



# the WORD

NEWSLETTER FROM WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (WAC) PROGRAM

## IN THIS ISSUE:

Farewell from  
2013-14 WAC Fellows

Academic Integrity  
Workshop

WAC Colloquium on  
"What Makes Writing  
Good?"

WAC Fellows' CETL  
Workshop

## SCIENCE LITERACY INITIATIVE

**Based on conversations generated during our workshops this year, the WAC Writing Fellows are looking forward to launching a science literacy initiative during the 2014-2015 school year.**

**The initiative will include workshops and collaborative partnerships focused on writing pedagogies in the sciences.**

## Farewell from 2013-2014 WAC Fellows



The 2013-2014 York WAC Fellows, *Nazik Dinctopal-Deniz, Annabel D'Souza, Hilal Erkovan, Kevin Moran, Hallie Scott, and Debby Su*, would like to take this opportunity to say goodbye to York College!

It has been a great experience for us to serve as WAC fellows at York College. We hope that, via the workshops we conducted and our faculty collaborations, we were able to pass some of the knowledge we gained through our WAC trainings to York faculty. We would like to thank our two amazing mentors, WAC Program coordinator Jonathan Hall and Writing Fellows coordinator Shereen Inayatulla for their guidance on our work at York.

## A WAC Workshop on Preventing Plagiarism

By: *Kevin Moran*

On April 10th, Writing Fellows, Hallie Scott and Kevin Moran, led a workshop on "Preventing Plagiarism through Pedagogy" as part of the Professor 101 series organized by Dean Chirico for incoming faculty. The aim of the workshop was to introduce new faculty to a range of pedagogic techniques intended to help students use sources appropriately (indeed, effectively) as well as some tips on assignment design. The principles behind the workshop were taken from Prof. Jonathan Hall's article, "Plagiarism Across the Curriculum: How Academic Communities Can Meet the Challenge of the Undocumented Writer," in providing a pedagogically centered approach to academic integrity.

The workshop encouraged instructors to consider breaches of academic integrity as resulting from students not having developed their own writing voice. In viewing academic integrity from this perspective, preventative strategies supporting student's use of sources as well as the development of their writing voice are key to tackling plagiarism. To this end, Hallie and Kevin demonstrated a number of exercises designed to help students identify instances of plagiarism as well as exercises on how to teach an excellent use of sources. In expanding the theme that academic integrity can be fostered by supporting the student writing process, Hallie and Kevin also discussed and demonstrated assignment design as a means of giving transparency and instructional support to student writing and the development of student voices.

The workshop included some lively discussions on the emotions that instructors feel when encountering academic dishonesty, the applicability of writing pedagogy to courses in different disciplines, as well as the policy and procedures on academic integrity at York. The workshop organizers were delighted with the energy new faculty members brought to the event and hope that participants took some new insights and, importantly, new tools for supporting student writing. Hallie and Kevin would like to thank Dean Chirico for adding this additional session to the Professor 101 series and hope this marks the beginning of a lasting collaboration between Writing Fellows and new faculty members arriving at York.

## What Makes Writing "Good"?: York Writing Across the Curriculum Colloquium #1

By: *Debby Su and Jonathan Hall*

The first annual York Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Colloquium was held on May 6 with the theme "What Makes Writing 'Good'?: A Discipline-embedded Approach to Writing Assessment." The inaugural guest speaker was Terry Myers Zawacki, Director Emerita of the WAC Program at George Mason University, one of the flagship WAC programs in the country.

In her presentation, Dr. Zawacki actively solicited the experience and feedback of York faculty in attendance about student writing, writing intensive courses, assessment and curricular issues, and what they think their graduating majors ought to be able to do, in terms of writing and reading in their field. Dr. Zawacki pointed out that "good" writing may be defined differently across disciplines and therefore corresponding writing assessments also need to be fine-tuned to meet different objectives of writing tasks. She recommended that writing assessment efforts, like the one she led at George Mason, should take place on a discipline-by-discipline basis, with context-specific rubrics constructed inductively and collaboratively by a department's entire faculty, examining sample student papers and articulating what they are looking for in writing in their fields.

Coming at the end of the academic year, this event for York faculty provided an opportunity for communal reflection on where we have been, what ongoing projects are currently in the works, and where we are going with writing instruction and assessment at York in the future. The WAC Program is already planning to make the WAC Colloquium an annual event. Thanks to Auxiliary Enterprises and to Dean Ntoko for financial support that made this first edition possible.

*Faculty who were not able to attend may access Professor Zawacki's Powerpoint and handouts, on the York Writing Across the Curriculum Blackboard site. Most faculty who have taught WI courses are already enrolled; faculty who would like to be may contact WAC Coordinator Jonathan Hall at [jhall1@york.cuny.edu](mailto:jhall1@york.cuny.edu)*



# WAC Fellows Launch a CETL Workshop on Student Research Writing

By: Nazik Dinçtopal-Deniz, Annabel D'Souza, Hilal Erkovan, Hallie Scott, Debby (Chih-Huei) Su

Research assignments are an excellent teaching and learning tool for students. When well-designed they help students develop research skills, critical thinking, communication and content knowledge. These assignments require students to develop arguments by reviewing, critiquing and selecting salient literature. Through the process of presenting empirical and/or theoretical evidence for their opinion, students gain deeper understandings of content. For many students, however, the research writing process can be frustrating and overwhelming. This workshop introduced a number of techniques to mitigate student anxiety, including scaffolding, effective assignment design, and in-class activities. This section will briefly describe the topics covered during the CETL workshop and include relevant links.



**Creating Effective Assignments:** Research assignments should be framed clearly in a way that lets students know what they are being asked to do. Before creating an assignment, it is important to define the following:

*The purpose of the assignment.* Explain to students why completing the assignment effectively contributes to the learning objectives of the course.

*Criteria to consider when formulating topic and research questions:*

- the breadth of the topic
- the number of research questions that need to be generated
- the level of freedom students have in choosing research questions



*Type of paper:* Make clear what type of paper is expected.

Provide a specific task to complete, such as a problem to solve, a question to answer, or an argument to support.

*Instructions on format:* Provide clear instructions for the paper format such as the length, margins, font, structure, citation style, etc.

*Audience and tone:* Indicate a specific audience such as other academics, peers, newspaper readers, etc. Ask students to consider an appropriate tone for the specified audience.

*Turning in the paper:* Add instructions for turning the paper in. Include clear instructions for submitting assignments.

*Using academic resources:* Clarify differences between popular and scholarly resources and offer students a list of academic journals or databases.

**Scaffolding Assignments:** Scaffolding in writing pedagogy refers to a technique that breaks up a complex research project into smaller pieces and makes it more manageable to students. It not only enhances students' learning but also allows instructors to intervene and provide feedback throughout the writing process. Together with low stakes assignments, peer reviews and effectively designed rubrics, scaffolding may significantly lower instructors' grading load at the end of semester.



Scaffolding assignments requires breaking down the assignment into tasks and sub-assignments, which are sequenced throughout the semester.

**Teaching the Research Writing Process:** Devoting some class time to teaching the major components of research writing can greatly improve students' understanding and competency. Useful topics for in-class workshops include: effective use of sources (defining plagiarism and practicing summary and analysis), academic diction, crafting a thesis statement, writing a literature review, note taking, and essay organization.

In-class writing workshops are most effective when enmeshed with course content or when held in conjunction with the scaffolded assignment schedule. For example, if students are asked to turn in a thesis statement as part of a scaffolded assignment, hold an in-class session on thesis construction during the class before they are due or collectively workshop the completed thesis statements in class on the due date.



There are several online resources for pre-designed in-class writing lessons that can be easily adjusted to fit discipline-specific procedures. One recommendation is to use the "mini-lessons" developed by Brooklyn College Writing Fellows, which address specific aspects of college writing in 20-30 minute sessions: <http://bcwac.wordpress.com/teaching-resources/mini-lessons/>

In addition to teaching the writing process in class, making an appointment with a librarian to discuss available resources and search engines is a great way to introduce students to navigating the library.

## Grading Student Writing:



Often times, instructors spend long hours reading, commenting on and grading student papers. Rubrics can be used for grading and evaluating student writing in an efficient and consistent manner. They are scoring guides that articulate specific components and expectations of an assignment. Rubrics can reduce grading time by decreasing uncertainty and referring to previously-set criteria for a grade instead of writing long comments for each paper. They provide justification for the grade earned, lending transparency to the evaluation process. In addition to grading research papers, rubrics can be used for a wide range of assignments such as lab reports, oral presentations, portfolios, and essays.

Students also benefit from rubrics during their writing process. An effective rubric provides a guide to the writing process, allowing students to understand expectations and components of the assignment.

If interested in seeing sample rubrics, contact Writing Fellows.

**HAVE A WONDERFUL SUMMER!!!**

Visit WAC website <http://www.york.cuny.edu/wac> to learn more about the CETL workshop.