

Two Years of WAC at CUHK: An Interview with Prof. George Braine

How did you learn about WAC?

For my doctoral research at the University of Texas at Austin, I investigated the university's WAC program, and observed teachers from various disciplines using writing innovatively in their courses. I realized that the teaching of writing need not be confined to the English department, that it could be shared by teachers from all disciplines.

Why is writing important across the disciplines?

More than any other language skill, writing encourages students to plan and to think critically about what they write. This is better than passive memorizing or textbook underlining, and will lead to a better understanding of course contents.

Is the WAC program at CUHK similar to the US model?

Fundamentally yes. The objective of the CUHK program, too, is to encourage teachers from all disciplines to incorporate more writing into their courses. But, in the US, the students are mainly native speakers of English. At CUHK, they are not. So our task here is much more challenging.

CUHK has an English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU). How does the WAC program fit into the overall plan for English language enhancement?

The ELTU consists of language specialists who teach credit bearing English language courses. The WAC program encourages teachers from all disciplines to include more writing in their courses. The objectives, the improvement of students' English, are the same.

Prof. Braine is the Principal Supervisor of the WAC Program.

What are your expectations of WAC courses?

To incorporate more writing assignments in courses across the disciplines, and to introduce some aspects of the process approach to writing (sequenced writing, multiple drafts, peer reviews, reflective writing) to the courses.

In the long run, I hope that CUHK will make the successful completion of WAC course a requirement for graduation. In this regard, we have already made representations to the university's Working Group on Language Enhancement.

What has the WAC program at CUHK achieved in the past two years?

So far, about 90 courses have been affiliated with the WAC program, many for more than one semester. Our TAs have provided feedback on nearly 3,000 papers written by students, held about 1,000 one-to-one conferences with students, and conducted about 100 mini-workshops. Thousands of students have benefited. We have also conducted workshops for teachers. I believe that, at CUHK, we have created a community of scholars who share a belief in the importance of writing.

Any final remarks?

Yes. I would like to thank the teachers who are affiliated to the WAC program for giving us access to their classrooms and to their students. I am especially grateful to teachers who have the option of teaching in Cantonese but choose to teach in English.

Prof. Carmel McNaught, my co-supervisor, has brought a great deal of energy and intellect to the program. Her extensive links at CUHK have benefited us, too. Prof. Joanna Radwanska-Williams, Research Associate, and Dr. Angela Cheater, Coordinator, have also enriched us. I am especially grateful to our TAs, the best among our applied linguistics graduates, for their dedication and hard work. They will excel as teachers of writing.

Process Writing in Engineering: An Interview with Prof. Janny Leung

Prof. Leung started her academic career as a pure mathematician, but took her Ph.D from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in operations research. She is now teaching courses in logistics and entrepreneurship, and chairs the English Enhancement Taskforce formed recently in the Faculty of Engineering. Since the Spring term of 2002-03, her undergraduate course, Engineering Innovation and Entrepreneurship, has been affiliated with the WAC Program. She is also a member of the University Writing Committee.

Could you describe the English Enhancement Taskforce in Engineering?

The Taskforce consists of myself and one professor from each department. The motivation actually comes from our Dean, Prof. Peter Yum, who really wants to raise the level of English proficiency in Engineering. The goal of the taskforce is to help raise standards and awareness of English writing and presentation by making both core components in the second year required courses, and major components in the final year project. We also have some fun activities to promote interest and skill levels in the English language and will probably institutionalize these activities as a 1-unit credit course.

What is the impact of the WAC program on your courses?

It has been tremendous! First, I have the chance to work with really wonderful tutors. They eased my workload because they offered tutoring services and instructional workshops to my students. That was wonderful. It is also good to have their additional expertise on language, so my students can get more feedback than just from me alone. That is the second bonus.

How have WAC tutors helped?

Their enthusiasm about language has rubbed off on the students. My students have worked harder because there is a WAC tutor. The WAC TAs have a different background than the engineering students so they get a different perspective. Because every WAC tutor does several courses for different departments at the same time, they appreciate how different writing styles are required for different disciplines.

Prof. Leung with WAC TAs Derek Chan and Wience Lai.



How important is writing in your courses?

Writing is very important. The ideal is not for students to parrot facts but assimilate new concepts and be able to express how they can apply those new concepts. Often, especially for graduate courses, students must come up with new explanations or new insights or new applications of concepts. So, they need to be able to express those new ideas clearly and precisely.

What do you expect students to achieve?

Good, clear writing is absolutely important. They need to be able to convey their ideas, especially newly-formed ideas, precisely to distinguish them from previous work and previously-known ideas. They need to be able to draw that line clearly, to be able to explain what they are trying to convey precisely. They must be able to make their ideas understandable to their audience.

What do you think are the best ways for Hong Kong students to improve their writing?

To write more and read more. Different people have different ways of learning things but learning through practice is the best. For any language, you have to learn it by reading more, using it more, and writing it more. Read more newspapers, watch more TV and then start writing. Also, it is good to read books, even fiction because you learn to build imagery and create an atmosphere. I think it is actually good to read a novel for which you have seen the movie. That is very interesting because then you discover that ways of expressing through words are very different from movie images. And you can create more imagery. The level of subtlety that you can represent in a book is often greater than in a movie. You see how much more expressive language could be than visual images. There are two quotes that I like most: "Good writing is clear thinking made visible" by Bill Wheeler and "Writing is thinking on paper" by William Zinsser – perhaps on computers nowadays! Writing complements thought and thought is transmitted through writing. That is what we are aiming at.

The WAC Team

Back row: Paulina Cheung, Angela Cheater, Wience Lai, Ada Young, Stacey Ng, Derek Chan.

Front row: Prof. Joanna Radwanska-Williams, Prof. George Braine, Prof. Carmel McNaught.



News of Teaching Assistants

Paulina Cheung, who has worked for WAC since 2002, has been awarded a Lynn Fellowship by Purdue University, USA, to pursue her doctoral studies in Linguistics.

On May 17, Paulina presented a paper titled "Adapting to writing in journalism: A non-native speaker writing coach in *Varsity* magazine" at the International Conference on Tertiary/College English Language Teaching, held in Hong Kong.

Derek Chan has published an article titled "Virtually WAC: Coaching students on their writing during SARS" in *Educational Research Journal*, 18, (2), 2003.

Participating Professors and Their Courses — 2003-04, Term 2

WAC@CUHK

Faculty of Arts

Prof. Cathy Potter

HIS 3255 Explorations in Russian and Soviet History

HIS 3411 Women, Family and Community in Western History

Prof. Caroline Pluss

HIS 3505 Topic Studies in HK History

Prof. Lynne Nakano JAS 1020

Introduction to Japanese Studies

Prof. Chris Fraser

PHI 1210 Philosophical Thinking through Writing

Faculty of Business Administration

Profs. Ping Ping Fu & Bee Leng Chua

MGT 1020 Principles of Management

Prof. Jessica Kwong

MKT 2010 Marketing Management

Faculty of Education

Prof. David Johns

SPE 3910 Adapted Physical Education

Dr. Eunice Tang

LED 2810 English Language Teaching: Theory and Methodology I

Faculty of Engineering

Profs. Jack Lee & Soung Chang Liew

IEG 5200 Advanced Studies

Prof. Janny Leung

SEG 3450 Engineering Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Prof. Ada Fu

CEG 5120 Advanced Topics in Database Systems

Faculty of Medicine

Mrs. Frances Cheng

HEZ 8001 Professional Practice of Health Education and Health Promotion

Prof. Carmen Chan

NRS3550 Palliative Care

Profs. Violeta Lopez and Eleanor

Holroyd

NRS 6024 The Changing Health Care Context

Prof. Yuan Yuan Ho

Thesis Writing (PG & UG)

Drs. Mary Au-yeung & Chui Ping Lee

PHA 5924 Graduation Project

Faculty of Social Science

Prof. Jeff Cody

ARC 2321 Architectural History and Theory III

Prof. Bill Tsang

SWK2150 Individual Mental Health and Healthy Families

Prof. Gordon Mathews

ANT 2460 Cultures of Japan & Korea

ANT 3630 Language, Symbols and Society

Prof. Maggi Leung

GRM 2321 Globalization and Development

GRM3022 Final Year Thesis II

GRM3321 Planning & Governance for Sustainable Development

Prof. Bryce McIntyre

COM2180 English News Reporting II

COM3610 English News Editing

GEN 1113 STOT & seminar

WAC@BaptistU

Faculty of Social Science

Prof. Jacqueline Adams

Thesis Writing