Troubleshooting: Working with Struggling Writers

In the second portion of WFDI, six professional development sessions are completed simultaneously with an instructor’s first semester of writing-intensive instruction. The instructional mode of the second portion of WFDI is a hybrid method, allowing faculty to interact through Blackboard, peer observations, and traditional sessions.

This job-embedded approach to professional learning allows faculty to come together and share solutions to some typical writing instruction dilemmas that they are experiencing in their courses.

One writing dimension discussed during training is the mastery of English language conventions. Sentence-level errors continue to plague papers written in content-area courses. Sometimes, when writing is full of these types of errors, it is difficult for instructors to address higher order concerns such as focus, content, and organization.

John Bean (2001) provides comfort with the following statement: “Even in an error-laden essay, an actual count of the errors reveals that there are many more correct sentences than flawed ones and many more correctly spelled words than misspelled ones” (p. 66).

Nonetheless, in one of the online sessions of WFDI, faculty members shared the following suggestions for confronting sentence-level errors:

Theatre has a specific vocabulary that we use in our field. As an introduction to Theatre Appreciation, I spend some of the early lectures focusing on what some of these terms mean. Then, they have a glossary of these terms or phrases that they can incorporate into their criticism and analysis. (Val Winkelman, Theater)

I always encourage my students to read their papers aloud before handing them in, with the caveat that they must read their prose as it is punctuated. I also encourage them to have a friend “who is willing to be brutally honest” read the paper (or a portion of it) and then answer the question, “Does this make sense?” (Matt Jordan, Philosophy)

I take anonymous examples of student writing with particularly egregious examples of poor writing, and put them up on screen with the document camera. I indicate the paragraph containing the error and let students read and evaluate it quietly. I then allow the students to identify the offending passage, diagnose the problem, and suggest ways to correct it. I have been doing this for years, so I have an ample collection. I also tried the journaling option on Blackboard. With students’ permission, I show their journal entries and we make suggestions as a class. (Rosine Hall, Biology)

Have students read their work out loud when they are through. This shows them where the errors are. If they have comma trouble, it also shows where the commas should be. Their work improves by leaps and bounds when they do this. (Joyce Kelley, English)

I have to remind students that we don’t write like we speak. I want them to insert more formality into their writing because I think they are more likely to remember their good grammar (like their table manners) when the setting is more formal. (Kim Brackett, Sociology)
In the fall of 2011, up to ten Writing in the Discipline (WID) interns—undergraduate students representing all Schools—will be assigned to WI content-area classes to support the learning and writing growth of peer undergraduate students.

Due to a lack of nominations and applications this past fall, the WAC program was unable to initiate the WID intern pilot program in Spring 2011.

We urge all WFDI-trained faculty to nominate their outstanding undergraduate writers who are also strong and knowledgeable in their content-areas.

WID Intern Qualifications
The following qualifications apply to nominees:

- WID Interns must be nominated by faculty who have completed the first four sessions of WFDI.
- Interns should be of junior-standing or above during the year of the WID internship. In other words, second-semester sophomores can be nominated in Spring 2011 for the fall WID Intern program.
- WID interns must have an overall GPA and GPA within their major of at least 3.0, although 3.5 is recommended.
- WID interns should have completed a WI course—or a course that is slated to become WI during the 2011-12 academic year—to give them a clear understanding of WAC program expectations and writing in a given field or area.

Call for Nominations
All WFDI-trained instructors will be contacted in April of 2011, requesting nominations for the WID Intern program by May 15.

During the summer, nominees will be requested to apply for the program. After a review of applications, candidates will be asked to interview with Susan Barganier, the Associate Director of the Learning Center, and Jenny Good, WAC Director.

Those selected will complete WID Intern training. Initial training will consist of five 1-hour sessions covering topics such as tutoring techniques, Learning Center overview, WAC program overview, intern responsibilities and expectations, and peer review strategies.

Ongoing training will continue throughout the academic year.

The 2011-12 WID Interns will be compensated for their work through receipt of academic scholarships provided in the fall and spring semesters.

Meet Kimberly Johnson: The School of Business WAC Committee Member

Kimberly Johnson, an assistant professor in Management, joined the WAC Committee this spring as the representative for the School of Business.

Kimberly completed the first four sessions of WFDI in Fall 2010. Currently, she is teaching her first writing intensive course, Management of Organizations (MNGT 3100), while simultaneously completing the final six sessions of WFDI.

Kimberly is passionate about the incorporation of writing into her coursework: “I have personally enjoyed teaching my first writing-intensive course. The importance of effective written communication in all areas of our lives cannot be underestimated. Requiring students to further develop their abilities to communicate in writing can only enhance their learning, careers, and personal lives.”

In addition to teaching writing-intensive courses for the Management department, she also teaches Organizational Behavior and other specialty courses.

As stated in her biographical sketch on the AUM website, “her research interests include organizational values, small business management, and entrepreneurship.”

Kimberly’s broad based interests, her practical perspectives on the importance of writing, and her enthusiasm to further her own professional development make her a vital contributor to policy and procedure discussions during WAC Committee meetings.
Summer Sessions of WFDI

In Summer 2011, the WAC program is offering the same four preliminary sessions of WFDI for faculty in a new format. WAC administrators are hoping to accommodate more interested faculty members during the summer term with the new scheduling concept.

Rather than meeting over the course of four 3-hour sessions that extend over four weeks of training, the new format will complete the four sessions within two full days in the same week. With this format, faculty can have flexibility for summer travel and research.

The first four sessions of WFDI are open to all tenure-track faculty who would like to learn about the WAC program, regardless of whether or not a faculty member plans to teach a writing-intensive course in the future.

The Summer 2011 sessions of WFDI have been planned for the following dates and times:

- **Tuesday, May 31 and Thursday, June 2, 2011 (9 AM to 4 PM):** Sessions I (9 AM to 12 PM) and II (1 to 4 PM) on May 31; Sessions III (9 AM to 12 PM) and IV (1 to 4 PM) on June 3
- **Monday, July 11 and Wednesday, July 13, 2011 (9 AM to 4 PM):** Sessions I (9 AM to 12 PM) and II (1 to 4 PM) on July 11; Sessions III (9 AM to 12 PM) and IV (1 to 4 PM) on July 13

Participants who complete all four sessions receive a $400 stipend that is entered into their departmental accounts.

Send an email to Jenny Good (jgood@aum.edu) to register for the summer sessions of your choice.

Assessing WAC: Making Analysis Meaningful for All Disciplines

On Friday, April 8, Jenny Good presented a full overview of the WAC writing assessment system at the national conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in New Orleans.

She emphasized the importance of getting meaningful data back in the hands of the discipline-specific faculty.

The full paper presented at AERA is available on the Research Presentations link of the WAC website.

Based on a writing assessment position statement published by a special committee of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the AUM WAC program administrators agree that assessment should do the following:

- Inform teaching and learning.
- Recognize varying audiences and purposes.
- Encompass a variety of skills that fluctuate due to changing contexts of writing.
- Influence perceptions of writing.
- Consider current research-based programs and assessment systems.

For these reasons, the WAC program assesses growth through a locally-developed writing rubric that considers focus (purpose and audience), content, organization, style, and language conventions.

Basic writing skills scores, taken from ACT’s CAAP subtest, are also reported. These mean scores and trends can help instructors make instructional decisions when developing curricula and writing-intensive courses.

To further promote writing assessment and its uses within specific disciplines at AUM, Jeff Periatt, Associate Professor in Marketing, has volunteered to assist in future assessment collaborations.

The WAC program assesses growth through a locally-developed writing rubric that considers focus (purpose and audience), content, organization, style, and language conventions.
To date, 55 different courses that carry the WI label have been approved by the WAC and Curriculum Committees. This number continues to grow each semester.

All undergraduate students must complete two composition courses (ENGL 1010 and 1020) and three writing-intensive courses prior to AUM graduation.

Although credit for ENGL 1010 and 1020 can transfer in from any state-approved institution, the three writing-intensive courses must be taken at AUM. These courses are labeled with a WI in the course title and section field of Banner.

A complete listing of these courses is available on the WAC website at the following link: Current List of WI Courses Per Department

WI courses are taught by trained writing-intensive faculty.

Students and advisors can contact department heads to find out which semesters sections of the approved courses will be taught as writing-intensive.

Meet the WAC Committee:
- Kimberly Johnson, Business
- Lynne Mills, Education
- Lee Farrow, Liberal Arts
- Ramona Lazenby, Nursing
- Sue Thomson, Sciences
- Jason Kneip, Library

Contact the WAC Director:
Dr. Jennifer M. Good
Phone: 334-244-3732
Fax: 334-244-3436
E-mail: jdyess@aum.edu

Contact the WAC Senior Program Associate:
Jennifer Dyess
Phone: 334-244-3732
Fax: 334-244-3436
E-mail: jdyess@aum.edu

We’re on the Web!
www.aum.edu/writing

Meet the Executive Writing Committee:
- Susan Barganier, Associate Director of the Learning Center
- Jenny Good, Director of WAC
- Elizabeth Woodworth, Director of Composition

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