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 Angelique Stevens, English/Philosophy
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Papayas aren't Pomegranates: Some Challenges WAC Instructors Face Assessing Student Outcomes

By Tony Leuzzi

One of the recommendations published last year in the Self Study Report of the Middle States Committee was that MCC's WAC program "be assessed." After thoughtful consideration, the members of the WAC Committee, with input from Interdisciplinary Programs Dean Carol Adams and Assessment Coordinator Maureen Erikson, determined the scope of the assessment would proceed in the following ways:

1. The WAC Program itself would undergo a self-evaluation to determine its strengths and weakness. This evaluation will be published in a report to Stuart Blacklaw (Dean of Curriculum) and Janet Glocker (Vice President of Student Services).
2. Student performance in various specified Writing-Intensive (WR) courses would be assessed each term over a seven-year cycle.

As the College's WAC Coordinator, I will be responsible for the program evaluation and generating the report. The College supports this endeavor and has granted me additional release time to complete the project by spring 2008. The initial findings from the report will be published in next year's WAC Notes. The student assessment portion of the project will begin in the Math and Biology departments, where discipline-specific WR course offerings will be assessed for three desired outcomes:

1. Students demonstrate improved communication skills through the use of discipline specific writing.
2. Students demonstrate enhanced ability to think critically and apply discipline-specific concepts through writing.
3. Students express confidence in their writing and appreciation of the importance of the written word in education and in life.

These outcomes are based on a widely-held belief that writing assignments help students improve as writers, and enable them to consider and articulate more fully the concepts they learn. In the wise words of Professor Judith Bulin (Business-Economics) "I can't get students to an appropriate level of thinking with multiple choice questions. They have to do some writing in order to integrate and synthesize what they have learned." Thus, to the extent that conducting an assessment to see if writing is helping students improve as writers and critical thinkers seems readily evident, we are hoping the student-assessment portion reinforces this belief. As mentioned above, the initial findings will be summarized in next year's newsletter.

The members of the WAC Committee recognize that what determines "good writing" is relative to the context of the assignment and course. This is reflected in the inclusion of the phrase "discipline-specific" in two of the three desired outcomes. The tools we use to determine the outcomes therefore need to acknowledge these differences. To illustrate this point, consider the samples of student writing culled from three vastly different WR courses.

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Assessing Student Outcomes (continued from page 1)

The following passage comes from an in-class exam written by one of my students in an advanced poetry course:

When considering whether or not Louie Gluck's poem, "Snowdrops," is a sonnet one must consider the question of form. A turn and sonnet-like theme do not themselves a sonnet make. The poem must adhere to strict form, or be recognizably related to it. If "Snowdrops" is a sonnet, it has shed many of the trappings of the original sonnet form. This difference, however, does not automatically exclude it from being a sonnet. A toy poodle is still genetically related to the wolf, as is a Chihuahua or St. Bernard. Likewise, Gluck's poem seems as distinct from the "traditional" sonnet, but may still be of the same species.

There is no question this writing sample demonstrates strong critical thinking and a sophisticated sense of style. The writer expertly articulates a complex problem and even uses an illuminating analogy to support the main point. But lest one think all good writing looks like this, consider the following example from a well-executed student lab report for Biochemistry:

Ferrocene, an organometallic compound, is prepared by reacting sodium cyclopentadiene with ferrous chloride. This reaction results in a "sandwich" compound in which the iron atom is between the two cyclopentadiene rings. The "sandwich" compound is formed by the overlap of the two pi-systems and d-orbital of the iron atom. Ferrocene has a few practical applications. One application utilizes ferrocene as a fuel additive, which reduces "knocking" in automobile engines.

Despite obvious differences in subject matter and assignment type, the first two student passages share a good deal in common: both writers are primarily concerned with definitions and shape their understanding of conceptual thought through observation; both passages are written in concise, clear grammatical sentences; and the sentences themselves follow one another in tight, logical ways that recognize traditional paragraphing.

The same cannot be said for this solidly written report by a nursing student documenting patient care:

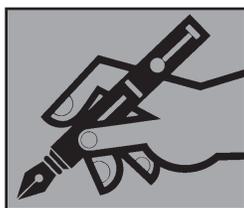
3/9/07, 1030

pt. complained of acute pain r/t movement ꝑ assisting pt. ⅈ ADL's pt. c/o pain in hands and knees, and unable to do AROM. ⅈ clinical instructor, administered Aspirin 650 mg po at 0900. routine medications. ꝑ 30 minutes, pt. reported a decrease in pain and completed AROM. ⅈ pt. helped to recliner in dayroom with one assist.

[pt. = patient; AROM = active range of motion; c/o = complains of; r/t = related to, ꝑ = after; ADL'S = activities of daily living; po = by mouth; ⅈ = with]

Although such writing would be dismissed as fragmentary and unclear in either of the English and Biochemistry assignments, patient care reports adhere to different conventions for a variety of reasons. Here, the student effectively utilized such conventions to produce a discipline-specific document.

Given such vast differences in the form and function of writing in any given field, the tools used to create assessment of student outcomes needs to be at once general enough to accommodate the content in all WR courses and elastic insofar as it will be able to address challenges in any given course. To that end, the WAC Committee has developed tools that consider these challenges. Pages 10-11 of this newsletter reproduce a brief student survey and a rubric to assess student writing. The WAC Committee welcomes the opportunity to assess and validate the WR objective of strengthening the college mission of student success through active learning and are confident that student performance will support this outcome.



WAC: YEAR-IN-REVIEW *By Patty Sarantis*

The WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) Committee has just completed a busy and productive year of activities and projects. Under the guidance of our WAC Coordinator Tony Leuzzi (English/Philosophy), we met several times each semester. Committee members include John Cottrell (Chemistry and Geosciences), Brian Edelbach (Chemistry and Geosciences), and Annette Leopard (Mathematics), Mark Sample (Anthropology, History, Political Science, Sociology), Patty Sarantis (Nursing) and Paul Wakem (Biology). We also welcome Angelique Stevens (English, Philosophy) as the Committee liaison for the Damon City Campus.

During the fall, the Committee held two WAC Information Sessions for Faculty in order to share our commitment to the WAC program, provide advisement information about the program and explain how faculty can become involved in teaching WR courses. Members of the committee distributed handouts explaining the writing intensive components of the courses they teach and were available to answer questions. Faculty in their first or second year of teaching were invited to attend and approximately twelve faculty attended the sessions.

In the spring, Tony Leuzzi invited a Damon Campus representative to the Committee: Angelique Stevens (English/Philosophy). Leuzzi and Stevens developed a faculty workshop for the DCC campus, which served as an information session for new and seasoned faculty alike.

The committee has agreed to begin college-wide assessment of the (WAC) Writing Across the Curriculum Program during the fall 2007 term and has written student learning outcomes in order to assess writing skills and student progress in WR courses. We will also be assessing student attitudes regarding writing in their discipline and their perceptions regarding their learning. A plan will be initiated to evaluate these outcomes over the next several years in the courses that have writing intensive sections.

As usual, the WAC website was routinely updated to reflect developments in the program. Perhaps most valuable to faculty is the inclusion of each WAC Notes publication since the 2000 academic year. WAC also asserted its presence at the annual spring Academic Advisement Fair. Furthermore, former WAC Committee Member, Jean McDonough, who is the Coordinator of the College's Writing Center, was on hand to assist certain Business faculty by speaking to their sections about how to develop quality writing responses.

The WAC Committee is pleased to report that approximately seven WR new course proposals were approved during the past academic year. Students can now select Writing Intensive courses in the following areas: Communication, General Biology, Microbiology, Marketing, and Computer Related Curricula, in addition to the other WR courses available at the college.

For the fourth year, the WAC Committee presented the Outstanding WAC Faculty Award. This year the recipient was Mike Doolin from the English/Philosophy and Chemistry/Geosciences Departments. The award is given annually to a faculty member who has demonstrated outstanding WAC instruction including, but not limited to: use of innovative writing assignments that address WAC objectives, promotion of WR courses to other faculty and students, and participation in the WAC Committee activities. Previous award recipients are James Petrosino (Business and Economics), Stasia Callan (English and Philosophy), Wanda Willard (Psychology), Patricia Kuby (Mathematics) and Bob DeFelice (English and Philosophy).

Faculty who are interested in obtaining more information about the WAC Committee and WR courses are encouraged go to the WAC web site or obtain a WAC brochure from Tony Leuzzi. Faculty are always encouraged to develop WR course proposals and participate in the activities of the WAC Committee.

WAC

Why is This Man Smiling? A PROFILE OF RICHARD CONNETT

by *Brian Edelbach*

Many different pathways lead faculty to MCC. Dick Connett's own circuitous journey to MCC is no exception and his students are the lucky recipients of this wealth of knowledge. Professor Richard Connett is a Biology professor and a long-time WAC participant. This is no surprise since much of his professional life has relied heavily on his writing ability—more on that shortly.

Dick was born in York, Nebraska and attended Park College in Missouri, earning a BA in Chemistry and nearly a Philosophy minor. Even at this early stage, Dick's writing skills were in demand. He served as a Teaching Assistant for an undergraduate science survey course; his duties included writing new laboratory procedures as well as helping craft exam questions. Upon receiving his BA, Dick moved on to Duke University (and is still a huge Blue Devils fan) earning a Ph.D. in Biochemistry. His graduate research, studying the kinetics of an enzyme from the adrenal gland, resulted in three publications. After graduate school, Dick had to decide if he would become a chemist or a biologist. As he stated: "I decided on biology because chemistry was boring." (It should be noted that the author of this article is a chemist and he couldn't disagree more!) Having made his decision (as flawed as it was) he moved upstairs to the Duke Physiology department to start a postdoctoral fellowship. As a post-doc, Dick studied the metabolism of a single-celled organism and wrote several grants to help pay his salary – a trend that would continue for many more years.

Upon leaving Duke, Dick came to the University of Rochester's (U of R) Physiology Department, initially as a teaching fellow then as a member of the faculty. He spent almost twenty more years at the U of R studying muscle metabolism and teaching an integrated physiology course to medical students. He was also the coordinator of the graduate physiology course for about seven years. According to Dick, "Students have to write to learn science." He certainly followed through on this philosophy while teaching at the U of R. A typical exam question for his medical students involved writing long situational essays. For example, "Describe quantitatively how each body system would respond if a person went into a cold environment with a light coat on?"

The lifeblood of research faculty at Ph.D. institutions is grant writing and publications. Dick said, "I wrote a grant a year in order to support the lab, lab personnel, my salary, and the university (which receives 60% of the grant money off the top)." Unfortunately, the revenue stream was fluid since most grants administered by the government promised a certain amount of money for three years and then cut back one or two years into the grant. During this time he wrote 2-3 papers per year. After nearly twenty years of being on this treadmill, he had pushed his research to the limit of existing technology and funding in his research area was drying up. It was time for a change. "I was a few weeks away from life on the street," he said. Then Susan Dougherty, a former student in the physiology department at the U of R and current biology faculty member, called and told Dick about an anticipated biology faculty position at MCC.

Dick started at MCC in September 1991 teaching the Human Anatomy and Physiology sequence – BIO 142/143 respectively. He told me he had two weeks to prepare for his first day of class, which was a bit daunting since he had never taken an anatomy course in his life. He made it through that semester and learned a considerable amount of anatomy during his five years teaching those courses. While BIO 142 (Human Anatomy) is not writing intensive, his BIO 143 (Human Physiology) section was a writing-intensive course. Dick had students write weekly lab reports, answer clinical analysis questions, and write detailed essay answers on exams.

Dick was also involved in revamping BIO 133 (The Human Machine). This course was originally developed for Human Service and Criminal Justice students in order learn something about the human body and the associated vocabulary. Currently, BIO 133 is the anatomy and physiology class designed for non-science students. Dick feels it is very important for good teachers to teach the non-major courses and he really enjoys teaching this class. This course was certified WR soon after he started teaching it. Two of his major objectives in this course are to show students how to communicate effectively with their physicians, and to help them understand health-related articles in the newspaper. Consequently, he has his students write four major reports based on newspaper articles. He wants the students to summarize the articles, demonstrate an understanding of technical language by expanding on the topic of the articles, and use proper referencing. He sees considerable improvement in students' writing during the semester. His goal is to give every student a 100% on the final newspaper report. Generally, only one person receives a 100% on the first report; however, approximately one-half of the students earn a 100% on the final report. Dick writes detailed responses on each report in order to help them improve. When he teaches the on-line version of BIO 133, he gives no exams. Instead, he asks students to write detailed answers to critical thinking questions, such as "What is the biological advantage of a spinal reflex?" or "Compare and contrast compact bone and spongy bone." Writing answers to these types of questions really helps them crystallize the concepts he is teaching.

Dick was Chair of the Biology department from 1996-2002. During this time he helped develop the on-line version of Bio 133 and add course space material for Bio 134/135 – a Human Anatomy and Physiology course sequence for students enrolled in Health Information Management and Dental Hygiene. While these courses are not writing-intensive, he still has students do a fair amount of writing.

Currently, Dick is teaching Bio 142-BH1 (Human Anatomy) in hybrid format and BIO 134. He told me that he really enjoys working at MCC. When I asked him why, he said: "We're good! As I look at other places across the country I'm very impressed." He also said that MCC has had a supportive, student-oriented environment since he came here fifteen years ago. Finally, he told me that unlike some other places he has been, "People smile here!" What could be better than that?

FACULTY FALL WORKSHOP FOR WAC *by John Cottrell*

This year's faculty fall workshop focused on expanding awareness of the Writing Across the Curriculum program to the faculty as advisor and provider of WR courses. The information session was held November 1st and 2nd and was well attended at both sessions. The sessions began with a short presentation by Tony Leuzzi, chair of the committee, outlining the goals of WR courses, the advantages to students, and the requirements for certification as a WR offering. Representatives from a variety of disciplines attended: Biology, Chemistry, Psychology and English. Most were already offering WR courses and were seeking help in generating ideas to fulfill the informal writing component of the course. Those concerns were addressed in presentations given by the committee members.

Concerns were also voiced of how to approach grading of grammar and writing mechanics in student papers. Many instructors outside of the English department, are uneasy about being too demanding about grammar and sentence structure. One suggestion provided by participants is to note errors in the margins of students work and if necessary refer them to the writing center for aid in honing their composition skills.

One concern of many prospective WR faculty is "WR phobia", the fear of losing student enrollment because of the perception that somehow WR courses are too demanding of students' time. While this is the perception, what tends to be true is that most courses that are proposed for WR status are already meeting the requirements for the formal writing and the addition of informal writing requirements adds very little extra work. Unfortunately this urban legend of WR phobia is a difficult one to put to rest, and unfortunately a concern of many prospective WR faculty.

Following a question and answer period, committee members addressed some faculty concerns in brief presentations on their approach to formal and informal writing. Brian Edelbach (Chemistry) teaches Organic Chemistry (CHE 251, CHE 252), both lab and lecture, as a writing intensive course. The formal aspect of writing comes in the form of weekly lab reports summarizing the results of lab experiments. These reports are written in a lab notebook and serve as documents that communicate experimental results and conclusions. These labs are graded according to format, organization, background information relating to the experiment, results, explanation of results, and answers to assigned questions. Brian includes extensive comments regarding corrections and/or improvements when returning labs to the students.

Informal writing is incorporated into the laboratory portion of the course where students record their observations of experiments. Additional informal writing is approached through short answer take home quizzes assigned during the semester.

Mark Sample (History) teaches two survey courses of U.S. History (HIS 111, HIS 112) and one course on World War II (HIS 260) as writing intensive. The formal writing component is addressed through weekly 2-3 page summaries of articles read by the students. This is supplemented by three response papers of 5-7 pages to guided questions on three books read throughout the semester. The formal component is also met with essay exams, both in class and take home.

Mark requires a weekly journal from his students to meet the informal writing component of the WR course. This provides the student a chance to reflect on what they are learning and to incorporate outside sources into the learning process. Periodically students will also be divided into small brainstorming groups to enhance discussion of a topic.

Paul Wakem (Biology) currently teaches two biology courses as WR, Human Machine (BIO 133-SL1) and Microbiology (BIO 202). The Human Machine course is an online offering which introduces students to general anatomy and physiology of the human body. BIO 133 requires a number of formal writing assignments. Students choose scientific articles pertinent to the course material and provide a brief (1-2 page) critique of the article. Many quizzes and additional assignments must provide written answers. Informal writing assignments include weekly discussion topics that require written submissions by each student. Some submissions must introduce new ideas and the student's opinions to the discussion thread with the sources of all information properly cited, while in other submissions each student must respond to the comments of their peers.

Microbiology has always been taught by Paul with lots of writing assignments and it made sense to him to add an informal writing component so that students could earn WR credit for the course. Students in this course write weekly journals describing their exploration of various topics in microbiology that may not be covered directly by the course material. Weekly lab quizzes and records of each week's experiment count towards meeting the informal writing component of this course.

Annette Leopard (Mathematics) provides a WR course offering for Statistics I (MTH 160) and for Survey of Mathematics I (MTH 150). She draws from an extensive list of formal and informal writing assignments. Formal essays on a range of topics from Sampling Bias to Binomial Experiments are required of her students. Research reports, exam questions and take home exercises are other examples of formal writing for MTH 150 and MTH 160.

Informal writing is approached through a written journal of students' encounters with mathematics and class participation papers such as summaries of day's lessons, a written explanation of work done on a problem set or a description of a personal experience.

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Faculty Fall Workshops (continued from page 5)

John Cottrell (Geosciences) offers two introductory geology courses as WR: Our Changing Earth (GEO 131) and Ancient Life (GEO 133). The formal component of WR in both courses is presented as a series of projects to be completed out of class. The first project is required of all students and consists of directed questions based on the article This Is Science! by Jere Lipps, an introduction to how science works, its strengths and weaknesses. The three remaining projects are chosen from topics presented during class. Students enrolled in GEO 131 are also asked to read and critically review The Expanding Earth by Lawrence S. Myers. This review contrasts the theory of plate tectonics with the “new” concept of an expanding Earth championed by Myers. The formal writing component is also addressed through bi-weekly short answer quizzes and essay questions that make up a quarter of their midterm and final exams.

John also uses journal writing as part of the informal writing component. Each student is responsible for one summary each week of something geological that is new to them. In addition to the journal, students are given a series of concept questions to answer and hand in. These are designed to emphasize important elements of the class presentations and to elicit student comments and feedback.

Patty Sarantis (Nursing) notes that all clinical nursing courses taught at MCC are writing intensive. As nurses write they think critically and analyze patient information. Through student writing, instructors can determine what has been learned and understood about a client’s health. Formal writing abounds in Nursing. Students are required to present professional literature analyses, patient assessments, patient care plans, teaching plans, and write ups of clinical observation experiences. Writing skills are crucial in nursing to document medical records. Accurate documentation is considered an important nursing intervention with legal implications. Without documentation, there is no record of a medical intervention.

Journals are also an important part of WR courses in Nursing. Along with reflections on the clinical day and conference activities, they constitute the informal aspect of the WR requirements.

The committee wishes to thank all of those who participated in the workshops and contributed to its success. We look forward to meeting your WR needs in the years to come and assisting you in expanding the WR offerings across the curriculum.



HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

by Annette Leopard

In the last several issues the WAC committee has reported on interviews with faculty members from different disciplines focusing on how, and inevitably, why they began teaching Writing Intensive (WR) courses. For this issue I interviewed four faculty members from very different disciplines. Their stories were both captivating and inspirational.

Janet Waasdorp

Janet Waasdorp is a member of MCC's education faculty—a teacher of teachers. Like so many of the teachers who were at the college in the late eighties and early nineties when MCC's WAC program was new, Janet became aware of the WAC initiative through the efforts of Stasia Callan, WAC's first administrator at MCC. At the time Janet was teaching as an adjunct in the Office Technology Department. As the daughter of immigrant parents Janet knew first-hand the importance of good language skills. She saw the WAC initiative as an opportunity to develop valuable assignments around the business-related practicums in the Administrative Office Management course. Today she teaches EDU 200, Foundations of Education, and EDU 208, Guided Observation in Education, as WR courses. When I sent Janet an email asking her how she had become involved in teaching WR courses, she wrote:

I started teaching WR courses when I was an adjunct in the late 1980s| early 1990s in the Office Technology Department. I wrote a course for them that was WR, so when I joined the Department of| Education full time I wanted to provide this extra academic| requisite.

Geneseo and Brockport require student writing to be mature, well developed and collegial - without practice our students are unnecessarily challenged and sometimes disappointed. It is good to introduce them to the rigors of serious writing and the skills necessary to do it well.

Education students take EDU 200 and EDU 208, both of which are writing intensive. As future teachers, getting used to mounds of paperwork can't begin too early, can it?

Janet prepares her students for the work that will be expected of them at their transfer institutions that motivates her use of writing in her courses. She knows that her students need to practice the advanced writing skills that will be expected of them.

Terri Tugel

Terri Tugel, Professor of Biology, was a pioneer in the Writing Across the Curriculum movement. At the time she was the only instructor of a course in Growth and Aging and she saw writing as a pedagogical tool for her students to learn and internalize the material. When she began teaching Anatomy and Physiology as the majority of her load, Terri got away from formally designating her classes as WR although writing remained a part of her pedagogical approach. Although the subject material within Anatomy is factual

and requires a lot of memorization, Terri began having students describe what they observed in order to help them recognize similarities and differences of anatomical structures. Terri's current experience with WR courses, however, began in the Fall of 2005 when the Biology Department introduced BIO 155 and 156 (General Biology I and II) as their new majors' courses. Terri recognized informal writing as a pedagogical tool appropriate for these courses as well. The students engage in informal writing in the notes they take. Terri does not share her power point lecture notes with students until after the class, preferring to have her students actively engaged in note taking during her lectures. As majors, the students need to learn to write formally in the style of professional biologists. The formal writing in the course includes designing and conducting a simple experiment and writing a report as a scientist would for publication in a scientific journal as well as writing essays on exams. With both formal and informal writing components well-suited for the courses, Terri thought they would be ideal Writing Intensive courses. Other instructors also think the new courses are ideal WR courses as reflected by all BIO 155 and 156 spring 2007 sections identified as WR.

Sherry Tshibangu

Sherry Tshibangu became interested in teaching Personal Money Management as a WR course when she first received a general e-mail announcement from Tony Leuzzi about WR course proposals. She found that the goals for WR courses fit her philosophy of teaching. Sherry's approach to teaching is comprehensive. She recognizes that the courses her students are taking need to be interconnected and that education should equip students with the critical thinking, communication and writing skills they need to function in the real world. Sherry was already using writing in her courses and found that student writing left a lot to be desired. She found that modern professionals in general need to increase their writing skills. Sherry thought that designating her course as WR would give her official license to correct her students' writing. When students occasionally complain about the writing assignments by pointing out that hers is not an English course, Sherry counters, "This may not be English class, but you are at an academic institution!" Once she designated her course as WR Sherry increased the amount of writing in her course with the understanding that her students needed to practice to improve. She assigns seven projects for the students to complete. One of those, for example, requires the students to comparison shop. As part of the project Sherry asks students to reflect on the exercise and to ask themselves, "What did I learn through this exercise?" Asking students to write about their experiences provides her with valuable feedback about whether or not her students are digesting the material in an appropriate way. Sherry notes that a side benefit to teaching a WR course is that it engages her in her own learning. When she is uncertain about a student's English usage she consults with her colleagues in the English Department. A life-long learner, Sherry is pleased that her own writing continues to improve as well.

Tony Joseph

Tony Joseph teaches in the Radiologic Technology Program which

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has a writing intensive component in the radiographic exposure course during the first year of study. Currently, Professor Paulette Peterson and Tony team-teach this vital course. Stasia Callan brought Tony into the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, but it was an easy sell. Tony says that in medical imaging science the desired outcome is that perfect diagnostic image which translates into proper patient diagnosis. Tony believes that WAC reinforces and supports the highest standards and objectives of the imaging profession. Radiographic Exposure has several major components including: readings, lecture, discussion and application. Key companion components that seem to bring it all together for the learner are journals and laboratory research.

In their journals students record their questions, instructor's notes and findings. There is no doubt that students retain what they read, write and investigate since MCC's Radiologic Technology graduates have consistently ranked higher than the national average on their certification examinations. Tony reports that over the years not one student has complained about a required journal or laboratory assignment. In fact, many students have maintained journals in other classes since they see the vast benefit of logging and exporting information. Tony's enthusiasm was poetic: "A bird can't fly very well with just one wing . . . the journal seems to be that "extra wing" in Radiologic Technology . . ."

Mike Doolin: WAC FACULTY AWARD WINNER

In its more than ten year history, the WAC Committee has realized its success is due not just to its mission but to the hundreds of faculty who design their courses to be writing intensive. It is their dedication and devotion to teaching that has made the Writing Across the Curriculum program thrive as a pedagogical tool in aiding students to learn course material.

Six years ago, the WAC Committee created an annual award to honor an individual faculty member who has made a significant contribution to the development of writing across the curriculum at MCC. The Committee is pleased to recognize Mike Doolin, Adjunct Instructor of English and Geology, as the 2006-07 recipient of the Outstanding WAC Faculty Award. This decision was based upon many factors, including Mike's ability to successfully teach basic composition skills to a specialized (and potentially difficult) population—Applied Tech students enrolled in the General Motors and Toyota Tech programs. The challenges Mike has faced in this context are best summarized by himself:

"The first time I taught and Auto Tech ENG 101 section, I wasn't really prepared for what I came face to face with in the classroom. Not only were the students somewhat unruly (picture a room full of 18 year old boys who would MUCH rather have a socket wrench in their hands than a pencil), they were also not particularly interested in the subject matter. The first couple of weeks of the semester I tried a conventional approach. It clearly didn't work. I quickly dumped my initial course content and created special in-class and homework writing assignments customized to the students' affection for and familiarity with tools, cars, repairs, etc. Fortunately I am a tool-user myself . . ."

Borrowing liberally from his experience teaching Professional Communications (ENG 50) and Technical Writing (ENG 251), Mike has developed a rigorous course itinerary for his Applied Tech students—each of whom is expected to write roughly 18,000 words per term. As an expert rhetorician, he has furthermore provided clear, concise evaluative comments which are often humorous and always helpful. In brief, he knows his audience and speaks to it.

Beyond the classroom, Mike has furthered WAC's cause as a faculty advisor for students during their registration. Each summer, I have the pleasure of seeing and hearing Mike speak warmly but frankly to students about their academic needs. On several occasions, he has articulated the WAC mission for students in ways they will understand and appreciate.

What is more, Mike routinely teaches across the disciplines, taking on sections of GEO 103 ("Great Mysteries of the Earth"), where he offers students "Writing-Optional" assignments. The WAC Committee appreciates all of Mike's efforts and—hint, hint—hopes his GEO 103 sections might someday too be proposed as Writing Intensive courses.

WAC STUDENT INTERVIEWS: Part I

by Paul Wakem

I have been a full time faculty member in the Department of Biology at Monroe Community College for six years and have been teaching Writing Intensive courses for the last four years. I am also a member of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) committee. During this time I have often heard comments and questions about writing-intensive (WR) courses from faculty throughout the college who either teach a WR course or are interested in teaching WR courses. However, I rarely hear the comments and thoughts concerning WR courses from the student's perspective. This interview is an attempt to summarize the unique viewpoints of three students who have experienced WR courses.

Mitchell Erin is currently completing her degree in Administrative Office Management and will also receive a Medical Office Assistant Certificate. She began her studies at MCC in an Education program with a concentration in English. Most of her classes were writing intensive. In total Erin has completed thirteen WR courses that include the following disciplines: nine in English, one in Sociology, one in Psychology and one in Education. Erin states that the writing intensive courses were all definitely worthwhile for her. She says "They have helped me become a better and more diversified writer." Erin summarized her thoughts about her WR experiences in the following statement: "I would say that my written communication skills have benefited from taking the writing intensive courses. In my field, written communication skills are very important and highly sought after."

Katie Young is an LA04, Liberal Arts General Studies student who plans to transfer into the Nursing program at Nazareth in the fall of 2007. She began taking WR courses because she wanted to take a

class with a specific professor who taught the section as WR. She has completed or is taking six WR classes so far. They include courses in English, Anthropology, History, Philosophy and Microbiology. Katie believes that her WR courses were worthwhile since they helped her concentrate and understand the material better. They also helped her to develop her critical thinking skills and allowed her to more easily express her opinions.

Jammie Yatteau is enrolled in the LA05, Liberal Arts Health Related program and plans to complete a Nurse Practitioner program. Her immediate plans are to transfer into a Nursing program at St. John Fisher in the fall of 2007. She began taking WR courses since they were required for her degree. She has taken a total of six WR courses at MCC, including two in English, three in Philosophy and one in Microbiology. Jammie feels that WR courses improve a student's writing skills and encourage critical thinking and learning in a non-conventional way. It helps one think critically and approach problems from a different perspective. Jammie says "I have improved my writing skill and developed a more professional style of writing, speaking, arguing, researching etc." Jammie believes that writing intensive classes are worthwhile but she cautions "Teachers need to understand that writing is a very time consuming process that requires more brain energy than anything, especially if you want a good paper. Just getting a creative idea is tough, not to mention structure, grammar, etc."

These three interviews suggest that many college students recognize the importance of developing good writing skills and appreciate that writing does improve both communication and critical thinking skills. All three students believe that the writing intensive courses they have taken at MCC have been very worthwhile.

WAC STUDENT INTERVIEWS: Part II

by Mark Sample

I have been teaching WR courses for four years. In that time I have had many students who have taken different WR classes with me. I spoke with a few of them to see why they took WR courses and what they gleaned from them.

Alyssa Campbell is a graduate of Gates-Chili High School. Alyssa found out about WR courses when she signed up for a WR History course. She said she received a letter in the mail informing her about the WAC program and encouraging her to enroll in more classes. She heeded the suggestion and has since taken many others. When asked what advice she would give to students considering taking WR courses, Alyssa said she would tell students to definitely do it. She said they aren't much harder than "regular" courses: you just need to be focused and make good decisions with your time. Alyssa took three WR courses during one semester and found it challenging but doesn't regret it. Alyssa is majoring in History/Adolescent Education. She plans to graduate from MCC this semester and transfer to St. John Fisher.

Mia Johnson is a graduate of Bishop Kearny High School. She majors in English and has taken six WR courses at MCC. She found out about the WR option when she was cruising through the MCC website. Mia said that she has found a much better understanding of the material through taking WR courses. During one semester she took 3 WR courses and found that the workload was a bit too much. Therefore, in successive semesters she limited her WR courses to one or two per term. Mia plans to graduate this spring and is transferring to Nazareth.

Nick Kingsley is a graduate of Victor High School. Nick found out about the WR courses by accident: he was taking a WR Math course, though he didn't realize it when he signed up for it. However, having attended the course and having enjoying the different approach, he decided to look into the WR program. He has now taken ten WR courses. Nick says that he has definitely learned more in his WR courses than in the non-WR courses, particularly in History. Nick is a Liberal Arts Major with an emphasis in History and he plans to graduate this fall and transfer either to Portland State or Ithaca.

Please answer each of the following questions by circling the number that most strongly reflects your position.

My writing skills have improved as a result of this course.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

The writing components of this course have measurably increased by comprehension of the material.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

I have a greater appreciation for the importance of writing as means of communication in this field after taking this course.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

I am more confident in my writing skills as a result of taking this course.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

I am a better writer now than when I began this course.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

GRADING RUBRIC FOR WRITING INTENSIVE COURSES

1. Students demonstrate improved communication skills through the use of discipline-specific writing.
2. Students demonstrate enhanced ability to think critically and apply discipline-specific concepts through writing.

	Exceeds Expectations=4	Meets Expectations=3	Approaches Expectations=2	Does Not Meet Expectations=1
<u>Learning Outcome 1</u> Organization Demonstrates coherence and logical flow of ideas.				
<u>Learning Outcome 2</u> Evidential Reasoning Supports thesis with appropriate evidence and logical reasoning to conclusions.				
<u>Learning Outcome 3</u> Language Use Demonstrates effective use of discipline-specific vocabulary and style.				
<u>Learning Outcome 4</u> Writing Conventions Demonstrates command of spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure consistent with discipline.				

FOR THE NEWLY INITIATED...

WAC Notes is the annual newsletter produced by the College's Writing Across the Curriculum 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. Writing Intensive courses receive a "WR" designation.

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 2000-2500 words. Research suggests that shorter formal assignments help students more than one long paper, however many kinds of writing satisfy the formal writing assignments. These may include short memos, evaluation reports, critiques, case studies, lab reports, annotated bibliographies, discipline-specific writing, and exam writing.

Informal writing is writing largely for oneself, and it need not be graded. Informal writing helps students to "think on paper"; it helps them learn. 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 are marked on the Master Schedule and on student transcripts as WR. 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 transcripts will then be marked as "Writing Intensive," and—if the student graduates—a gold seal can be obtained from the WAC Coordinator to put on his or her diploma. Such a designation will enhance the MCC degree and increase the student's options for both transfer and employment for the program.

For additional information visit the WAC website at www.monroecc.edu/depts/wac/index.htm or contact Tony Leuzzi, Coordinator of the WAC Program: aleuzzi@monroecc.edu or 585-292-3392

