2015-16*, IR, Total pgs. 1

Note: Numbers for 2012-2015 are revised from what were reported in previous *WAC Notes*; there had been an error in the formula used prior years.

## **Writing Across the Curriculum Steering Committee**

**Amy Burtner**, English/Philosophy, Interim WAC Program Coordinator

**Ryan Clemens**, Chemistry/Geosciences

**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, former 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/>