Writing Across the Curriculum

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Wright State Represented at the National WAC Conference

Wright State University will be represented by six panelists at the upcoming Fifth National Writing Across the Curriculum Conference. The conference will be held at Indiana University from May 31 to June 2, 2001.

Marlese Durr (Sociology) and Joe Law (WAC Coordinator) will present "Sociological Writing in an Electronic Environment," a joint presentation describing their attempts at combining technology with teaching writing skills for sociology.

Among the issues to be considered are the challenges of using technology in large (400+) introductory classes, especially when many entering students are unfamiliar with that technology. They will also look at ways this delivery system might be used to foster critical thinking and introduce the writing conventions and expectaions for a particular discipline.

Janet McLendon Harbort (English) will be presenting a paper titled "Collaboration in New Contexts: Linking Content and Writing Instruction in Virtual Classrooms." Based on her experiences team-teaching online with an education professor in Georgia, Janet's presentation will first focus on the problems many instructors face assigning and evaluating written work in an online class. She believes that linking content instructors with composition specialists in virtual classroom environments facilitates student progress and provides a mentoring relationship for the content area faculty.

After being assisted in this way by a composition instructor, the content area faculty member would be more at ease assigning and evaluating written work unaided in future online classes.

Sociology will also be represented by three of its graduate students—Angel Griffin, Kimberly Kohli-Pinto, and Diana Gibson. Their panel is called "Graduate Students as Sociology Writing Assistants: Coping with Role Reversal." As the title indicates, graduate students face a marked change from their previous role as students when they work with writing intensive classes. Now they must grade, advise, tutor, and provide writing workshops for the students they work with in large lecture sections. On Wednesday, May 9, they will present their panel here at Wright State. See the announcement on page 3 for details.

Book Review: Keith Hjortshoj *The Transition to College Writing*

Hjortshoj's book is clear and direct in addressing the assumptions that students and faculty bring to college writing assignments—and how far apart those assumptions sometimes are.

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I receive a number of sample textbooks in the mail, most of which get little more than a cursory look. That was not the case with Keith Hjortshoj's *The Transition to College Writing* (Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2001). Designed for use in classes that help first-year students adapt to college life, Hjortshoj's book is clear and direct in addressing the assumptions that students and faculty bring to college writing assignments—and how far apart those assumptions sometimes are. Although few readers of this newsletter are likely to be teaching a course in which they might use this text, Hjortshoj's advice to students could prove useful in helping us communicate our expectations about our own writing assignments. Tacit assumptions are not necessarily shared assumptions, and it is often beneficial for all involved to make those assumptions explicit.

The author, who has taught at Cornell University for a number of years, begins by acknowledging the disorientation that students face as they encounter new demands for which they may not be adequately prepared. At times, in fact, their preparation may turn out to have been inappropriate. In the area of writing instruction, for instance, high school teachers may have actually trained students to write in ways that will run counter to their college teachers' expectations. As evidence, Hjortshoj cites a 1990 survey of high school and college writing teachers conducted by the South Coast Writing Project at the University of California Santa Barbara. According to the survey, half the high school teachers taught specific formulas (such as the five-paragraph theme), but 93% of the college writing teachers discouraged using such a formulaic approach. Whereas 72% of the high school teachers said they expected college students would write all their papers in a "formal academic style, using a sophisticated vocabulary," only 13% of the college writing teachers agreed. Likewise, half the high school teachers said that using the first person would be inappropriate for college writing, while 95% of the college writing teachers disagreed (28-29).

Do the high school teachers' expectations sound more appropriate for the writing done in your class? Then imagine what happens to students as they go from one set of unspoken assumptions to another. If they decide that instructors' expectations are arbitrary and idiosyncratic, who can blame them? Throughout the book, Hjortshoj rightly stresses that his student readers are responsible for determining their professors' expectations, but we can make their lives—and our own—much simpler if we are prepared to meet them part way in this respect.

Some of Hjortshoj's comments in Chapter 4 ("What Do College

Teachers Expect?") may surprise the college teachers described there. For instance, he warns students that assignments "will not tell you exactly what you should write" (124), a statement that may initially irritate those of us who are sure we've done just that in our assignments. However, following Hjortshoj through an analysis of several writing assignments—good ones, I might add—reveals just how much interpretation is called for in responding to any assignment and how easily inexperienced student writers can go astray.

Throughout the book, Hjortshoj emphasizes that assignments—even lab reports—will vary greatly and that there is no single reliable formula for all academic writing tasks. However, he does provide a set of broad guidelines that he calls "general expectations." These "general expectations" are not always evident to students, and it may be useful to announce some of these expectations directly, particularly in classes with a number of first-year students.

Some expectations seem so fundamental that at first it would appear unnecessary to state them explicitly. The first, for instance, is the recognition that writing assignments usually have two purposes—"to contribute to the process of learning in a course and field of study" and "to serve as a basis for evaluation" (81). Having worked with student writers for a number of years, though, I have often encountered comments that suggest writers are not fully aware of those basic purposes of what they are writing: "Oh, I don't need to say anything more about that. She [the professor] already knows it."

Another of the fundamental expectations for college writing is that it calls for "a tone of rational explanation and discussion" (82). In academic culture, the term *argument* probably means something quite different than it does in the rest of a student's experience. Likewise, *critique* and *criticism* are not wholly negative concepts, and a brief discussion of

continued on next page

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SPECIAL WAC EVENT

Graduate Students as Sociology Writing Assistants: Coping with Role Reversal

Wednesday, May 9, 2001
E157A Student Union
2:00 p.m.

Many graduate students enter their graduate programs directly from undergraduate degrees and must assume a number of new roles. Those who become writing assistants in a large lecture class must add the new role of teacher as well. With little or no training, they must now grade, advise, tutor, and provide writing workshops for the first time. How can they handle all these demands, provide good instruction for the students they work with, and manage their own graduate work?

Join Angel Griffin, Kimberly Kohli-Pinto, and Diana Gibson—all graduate students in Sociology—as they discuss their work as writing assistants in Sociology 200 and how they dealt with these challenges. While the discussion will focus on one particular class, it will have clear implications for any class in which graduate students are asked to make the transition from student to teacher.

"Book Review" continued

those terms may relieve students of some of the anxieties that would accompany the perception that they are supposed to attack an authority in an unfamiliar field.

Another of the tacit expectations is that writing will be organized clearly so that the reader can follow the writer's argument. Such a statement, Hjortshoj reminds his student readers, presupposes that "*you have a clear argument*" or some other clear objective, such as explaining, summarizing, or comparing readings (84, emphasis in original). One of the obstacles to clear organization is the writing strategy Hjortshoj calls the "memory dump"—that is, "downloading" all the information in the writer's memory, evidently in the hope that the right answer is in there somewhere and will be recognized by the instructor. While it may have been a number of years since some of us were in that position, our own recollections might help us to understand our students' situation and devise ways to help them move beyond that approach.

In addition, Hjortshoj tells his readers that "correctness" is important, even if teachers don't mark errors. "Even if the writing is strong in other respects," he writes, "minor errors and typos will make it seem sloppy, unpolished, undeserving of an A. [. . .] Numerous errors sometimes lead teachers to imagine that a solid, fluent paper is 'disorganized' or 'chaotic,' even if it is not" (87). The final expectation is a more forceful enunciation of the same principle: "The Writing" Always Counts. Even when teachers say they're interested primarily in "the content" or "the ideas," Hjortshoj says, the quality of "the writing" is still crucial because most papers consist entirely of writing. Under those circumstances, a reader has no other basis for evaluation (87-88). That idea cannot be stressed too often, for students and instructors alike.

> "The attempt to make the first draft the last works best if you start out with a clear sense of form and direction, if the task is simple, or if your standards are low."

At several points, Hjortshoj takes up the topic of revision. Arguing that the failure to revise effectively is the greatest obstacle to good writing, he points out that many students submit what is essentially a first draft, edited to eliminate typos and "fix" an occasional awkward sentence. In support of this claim, he recounts the results of an assignment (repeated over several terms and in classes of varying level) in which he asked his students to interview other students about the writing assignment they had completed most recently. Repeatedly, they found that when students write for classes other than a writing class (where revision is almost always assigned), the great majority of college writers said that they tried to write only one draft, making as few changes as possible once that version was completed. That was the case whether students were writing simple one-page reading responses or research papers of 12-15 pages. Still more revealing was their finding that even students who had been taught to write multiple drafts in high school dropped that practice once they were in college.

> Hjortshoj points out . . . that initial goals—the paper we envision when we begin writing—may not be the best goals or even feasible goals for completing an assignment.

Recognizing the pressures of time most students face, Hjortshoj approaches revision in the form of a cost-benefits analysis, trying to persuade his readers of the limitations of the one-draft strategy: "*The attempt to make the first draft the last works best if you start out with a clear sense of form*

and direction, if the task is simple, or if your standards are low" (66, emphasis in original). His comments about the importance of revision are models of clarity and directness we might emulate in our own classrooms and written assignments. If it is unlikely that the goals of the assignment can be met with a single draft, we ought to be as forthright as Hjortshoj in saying so.

Additionally, it might be worth sharing some of his cost-benefits analysis concerning multiple drafts and genuine revision. He points out, for instance, that initial goals—the paper we envision when we begin writing—may not be the best goals or even feasible goals for completing an assignment. Adhering rigidly to the original plan makes it more difficult to accommodate the new discoveries (and the obstacles) that may arise during the drafting. For that matter, sticking with the first draft effectively prevents writers from making the discoveries that often emerge when the writer is genuinely engaged with the topic.

Hjortshoj encourages his readers to make use of quick exploratory drafts on a number of occasions. If a writer is uncertain what direction the paper will take, a draft of this sort represents "thinking on paper" (66). He also recommends such drafts for starting out on an assignment that calls for long, complex papers. Exploratory drafts will take the writer beyond his or her limited first thoughts. Drafts of this kind also free writers from the writing anxiety often generated by their determination to produce text that will not have to be altered. Hjortshoj's advice to student writers suggests that instructors might assign several short preliminary writing assignments leading up to a fairly complex paper at the end of the term. Quick exploratory drafts that address different aspects of a topic might encourage students to rethink the topic, not just make a few corrections to an initial draft.

Hjortshoj is candid in telling his readers how their professors will assess their work: "Because they will not know how you produce writing they assign, when they read 'patched up' first drafts many of your teachers will assume they are observing the limits of your ability to write and think, not the weakness of the methods you used" (69). He is equally candid in predicting how professors will respond: "Because grading standards have adjusted to typical student writing methods, if you are the kind of writer who can become skillful at avoiding revision you can probably get fairly good grades on this kind of writing, perhaps even excellent grades" (69). Such candor challenges students and faculty alike, calling for all of us to look more closely at our own practices.

Anyone teaching a first-year course of the type this book is designed for will find much of value in *The Transition to College Writing* and would do well to consider adopting it as a text or a supplement for that class. Others—especially those of us whose own first-year experience has become the vaguest of memories—may find it instructive to look over Hjortshoj's advice to incoming students. It's a useful reminder of the difficulties inherent in making the transition to college and to college writing.

—Joe Law

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Writing Laboratory Reports

Guiding Students through New Territory

Laboratory reports can be a challenging new form of writing for some students, who often express confusion about how to report their findings and divide their writing into sections.

In Dr. Roberta Pohlman's BIO 352 course, Human Biomechanics, students are required to write three formal laboratory reports and one individual writing project, in addition to completing quizzes, exams, and homework sets.

Students are required to complete every laboratory session and turn in their raw data and calculations; they choose three sessions for which to write formal laboratory reports.

Pohlman describes requirements for a laboratory report, listing all sections students should include in their reports and describing the material to be included in each section.

As part of the BIO 352 syllabus, Pohlman describes requirements for a laboratory report, listing all sections students should include in their reports and describing the material to be included in each section.

For example, for the "Discussion" element, the explanatory section reads, "The most important (and most heavily weighted) section of your laboratory report is the discussion section. Here you must explain your results. Why did you find what you found? Did your finding support popular theory or current understanding? If so, explain why; if not, explain why not. To do this, you must integrate information from other sources. Thus, you will need to consult the professional research literature to compare and contrast these research findings with your findings. The literature must pertain and apply to your data and experiment type."

The information sheet also indicates that each report should include a reference list formatted according to APA style.

The other seven sections explaining each element of the laboratory report are similarly detailed. They indicate how students should label each section and what information needs to be included (such as raw data, calculations, graphs, tables, and figures).

Not only does Pohlman provide information on the creation of laboratory reports, but she also provides her students with the grading criteria. On the reverse of the information sheet is an evaluation sheet, which is reproduced on page 7 of this newsletter.

The evaluation breaks the report into sections once again, giving possible point values beside a space to record actual points earned. A column of notes provides additional reminders to students for each point set. Such directions as "Integrate tables and graphs into results section" and "Provide titles for tables and graphs" give student writers the opportunity to revise and edit according to the same criteria the instructor will use in grading.

Reiterating to students the importance of such details . . . can help students edit their work more thoroughly prior to submission, resulting in better writing and less instructor time spent marking errors.

The last page of the syllabus includes a section of "Miscellaneous Considerations," which are reminders about common errors, format, and presentation of the laboratory report.

Reiterating to students the importance of such details as writing in third person and past tense, using plural rather than singular verbs with *data*, and providing units of measure when reporting numbers can help students edit their work more thoroughly prior to submission, resulting in better writing and less instructor time spent marking errors.

— Cynthia Marshall

Evaluation of the Laboratory Report for Exercise Science

Section	Possible Point Value	Notes
Abstract	_____ 10	100 word summary of your findings. Place on a separate page.
Purpose	_____ 5	
	Purpose	Why was the experiment/study performed?
	Significance	What is the significance of this experiment?
Methods	_____ 10	
	Subjects	(include vital info. for subject)
	Instrumentation	Use these areas as subheadings - Do not just list instruments
	Procedures	
Results	_____ 10	Appendix A will include your Raw Data (See below) Write out data and results (the #s), but do not discuss them. Make reference to your tables and graphs. Talk about all data collected. Integrate tables and graphs into results section. Provide titles for tables and graphs.
	_____ 5	Statistical or data Summary Table Tables must be different from graphs.
	_____ 5	5 - Computer Graph 2- Hand drawn
Discussion	_____ 40	Explain Results - Integrate your own data to explain Expected Theory What do you expect to happen based upon standard theory/ understanding/knowledge?
	Theory Support	Find literature to support standard (textbook) theory/understanding/ knowledge?
	Why-Why Not?	Did your data support what is generally accepted? - why or why not?
	Research Support	Integrate research references throughout Discussion. Relate papers to your data and results.
References	_____ 5	Up to 1 points for each of 5 abstract references used in the discussion section and presented on your reference page in APA style.
	_____ 5	APA Format
Appendix A	See Results	Note: Provide a Title page for Appendix A.
Appendix B	_____ 5	Note: Provide a Title page for Appendix B. One point each for copy of 5 research abstracts (Must be same ones used in Discussion Section).
Miscellaneous	-_____	Note: Points are deducted in this category: 3rd person, units, double spaced, proofread, grammar, staple, neat, spelling, style, APA number rule, late report, etc.

FINAL SCORE _____

Center for Teaching and Learning

Spring 2001 General Faculty Offerings

To register for these workshops, call the CTL at x3162. See the CTL web site <http://www.wright.edu/ctl/workshops/index.html> for additional offerings.

"Organizing for Enrollment Management" Teleconference

Sponsored by University College. From recruiting students for academic success to providing them with invigorating learning environments and support through every transition until graduation, enrollment management is careful, coordinated, and strategic. Particular attention will be paid to the relationship between enrollment management and support of first-year students and other students in transition.
Thursday, March 8,1:00-4:00 p.m. in 145 Russ Center.

"Services for the Hard of Hearing Student in Postsecondary Education" Teleconference

This program will cover some of the issues facing people who are hard of hearing and late-deafened. Viewers will better understand the unique adjustment factors related to the disability and how to provide appropriate education accommodations.
Thursday, March 15, 2:00-4:00 p.m. in E156 B&C Student Union .

"Electronic Classroom Orientation"

Led by Robert Frey, Classroom Services Coordinator, CTL, and Phillip Combs, Computer Systems Administrator, CTL. This session will acquaint faculty members with CTL's electronic classroom equipment. Attendees will see the equipment used in the classrooms and learn how to operate the equipment.
Wednesday, March 28, 10:00-11:00 a.m. in 494 Allyn Hall.

"Making the Most of Teaching, Learning, and Technology in Higher Education" Teleconference

Universities are faced with more opportunities to make major changes, compete in new ways, and use new applications of information technology (IT). At the same time, instructors find the demand for their traditional services growing. Three nationally recognized leaders in the field of education will explore new trends, ideas, strategies, consequences, and implications.
Friday, March 30, 1:00-3:00 p.m. in E154 Student Union.

"Strengthening First-Year Seminars" Teleconference

Sponsored by University College. Join a national conversation on first-year seminars that promises to spark enthusiasm for this proven approach to launching students into college. We will discuss the evolution of new student seminars, highlight best practices, offer answers to the most frequently asked questions, and talk with viewers about their own challenges and opportunities.
Thursday, April 5, 1:00-4:00 p.m. in E154 Student Union.

"Tools for Peer Evaluation" Luncheon

Led by James Uphoff, Associate Director, CTL, and Professor Emeritus of Education and Human Services. Peer evaluation has many forms. This workshop will explore a number of the options available to any individual professor and/or to any unit of faculty.
Tuesday, April 17, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. in W169C Student Union.

"Staying the Course: Retaining Online Students" Teleconference

"Student attrition is one of the biggest obstacles to the credibility and the success of online learning. Retention and completion rates for online courses are 10-20% lower than those for traditional in-person courses. We will examine steps colleges can take to increase retention even before students enroll, and offer strategies for helping students after the course has begun."
Thursday, April 19, 2:30-4:00 p.m. in E154 Student Union.

"Engaging Commuter Students" Teleconference

Sponsored by University College. The panelists will show how the college experience can be organized to address the learning needs and circumstances of today's students, the vast majority of whom live off campus.
Thursday, April 26, 1:00-4:00 p.m. in E154 Student Union.

How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School Book Group Luncheon

Led by Greg Bernhardt, Dean and Professor of the College of Education and Human Services. This book offers exciting new research about the mind and the brain that provides answers to a number of compelling questions. How do experts learn, and how is this different from non-experts? What can teachers and professors do with curricula, classroom settings, and teaching methods to help students learn most effectively? This book examines new findings and their implications for what we teach, how we teach it, and how we assess what students learn.
Monday, April 30, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. in E156 Student Union. Call x3162 to receive your complimentary copy of the book.

"Time Management" Luncheon

Led by David Hurwitz, Coordinator of Study Skills and Tutoring. "Does anybody really know what time it is? Does anybody really care?" Do you manage time, or does time manage you? Learn some helpful tools to manage your time.
Wednesday, May 2, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. in E156C Student Union.

"Virtual Syllabi: Ten Tips for Communicating on the Web" Luncheon

Led by Jeff Hiles, Instructional Web Designer, CTL. The easier it gets to put documents on the Web, the more educators offer course handouts and in-class presentations online for students to enjoy. In this presentation, we'll review ten ways you can strengthen your online offerings.
Friday, May 4, 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. in E157 Student Union.

"Enhancing Teaching: The Experiences of Wright State University's Learning Community on Teaching Excellence" Luncheon

Over the past year, faculty from Wright State University have participated in a learning community on teaching excellence. The goal of this community was to support a small group of faculty's efforts to enhance the quality of their teaching. Presenters will share their individual teaching projects and describe their experiences as members of this learning community.
Tuesday, May 15, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. in W169C Student Union.

"Speaking Skills for the Classroom" Teacher Luncheon

Led by Dan DeStephen, Director, CTL and Associate Professor of Communication. Nervous about lecturing to a class of 200 students? Do you want to know how to help students remember more about your lecture material? This seminar will focus on basic techniques for handling nervousness. We will also discuss your lecture from the perspective of your student. By attending this seminar, you will learn how to gain and hold the attention of your students.
Wednesday, May 16, 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. in E156 Student Union.

WAC Lunchtime Workshops

Spring 2001

Group Projects and Writing

Wednesday, April 4, 2001
E157A Student Union
12 noon - 1 p.m.
or
Thursday, April 5, 2001
E157A Student Union
12 noon - 1 p.m.

Collaborative projects provide opportunities for active learning and promote the kind of teamwork required in many workplaces. Many of these projects call for a substantial amount of writing as well.

In what ways should the responsibility for writing be handled within these groups? Can all students benefit from the writing component of these activities?

Join your colleagues from across campus as they share their insights into these and other questions. Lunch will be provided.

Writing Intensive Classes and Learning Disabilities

Wednesday, May 9, 2001 E156C Student Union
12 noon - 1 p.m.

How can we best work with a student with a diagnosed learning disability in a writing intensive class? How can writing assignments be designed to draw on the strengths students already possess? How much help can software programs provide?

Join representatives from the Office of Disability Services to discuss these and other questions. Lunch will be provided.

To register for workshops, contact Joe Law at x2155 or email him at joe.law@wright.edu.

Joe Law, Coordinator
Writing Across the Curriculum
027 Paul Laurence Dunbar Library