



# WAC Notes

## Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

Volume XXII: Academic Year 2013-2014

### *Tony Leuzzi, Outstanding WAC Faculty Award Recipient, 2013-2014*

By Jason Anderson

#### Writing Across the Curriculum

##### Steering Committee

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**MaryJo Witz**, Biology  
WAC Program Coordinator  
**Jason Anderson**, Chemistry  
**Kathleen Borbee**, Business  
Administration/ Economics  
**Amy Burtner**, English/ Philosophy  
**Pam Fornieri**, ESOL/TRS  
**Mark Sample**, History (AHPS)  
**Vestina Turner**, Nursing  
**Karen Wells**, Mathematics

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The Writing Across the Curriculum Steering Committee is pleased to announce the 13<sup>th</sup> recipient of the annual Outstanding WAC Faculty Award, **Tony Leuzzi**, Associate Professor of English and Philosophy. This award recognizes faculty members who make a strong commitment to fostering student writing skills through courses designated as Writing Intensive (WR).

Tony became a full-time, tenure-track instructor at Monroe Community College in the fall of 2001. Early in his career at the College, he began serving as the Coordinator of the Writing Across the Curriculum Program (2002-2013). Tony's contributions to MCC have been honored on numerous occasions, including both the NISOD Award and the Wesley T. Hansen Award for Excellence in Teaching. Throughout his tenure, Tony's passion for writing has been evident. An accomplished poet, he has published his own work on numerous occasions with *Radiant Losses* (the 2009 New Sins Editor's Prize Winner), *Fake Book*, and most recently, *The Burning Door*. He has also recently compiled a collection of interviews in his book *Passwords Primeval: 20 American Poets in Their Own Words*, which was designed to be a poetry resource both in and out of the classroom. This document is just one of the many examples of Tony's work as a practitioner of writing that enhances his excellence in the classroom.

At MCC, Tony has taught a wide range of writing intensive literature courses, creative writing workshops, and basic composition. Last semester, Tony taught ENG 101: Writing from Personal Experience, ENG 113: Introduction to Creative Writing, ENG 105: Introduction to Literature, and ENG 225: Contemporary Poetry. To support the new degree in Creative Writing, Tony implemented a new creative writing course, ENG 233: Creative Writing Workshop—Poetry during the Fall 2013 semester. As with many of his courses, ENG 233 was designed to help students advance their writing skills through drafting, workshoping, and revising original work.

Clear and concise expectations of student work and detailed guidance throughout the writing process are offered in each of his classes. This includes small group peer critiques/conferences that take place on "draft days" to allow the students an opportunity to

read each other's work; encouraging them to improve their writing by not only having their work reviewed, but by learning to help other group members also improve their writing. Treating writing as a process is also evident in Tony's courses with assignments designed to convey genera-specific conventions through sample essays used to provide a starting point for class discussions. In his words, "The emphasis is on building critical thinking through challenging writing assignments that often require a mixture of personal examination with citations from source texts."

Many of the current WAC Steering Committee members were fortunate to benefit from Tony's years of service as the WAC coordinator. We have had the privilege of working with him to elevate the importance of written communication to the College community, both students and faculty. Tony's writing advocacy – in the classroom, through poetry readings, and in his extensive publications – is inspiring. Furthermore, his leadership of the WAC program provided the committee a solid foundation to build upon for years to come. On behalf of the WAC Steering Committee, please join me in congratulating Tony on this well-deserved award.

## *How did you get started with writing-intensive classes?*

*By Mark Sample*

### **A profile of one of the WAC Steering Committee's newest members: Kathleen Borbee, Business Administration/Economics Department**

Kathleen Borbee has been a full-time faculty member in MCC's Business Administration/Economics Department for five years. Before coming to MCC, Kathleen was employed by IBM for over 31 years. Kathleen's undergraduate degree is in education; during her tenure with IBM she used this background to teach customers how their computer and how the latest software applications worked, educate customer executives on potential IBM solutions in the Executive Briefing Center, and teach managers and internal executives how to use the IBM Customer Relations Management System. In August, 2009 Kathleen retired from IBM. By September 1, 2009 she was a full-time faculty member at MCC, where she had been an adjunct for five years prior. Kathleen said that "Coming to MCC was like coming home or coming full circle - I began in teaching prior to IBM and came back to it, yet I had actually never left, since my many jobs in IBM all had aspects of teaching associated with them."

Kathleen has taught many different courses as WR during her time at MCC. When she first began teaching here she received e-mails urging her to designate her courses as WR. Her initial thoughts were that her courses were not like English courses; therefore, they wouldn't fit the WR criteria.

As time went on she began to add more reflective assignments to her courses, asking students to answer questions that tied a quest speaker's presentation to the course content, or to connect information on the Internet to something they were doing in class. Kathleen is a "firm believer that excellent written and verbal communication skills are something that will give a student the competitive advantage needed in today's job market." She began to realize that these reflective assignments, along with the formal project she had always required, met the criteria for the informal and formal components of a WR course, and were a great way to help a student put information into context.

Since designating her classes as WR, Kathleen has noticed both positive and negative outcomes. "I have a sense that students need to think about business issues and are not simply looking up answers in a text. It also helps me understand how my students think and what their opinions are regarding issues in the marketplace. Students who may be very quiet in class will express themselves much more fully in written form." On the down side, "I do spend more time grading written assignments which can get tedious. In order to try to streamline this and eliminate too much paper, I use ANGEL extensively and set up a Drop Box for assignments. I don't lose assignments and don't have to keep stacks of paper in my office. With the enhancements available in Blackboard, comments and notes on assignments will be even easier than it is in ANGEL."

Teaching her courses as WR has caused Kathleen to think differently about the way she teaches. With WR courses she has focused more on asking students to think about the questions she poses in her assignments. The overall outcome for the students is based less on multiple choice tests. She also found that students actually seem to prefer this. Quite often, students find that many multiple choice questions are ambiguous; they have a difficult time sorting out the answer choices. When she compares student grades on the multiple choice section of an exam to the essay portion of the same exam, students invariably do better on the essay portion. Students who may over-think a multiple choice question, are better able to explain themselves clearly in an essay. This has reinforced her decision to add more reflective writing assignments to her courses.

Lastly, I asked Kathleen how she would describe a writing-intensive course to a colleague now that she has successfully converted her courses to WR status. She replied, "A writing-intensive course can allow your students to think about the content of your course in a different way. It can be a way to move a course away from just memorization of facts to application of facts and can allow students the practice of being able to articulate course concepts in the written form. It is not as terrifying as it may initially appear."

## *The WAC Year in Review*

*By Amy Burtner*

The 2013/14 academic year was one of transition for WAC. After 11 years as coordinator, Tony Leuzzi (English/Philosophy) passed the torch to MaryJo Witz (Biology), who has been an active WAC member for six years. We were both sad to see Tony go and excited for the future under MaryJo's capable leadership.

This change, as well as the news that WAC is entering its assessment cycle again, offered the opportunity to spend most of the year in an introspective, reflective mood: Who are we? What is our central purpose? How can we increase WAC's college-wide profile and widen our vision? The first two questions are at the heart of program assessment. To address the third question, WAC began by making a subtle, but we hope fundamental, shift to the structure of WAC at MCC and the language used to reflect that structure.

Thus, "WAC Committee" became "WAC Steering Committee" to better align conceptually and functionally with other committees and programs at the College. It's the Steering Committee that meets regularly (once a month) to approve WR course certifications, set goals, revisit policies, plan events, and address the functional aspects of the program. The Steering Committee expanded this year, also, to now include faculty representatives from ESOL/TRS and business (Kathleen Borbee from Business Administration and Economics and Pamela Fornieri from ESOL/TRS). Mark Sample (History) and Vestina Turner (Nursing) accepted the invitation to serve after their departments' long-time WAC colleagues stepped down for other pursuits. We can better claim the across-the-disciplines mantle with Steering Committee representation from the following departments: Biology, Business Administration and Economics, Chemistry, English/Philosophy, ESOL/TRS, History (AHPS), Mathematics, and Nursing.

This change, from the old "WAC Committee" to a Steering Committee, also emphasizes the true foundation of the WAC Program at MCC: the WAC *Community*, which consists of all those faculty members who teach WR classes. It's the WAC Community that carries out—not just in theory but in practice—the values inherent in WAC and WID (Writing In the Disciplines) programs. WAC is not a club; it's a pedagogy, and it would have no value in and of itself were there not faculty members committed to its core values.

In the spirit, then, of enhancing and advocating for such community, the WAC Steering Committee focused on outreach and partnerships during both semesters:

- With TCC: Coordinator MaryJo Witz and Steering Committee member Amy Burtner led two workshops about WAC, one for the First Year Faculty Series and another at an Adjunct Supper;
- With the Writing Center: we are in conversations about how best to coordinate—not compete with or duplicate—our mutual efforts;
- With ENG 101: promoting the use of a shared style handbook (grammar, punctuation, mechanics, citation styles) that students would buy once and then use in all their classes.

Finally, a major WR milestone occurred late in the academic year: The Department of Anthropology/History/Political Science/ Sociology (AHPS) voted to make ALL of their courses (except ANT 130 and 205) writing-intensive with continuing, automatic recertification. Thank you!

## Longitudinal Data

Compiled by Kathleen Borbee

**Table 1**

Writing Intensive (WR) course section counts per semester, and total number of unduplicated WR courses per year, for Academic Years 2010-11 through 2013-14.

Semester	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Fall	577	529	427	526
Interession	2	0	0	0
Spring	511	474	487	N/A
Summer	85	91	80	N/A
Total WR Courses (unduplicated)	1,175	1,094	994	N/A

Source: MCC, Institutional Research

**Table 2**

The number of unduplicated students taking WR courses per semester, for Academic Years 2010-11 through 2013-14. In Fall 2013, approximately 48.8% of students took at least one WR course, while in Fall 2012, approximately 42.2% attempted any WR course. The proportions are based on fall census enrollment data.

Semester	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Fall	9486	8467	7307	8045
Interession	41	0	0	0
Spring	8419	7726	7509	N/A
Summer	1434	1595	1271	N/A

Source: MCC, Institutional Research

**Table 3**

The number of MCC faculty teaching WR courses by semester, for Academic Years 2010-11 through 2013-14. As of the most recent fall semester (2013), 208 faculty members taught an average of 2.5 WR sections each.

Semester	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Fall	202	194	152	208
Interession	1	1	0	0
Spring	190	169	178	N/A
Summer	49	55	41	N/A

Source: MCC, Institutional Research

**Table 4**

Graduating students who completed the WR Option, by semester, for Academic Years 2010-11 through 2012-13. Students must complete a minimum of 30 credit hours of WR coursework with a B average to earn the WR option on their transcript.

Semester	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13
Fall	79	87	78
Spring	80	103	90

Source: MCC, Institutional Research

## Notes from the Incoming Coordinator

By MaryJo Witz

It is with great pleasure, and more than a little trepidation, that I assumed the duties of WAC Program Coordinator last September from Tony Leuzzi. I am now completing my 6<sup>th</sup> year of service on the WAC Committee, and am more firmly convinced than ever that our students benefit greatly by communicating their thoughts in writing, regardless of the subject at hand. It is exciting to see the College move toward a wider embrace of WR courses, from the Roadmap Academies Project, to the MCC General Education plan recommended to the Faculty Senate, to the number of courses that have been designated as writing-intensive during the past year.

Looking ahead to next year, we have many challenging projects and ideas before us. Our new assessment cycle has begun, and we will be asking for your input and suggestions regarding the MCC Writing Across the Curriculum Program during the early weeks of fall semester. We are very excited to continue to forge strong partnerships with the Teaching and Creativity Center and the Writing Center to better serve MCC faculty and students alike. That said, after much reflection during this past year, the WAC Steering Committee feels strongly that the primary focus of our WAC Program should be to provide the support and resources necessary for faculty to be effective WR instructors, while coordinating with and supporting the Writing Center's programs to enhance student writing skills. We will, therefore, be stretching out in different ways to make contact with faculty over the next year. We are hoping to revive an ADV workshop from several years ago to help new faculty advisors understand writing-intensive options. We'd like the opportunity to visit with many of the departments across campus, perhaps during department meetings, to answer questions and provide resources related to WR courses. We are also planning to begin a series of informal get-togethers across campus next year, called "WAC Community Conversations," to allow faculty to informally network and develop ideas and shared resources. The conversations would occur more frequently than, and take the place of, the old WAC Faculty Workshops.

I look forward to working with all of you next year – please know that my door is always open, and I would be delighted to meet with anyone interested in more information on WR courses. Have a fabulous summer!

## For the Newly Initiated...

**WAC Notes** is the annual newsletter produced by the College's Writing Across the Curriculum Steering Committee. Its purpose is to update faculty on the presence and growth of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program at MCC. WAC is a program that promotes writing as one of the ways of teaching any course: Art, Biology, Chemistry, History, Mathematics, Physics, or any other discipline.

Any WR course uses formal and informal writing to teach the course content. Formal writing is written *for a reader* and, therefore, needs to be organized and edited. Additionally, it has to meet the minimum proficiency standards as defined by the discipline. The total of formal written assignments per semester should include at least 2,000 to 2,500 words. Research suggests that shorter formal assignments help students more than one long paper, however, many kinds of writing satisfy the formal writing requirements. These may include short memos, evaluation reports, critiques, case studies, lab reports, annotated bibliographies, discipline-specific writing, and exam writing, among others.

Informal writing is writing largely *for oneself*, and it need not be graded. Informal writing helps student to "think on paper"; it helps them learn the content of the course. This type of writing can take the form of a variety of short in-class or out-of-class activities, such as recalling on paper the subject of a previous class, clarifying an important idea during a lecture, brainstorming, speculating, journal writing, listing, etc. If needed, informal writing can be reworked into formal writing, which is therefore organized and edited for the reader.

Writing Intensive courses receive a WR designation on the master schedule and on the student's transcript. Any student who amasses 30 credits or more of WR courses with a B average will have completed the "WR Option" at MCC. The student's transcript will be marked as "Writing Intensive," and – if the student graduates – a gold seal is sent to the student from the WAC Program Coordinator for placement on the student's diploma. Such a designation will enhance the MCC degree and increase the student's options for both transfer and employment.

For additional information on development of WR courses or the WAC Program at MCC, please visit the WAC webpage at <http://www.monroecc.edu/depts/wac/index.htm?a-zindex> or contact MaryJo Witz, WAC Program Coordinator, at [mwitz@monroecc.edu](mailto:mwitz@monroecc.edu) or 585-292-2733.