TEACHING WITH WRITING

Pre/Views

by Vicki Collins, WIC Director

Writing Philosophy Papers: A Student Guide is a remarkable accomplishment. This publication by the OSU Department of Philosophy, described by Drs. Kathleen Moore and Courtney Campbell in this issue of *Teaching With Writing*, marks a notable effort by an OSU department to communicate to students in a coherent way what it means to be a writer in a particular discipline. A year ago at this time, the student guide was an abstract idea in a newly funded WIC grant. Today it is a clear, well organized publication already in the third edition.

Perhaps the most remarkable part of this story is that the original generation of the guide took place in a day and a half of very focused collaboration, followed up by revision and securing sample papers of each genre of writing. This is an ambitious but do-able project, one which might well be duplicated all across the OSU campus. Thanks to Kathy and Courtney for their vision and their follow-through.

My thanks also to Jon Dorbolo for his third article on WIC On-Line. As an OSU pioneer in this area, Jon has been both gener-

Writing Philosophy Papers: A Student Guide

By Kathleen Moore (Chair, Philosophy) and Courtney Campbell (Philosophy)

The Philosophy Department's new writing guide for students was born from an experience common to most faculty—the great disparity between faculty expectations and student accomplishments in writing. A guide, we hoped, especially one that contained examples of high-quality student writing, would give students direction and models to follow and the confidence to know they could attain new levels of writing skills. At the same time, a writing guide could meet important needs for quality faculty instruction: (1) It could save time by not requiring faculty to re-do similar assignments each time they teach a course, (2) It could diminish the disciplinary dissonance that emerges when a student, facing a writing assignment from a new instructor, relies on a writing approach adapted to another professor's expectations, (3) It offers a pedagogical rationale for the various kinds of writing assigned in philosophy courses, (4) A manual offers a way to display for both students and faculty the interesting diversity that makes up "philosophical" writing, such as dialogues or the personal essay.

The Goals

Our ultimate goal was ambitious. We thought that by systematizing the skills of philosophical thinking and writing, and by laying them out clearly from the simplest to the most complex, we could incorporate sequential skills development into our curriculum. Thus, students could learn the simplest philosophical skills and practice the simplest forms of writing in lower-division courses

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and gradually build up to the skills necessary to write sophisticated philosophical essays in the capstone WIC course (Phil 407: Seminar).

We believe that this systematizing approach has the potential to substantially improve the quality of the education students receive in our courses. It can improve the quality of work submitted by students and thus, improve the quality of academic life for faculty.

The Process

Philosophers pride themselves on knowing a good idea when they see one. In our case, participation in the WIC seminar exposed us to a "great" idea. The seminar itself expanded our sense of the possibilities for student learning-through-writing, WIC alumni provided models of success, and the WIC program provided grant sponsorship for a collaborative project to compile a writing guide. We believed there were several keys to a successful effort. First, we needed to escape from the institution and its distractions of phone calls, meetings, etc., and find a "retreat" setting. We chose Yachats, on the Oregon coast. Second, we wanted both the process and the product to be as collaborative and collegial as possible. Initial inclusiveness, we predicted, would help faculty accept ownership of the final product. So, we invited all faculty in our department and their families to participate in the retreat. Six faculty participated. We also asked all faculty members, participating or not, to supply examples of their

writing assignments so we would have a great array of materials from which to draw. We gave ourselves all day Wednesday and half of Thursday to write the manual, start to finish, with time out to study seagulls and grilled salmon.

Guided by an organizing form from Vicki Collins, we planned a very flexible agenda for the retreat. This provided prescient, for almost immediately we found ourselves discussing a completely unanticipated topic. As we scrutinized the diversity of philosophy writing, we recognized the need to identify some common basic skills of philosophical inquiry; this enabled us to see that certain forms of philosophy writing would develop or enhance a particular skill. This done, we broke into small writing groups, each assigned the task of describing a writing form, identifying its teaching purposes, and proposing criteria of evaluation. Following open discussion of the drafts, each writing group was given suggestions for revising their descriptions and criteria, prior to submitting them for inclusion in the guide.

The Product

By the time we left Yachats last June, we had the rough draft of a manual and mild sunburns. After some refining (and a succession of revisions, we learned more each term about what worked for students and what did not), we now have *Writing Philosophy Papers: A Student Guide*, 3rd edition.

The manual is divided into two sections.

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ous and articulate in sharing his expertise on information technology with other faculty.

Finally, I want to thank the eleven faculty from six colleges who participated in the 1996 Advanced Faculty Seminar. Topics covered included writing-to-learn, collaborative writing, teaching students to revise, and writing on the internet, as well as wide-ranging discussions of topics identified by the participants.

Participants were Marcella Becker (Political Science), Judy Bowker and Trischa Knapp (Speech Communication), Leslie Burns (Apparel, Interiors, Housing, and Merchandising), Michael Coolen (Music), Jennifer Cornell (English), Gary Ferngren (History), C.Y. Hu and Dale Weber (Animal Science), Michael Mix (Biology), and Mary Alice Seville (Accounting, Finance and Information Management).

Working WIC On-Line

by John Dorbolo, Department of Philosophy
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WIC on-line activities place more of the active learning process into the hands of students. To be effective this move must reduce the overall effort an instructor puts into evaluating and responding to individual student work. Well constructed on-line activities function with reduced intercession by the instructor, compared to collecting, individually commenting on, and returning in-class student work. A successful on-line activity allows students to interact individually with the instructor commenting to the whole class (or group.) Developing strategies for such meta-comment makes the instructor's work more efficient, the student's involvement more personal, and the whole activity more effective. Methods for designing on-line activities are outlined in the two prior WIC Newsletter articles. This article identifies techniques for working WIC on-line more effectively.

I HAVE A LITTLE LIST

A valuable device for instructors and students is the automated class maillist. Such a list takes all the email addresses of the class (or group) and automatically distributes messages to all from a single address. For instance, I have 50 students in my present InterQuest course. All are subscribed (addresses are listed) to a global class list. Any message sent to <phil201-class@maillist.cs.orst.edu> will be distributed to all the students. As list owner, I can add and delete list members at will. InterQuest supports several group lists as well. Students use these combined mailings to address other class members on the whole or within groups. Most important, I use it to distribute comments and instructions to the whole class. At OSU we use a listserver called "Majordomo" to perform these tasks. A Majordomo list must

be set with help from a systems administrator. Debra Crowe at UCS <crowed@ucs.orst.edu> will point you to the folks who can help.

COVERING BASES

The hardest part of a WIC on-line activity is managing the process for students whose partner-participants do not keep up their end of the bargain. Whatever punitive conditions are applied to the slackers, we are still burdened with the task of protecting the willing students. This is especially burdensome in a "peer-peer" model activity in which students are paired with partners. The InterQuest project, with support from OSU Information Services, is developing a "discussion engine" that will handle many of these problems. Until that marvel is available, we need to manage by wit and hand.

My approach is to designate one or more student volunteers as alternate partners. On-line discussion activities include specified due dates for the tasks required. When a student completes a task on time but receives no communication from their partner, my directions tell that student to send their work to the alternate who picks up the role of partner, thus allowing participating students to continue. Directions to this effect and the duties of the alternates must be very clearly specified at the onset. I advise against the instructor assuming this alternate role. The amount of work and the loss of activity effectiveness mitigate against such an arrangement. Regarding controversies over a student's failure to participate, you (and your students) will have a complete record of all messages exchanged. Disputes over who did what when can be settled by reference to that record.

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In the first section, we put short descriptions of the central skills of philosophy from the simplest to the most complex—defining, identifying a philosophical problem, analyzing arguments, etc. The second section describes ten different genres of writing that students may encounter in philosophy classes—again from the simplest to the most complex, that is, from journal entries to term papers. For each genre, we provided a short description of the genre, an explanation of its purpose, criteria of evaluation, an example from student writing, and an appendix that includes a guide to non-sexist language and information about citations, including citations to internet sources.

The Classroom

The writing guide takes its place among many tools that faculty have at their disposal to enhance the quality of student work and to enrich their own teaching. As with any teaching tool, its success in the classroom depends upon the persistence, ingenuity, and commitment of the instructor and the receptivity and responsiveness of students.

In our department, it remains to be seen how fully the faculty will choose to incorporate systematic writing instruction into the curriculum. During the past academic year, roughly one-half of our faculty have made substantial use of the writing guide in one or more classes. The guide has been used in very different ways. Some faculty have re-structured their courses significantly to incorporate the various writing possibilities of the guide into course instruction. Other faculty have drawn more selectively from the guide, recommending to their students that they pay careful attention to a particular section (such as the position paper, or argument analysis) before embarking on a writing assignment.

Student response to the writing guide has been generally favorable. Students have found the examples of good philosophy writing by other students especially helpful as they under-

take a similar assignment. Some students have used the philosophy manuals as a guide to writing papers in non-philosophy courses with similar assignments. The $64,000 question, of course, is whether the manual has improved student writing; for one faculty member, use of the manual correlates with a tremendous improvement in the quality of student writing. The manual's emphasis on the "process" of writing has, in some classes, led to substantially better term papers because students engage their writing projects much earlier in the term. However, the systematic improvement we hope to see will require introduction of the guide to students much earlier in their college careers.

The Future

Setting out to introduce writing skills sequentially into a curriculum has all the perils of designing a jigsaw puzzle, knowing in advance that not all students will be able to assemble all the pieces of the puzzle, and that each of the pieces they do acquire will have been designed by a different person, each person with a somewhat different vision of the final picture.

As a consequence, it will take careful work and the joined efforts of all the faculty to achieve fully the potential of the writing guide. In our annual fall faculty retreat to Peavy Forest, we plan to run a series of short workshops designed to (1) explore the potential of the writing guide for improving faculty teaching and student learning, (2) offer ideas about how to use the writing guide effectively in courses, and (3) once again, integrate the ideas of all the faculty, in order to make this project as much a joint effort as it is possible to be. Our hope, of course, is that the members of the department will think very carefully about how to help students build their writing skills over time and will integrate those ideas into their courses, so that—eventually— reading student essays becomes a joyous experience, a celebration of students' ability to write clearly and cogently.

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CONVENTIONS

It takes a practiced (usually blurry) eye to pick out important messages from a crowded inbox. Establishing some subject line conventions with the class is an aid. For instance, I ask students to reserve use of all UPPERCASE in subject lines for messages from me to the class. Students appreciate being able to pick out my sage messages from the rest at a glance. I reserve this usage for general informative and instructive messages. Professor ZoeAnn Holmes uses an ingenious numbering scheme for distinguishing student messages. Reserving a character (e.g. "*") for student "help me" messages is valuable.

TECHNIQUES FOR EMAIL MASTERY

Selective on-line activities keep the amount of mail students deal with to manageable levels, so long as the students practice some management. Successful activities do create huge amounts of mail for the instructor (who is on every list and message cc:.) This load can be handled to great instructional advantage with a few email management techniques. All contemporary email interfaces allow for some kinds of sorting and batching of messages. Here I am addressing the common interface available at OSU: pine. Look for detailed descriptions of these operations at the InterQuest Projects Site <http://www.sce.ojgse.edu/iq>.

SORT: Thursday morning. Open inbox; "208 new messages." What to do? Obviously the discussion has been successful in engaging students. But now you are stuck with a load that raises real doubts. Students may find the same condition (if the activity is on the "global" model, see "WIC Does IT") and respond negatively to the perceived overload.

The pine sort utility can help a lot. Organize your messages by using the "ctrl-$" key combination and selecting an organization schema from the menu.

SAVE: Grouping messages by the sorting options anticipates the organization of course work into "folders" (which are Unix subdirectories.) The key combination "ctrl-s" allows you to create and fill folders moving the work out of your inbox. Having an organizational schema of folders to sort and save classwork into is key to your efficient use of the medium. The organizing principle of your course is the guide to effective folder arrangements. Some courses are best categorized into weeks; some into student groups; others into topics. InterQuest works best when viewed as a progression of tasks, thus I organize my folders into "S96da1" (Spring 1996 Discussion Activity #1), "S96wa1" (Spring 1996 Writing Assignment #1), and so on. This way I can access the work received for a specific activity for purposes of grading, checking, responding, and so on.

SELECT: Sorting and saving on-line work into an effective organizational scheme are greatly aided by the recent additions of aggregate operations to pine. Aggregate operations allow you to work with clusters of messages in one stroke (well, a few keystrokes anyway.)

The command to perform aggregate operations is ";". That's it, a simple semicolon key. This opens up a wealth of options which are presented as a menu at the bottom of the screen.

Aggregate operations are part of the new pine releases in the last year (other email interfaces have similar utilities.) They are not automatically enabled. You need to switch the aggregate function on. Do this by going from the "m"ain menu to "s"et up to "c"onfigure. You will open a list of options that can be set for your own pine usage. The options are multitude and it is worth taking time with a manual to review what option you can configure in customizing your pine features. Here we are just looking for the

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Feature Name: "aggregate-command-set". Find that line (use "ctrl-n"ext to move down and "ctrl-p"revious to move up) and Set the function on by entering an "x", then "e"xit the configure menu. That should do it.

SEARCH: Picking the needle out of the haystack is made easier by using the search function of pine. The command is "ctrl-w". Enter a character string to search for and pine will find the match. Searching is very useful in conjunction with sorting and aggregate commands. When you sort messages, pine stays on the currently highlighted message. So if I want to view and move all of Bob's messages to a folder; I'd search for "Bob", sort by "f"rom, select the aggregate operation for "t"ext, choose the "f"rom parameter, enter "Bob", "s"ave to my "bob" folder. I just performed that whole operation in 20 seconds with 260 messages in my Inbox. In the bargain I found a message from Bob I had not yet read.

STAMP: I find myself making some kinds of comments to students over and over. Confirming receipt of an assignment, issuing new directions, pointing out common aspects of writing, and so on. Any body of text with a generic application can be stored as a unix file and inserted into a pine document using the "r"etrieve command.

First you must write your text. "Q"uit pine and enter pico at the unix prompt. Pico is a simple text editor that uses many of the same commands as pine, so you will be on familiar ground. Write your text and save ("x" and give it a short filename. Back in pine you can "r"etrieve that text into a message body by the filename (keep a list of your text files for this purpose.) With progressive use and editing you will build a valuable library of insertable comments. This technique was featured in the April Chronicle of Higher Education, quoting yours truly!

INTERCESSION STRATEGIES

Faculty often ask me "Do you really receive, read, and reply to all those messages?" Yes, I receive them all and keep complete records of my class activity. Yes, I read all messages in case something is there I need to respond to. But I read many the way one reads labels in a supermarket, quick and with purpose. No, I don't respond to most messages. Instead I have acquired a set of techniques for responding to student on-line work. Three of these are described here.

GROUP: Drawing together a number of messages with similar claims or assumptions that lead to a new topic. Pointing out to the whole class that different students are using a common idea emphasizes the unity of the class and guides discussion. It does a lot of teaching with less work.

FOCUS: Picking out a concept or claim from a message to redirect the focus of the discussion. Students typically deliver whole bundles of thoughts with one message. Unpacking that bundle to highlight a significant idea shows students how attention to the text yields new thought and opens new discussion.

QUERY: Posing questions raised by a student's messages. A la Socrates I try to guide students by tactical questions. Questions asked of a student or addressed to the class entire are almost always receive response.

STYLE

Teaching on-line shares with teaching in-class the potential for uniqueness. Some lectures are lively, others dreary. Some on-line discussions are spirited, others lethargic. Much of derives from the style of the instructor. The same wit, intensity, patience, intelligence, enthusiasm, ingenuity, and knowledge that brings power to your classroom will permeate your on-line class environment. Just as with

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Capturing and Captivating Faculty
by Sandra J. Suttie, Department of Exercise and Sport Science

Question: When does a discussion of writing take priority over a long awaited coffee break?

Answer: During a workshop retreat that stimulates ideas, generates enthusiasm, and converts partial believers into doers.

At 10:30 a.m. on a crisp Fall day at Peavy Arboretum, the faculty of the Department of Exercise and Sport Science were in small groups discussing informal writing ideas that each had created for a class. Each group included a graduate teaching assistant, a faculty member who taught in the major theory program, and one additional participant. As ideas were shared, critiqued, and revised, the foundation built through the previous hour lead to a level of peak excitement. The fifteen minute break period was ignored by most!

In an on-going process of stimulating and supporting writing activities in classes, the department applied for a 1994-1995 WIC grant, part of which supported a faculty retreat. The goals of the retreat were to develop greater knowledge and skills in utilizing writing as a tool in the learning process, and to gain additional insights into the creation and management of the products of writing.

Two morning sessions were planned. The first session, "Writing as a Tool for Learning", focused on informal and in-class writing.

WIC alumni, professors Suttie, Rose, Smith, Collier, and McCubbin, presented on topics including writing as a cognitive activity, evaluation of in-class writing, and informal writing.

When participants free-wrote their thoughts on topics posed to them, examples and evaluation of informal writing became clearer. The culminating project of these sessions was structured in the following manner. Each individual was asked to develop several examples of in-class writing for a particular class. Then small groups formed for discussion. This became the groundswell that wouldn't quit for a coffee break!

The second session of the morning, "The Products of Writing" by Dr. Vicki Collins, included the structuring of formal assignments, review and revision processes, use of peer reviewers, evaluation tools, and usage of writing manuals.

The ideas and spirit of these sessions and the retreat have continued through the activities of our faculty. For example, a recent survey indicated that in many of our courses, the review process by others, e.g., peers and or professor, has been expanded; and students have more opportunities for feedback, revision, and refinement of their papers. The in-depth immersion the retreat provided into the utilization of writing to facilitate the learning process was a successful, captivating experience.

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tight lecturing, forethought and planning are key. The options you choose, the organization you provide, the mode of interaction you produce all combine to project a unique teaching personality. Students distinguish on-line teaching styles just as they distinguish in-class lecture styles. The choices you make in managing email discussions contribute to your on-line teaching style.

On-line teaching is a skill acquired by experiment and practice. The aim for educators is not to become an email or internet expert, but to become proficient in the functions that make your effort and teaching more effective.

For more on techniques listed here, activities, discourse models, ect., see the InterQuest Projects Site <http://www.sce.ojgse.edu/iq> which will soon host a faculty discussion area. If you make use of any of these techniques, please let me know how it went.

WIC Grants Announced

The following departments were awarded WIC Department Development Grants this spring.

College of Home Economics and Education
Kinsey Green, Proposer

Goal: To teach fifteen graduate student-teaching assistants to teach and evaluate writing in undergraduate courses, both lower- and upper-division, through a series of workshops and monthly "reunions." After training in WIC approaches, participants will design and apply writing experiences for students which require discipline-related skills and which are specific to the fields of professional specialization.

Biology Program
College of Science
Kate Lajtha, Proposer

Goal: To hold a one-day retreat at Peavy Arboretum Lodge for instructors, experienced teaching assistants, and invited guests, with the goal of revising the Introductory Biology curriculum to include the use of writing-to-learn in small lab sections.

Department of Philosophy
College of Liberal Arts
Kathleen Moore, Proposer

Goal: To fund one course release-time (supplemented with department funds), during which the proposer will revise the course content and textbook for PHL 121: "Reasoning and Writing," to make them consistent with the goals and forms of the Philosophy Department's student writing manual, *Writing Philosophy Papers: A Student Guide*.

Department of Foreign Languages,
College of Liberal Arts
Guy Wood, Proposer

Goal: To fund one course release-time during which the proposer will coordinate an effort to revise approaches to writing used in Intermediate Level Spanish and develop an Intermediate Level Spanish placement test for incoming students.

Department of History
College of Liberal Arts
Gary Ferngren, Proposer

Goal: To fund research materials, supplies, and assistance for the proposer to convert two existing history courses, History 321 (Greece) and 322 (Roman Republic) to WIC courses; to fund travel to a WAC conference or to a university with a WIC program to further the proposer's knowledge of teaching with writing.

About *Teaching With Writing*

Teaching With Writing is the newsletter of the Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum Program. As part of the Baccalaureate Core, all OSU students are required to take an upper division writing intensive course in their major.

The content of WIC courses ranges from radiation safety (for Nuclear Engineering majors) to golf course design (a Horticulture option).

While subject matter differs by department, all WIC courses share certain commonalities defined by the Faculty Senate:

• Informal, ungraded or minimally graded writing is used as a mode of learning the content material.

• Students are introduced to conventions and practices of writing in their discipline, including the use of borrowed information.

• Students complete at least 5000 words of writing, of which at least 2000 words are in polished, formal assignments.

• Students are guided through the whole writing process, receive feedback on drafts, and have opportunities to revise.

For complete information on WIC guidelines, contact Vicki Collins by email at collinsv@cla.orst.edu or consult the OSU Curricular Procedures Handbook.