WAC@CUHK

Writing Across the Curriculum

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/wac

OUR TEAM

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What is Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC)?

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is a term that gained currency in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the United States. The term has been used to describe attempts by colleges and universities to extend student writing to all disciplines, beyond courses offered by English departments.

WAC is based on the principle that writing is the responsibility of the whole academic community. Students' writing will improve only when they see writing as important to the entire curriculum; that is, when they learn to value writing and to use it in all disciplines. The objective of WAC programs is to improve student thinking and writing by encouraging teachers from all disciplines to use writing more often and more thoughtfully in their courses.

The Basis for WAC Programs

When students are asked to write about the contents of academic courses, they have to think about the contents in an active manner, instead of passive memorizing or textbook underlining. Active (critical) thinking requires higher-level cognitive skills such as the understanding of concepts, the analysis of information, the evaluation of evidence, and the construction and testing of hypotheses. Simply stated, if teachers want students to think about the contents of their courses, the students should be encouraged to write, and thinking will be hard to avoid.

The Need for WAC in Hong Kong

Proficiency in the English language at an international level is vital for Hong Kong's global competitiveness. By involving teachers across the disciplines in improving students' writing, the WAC program aims to enhance the overall English proficiency of our university students.

Pioneering WAC in Hong Kong

To our knowledge, the WAC program at The Chinese University of Hong Kong and the City University of Hong Kong is the first attempt to extend the WAC concept to an environment where English is not the medium of communication. Our pioneering program is based on successful programs in the US; we are utilizing related research, staff training method, and evaluation criteria from programs at the University of Texas at Austin, Cornell University, Princeton University, and other US institutions. Although based on the US model, our program has been tailored to meet the needs of students who are non-native speakers of English.

What We Can Offer Professors

Our full-time teaching assistants, who hold postgraduate degrees in English applied linguistics, are trained to provide feedback on students' writing and to conduct writing enhancement workshops.

You are invited to participate in the WAC program if you include writing assignments in your courses. At your request, a TA will be assigned to your course(s) to provide oral and written feedback to your students on their writing assignments, specifically on organization, cohesion, and grammatical accuracy. Writing enhancement workshops (see next page for a list of workshop titles) can also be offered to your students.

Please contact Prof. Braine (2609 7445) or Prof. Williams (2609 7023) if you wish to participate in the WAC program.

WAC @ CUHK

The WAC program is supported by a $4 million Teaching Development Grant from the University Grants Committee. The overall aim of the WAC program is to enhance the English proficiency of CUHK students by encouraging teachers from all disciplines to use writing more often and more thoughtfully in their courses. Supervised by two professors from the English Department and one from CLEAR, the program employs five full-time teaching assistants who work directly with students in courses affiliated with the WAC program.

The future objectives of the program are to (1) assist teachers to incorporate writing into their courses; (2) establish a University Writing Committee consisting of teachers of various disciplines; and (3) provide a model of implementation for the further expansion of WAC programs in Hong Kong.

Contact

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Feedback on Student Writing and Writing Conferences

Our TAs have been attending the lectures/tutorials of WAC-affiliated courses and collecting course syllabuses, handouts and relevant materials. This has been done in order to familiarize themselves with these courses and to design better programs and workshops to suit the needs of students.

One-to-one writing conferences of 15 to 30 minutes each were conducted by our TAs on student papers. Written and oral feedback was provided on students' writing in terms of organization, structure, language (grammar), coherence, flow, and citation style.

In the first term, the TAs provided feedback on **440** papers and conducted **239** one-to-one writing conferences.

Workshop for Professors

Professors joining our project were invited to share their ideas and insight on the teaching of writing at the Workshop for Professors held in late November. The agenda included an introduction to the WAC program in Hong Kong and the US; the basis for assignment of TAs to courses; their training, and monitoring; participants' beliefs, practices, and personal reflections on writing; teaching writing as a process; incorporating writing in undergraduate courses; and designing effective writing assignments. The workshop was led by Professors Braine, Williams, and McNaught.

Workshops for Teaching Assistants

All of our TAs participated in the Workshops for TAs held in late September. Professors Braine, Williams, and McNaught gave presentations and led discussions on characteristics of successful programs in the US; differences between the WAC program in Hong Kong and those in the US; teaching writing as a process; types of writing taught/used in various disciplines; providing written and oral feedback to students; teaching summary and paraphrase skills; and interacting with Professors.

Workshops for Students

In the first term, our TAs conducted a total of 15 workshops for students of the WAC-affiliated courses. The workshops generated positive responses from the students and were successful in motivating students to come for advice on their drafts.

The workshops we offered are listed below. These workshops are available upon request by Professors.

- How to be a Better Writer (30 min.)
- Plagiarism – What it is and How to Avoid it (45 min.)
- The Writing Process – 8 Steps (15 min.)
- Writing a Scientific Report (30 min.)
- Conjunctions (20 min.)
- Making an Oral Presentation (15 min.)
- Process Writing (20 min.)

Coming Soon...

A new workshop will be introduced in Spring semester 2003 –

Writing a Business Proposal

Quotable Quotes

"Why is writing important in English News Reporting I? Well, I train prospective journalists. Writing is central to the journalist's daily routines. Indeed, it could be argued that one's skill as a writer can make or break a journalist's career." – *Professor Bryce McIntyre, Department of Journalism and Communication*

"Ideas are only useful if they are communicated, preferably to the broadest possible audience. Writing is the best way to do this. The ability to write good, clear and unambiguous prose is essential in all walks of life. WAC helps students to achieve good writing skills." – *Professor Cathy Potter, Department of History*

"If you watch and listen to someone express their ideas verbally they use a variety of mechanisms to communicate those ideas that include the use of the hands, eyes, face and body. When a person is asked to communicate those same ideas by writing, they become limited by the power of the words they select. Requiring students to write seeks out their level of understanding and the resources they have at their disposal to communicate." – *Professor David Johns, Department of Sports Science and Physical Education.*

Participating Professors and Their Courses

In term 1 of 2002-2003, the following Professors have joined our project:

Faculty of Arts
Prof. Victor Semerjian
FAA 1700 Artistic Traditions in the West
FAA 3840 Western Modern Art: Modernism & Quest for Utopia

Prof. Cathy Potter
HIS 3260 Europe 1500-1800

Prof. Lynne Nakano
JAS 0330 Studies in Modern Japan
JAS 4110 Anthropological studies of Japanese culture and society

Prof. Chris Fraser
PHI 4333 Philosophy of Mind

Faculty of Business Administration
Prof. Ping-Ping Fu
MGT 2040C Human Resource Management

Faculty of Computer Science & Engineering
Prof. Ho Fung Leung
CSC 4010 Final Year Project
CSC 4020 Final Year Project

Faculty of Education
Prof. David Johns
SPE 2710 Sociology of Sports Science & Physical Education

Faculty of Medicine
Prof. Yuan-Yuan Ho
Biochemistry Final Year Thesis Project

Faculty of Science
Prof. Kenneth Young
PHY 2001 Introduction to Mechanics

Faculty of Social Science
Prof. Gordon Mathews
ANT 2110 Anthropological Theory

Prof. Jeffrey Cody
ARC 2311 Architectural History & Theory II

Dr. Teresa Fung
ECO 3320 Asia-Pacific Economies

Prof. Lawal Marafa
GRM 3223 Leisure and Eco-Tourism

Prof. James Kenny
COM 3939 Film Directors
COM 4730 Documentary

Prof. Bryce McIntyre
COM 2120 English News Reporting 1

Prof. Catherine McBride
PSY 3530A Child Psychology

Prof. Chack Kie Wong
SWK 0310D Student-Oriented Teaching I