The Center for Writing Studies

WAC Programs at Illinois

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program at Illinois emerged from an institutional reevaluation of General Education at the end of the 1980s. The first reform proposed and implemented by the General Education Board was a second composition requirement (Advanced Composition), which would ideally be fulfilled by taking an advanced writing-intensive course in the student's major rather than a course offered by traditional providers of writing instruction (English and Communication) or in typical 100- and 200-level general education offerings.

To support this requirement, the Center for Writing Studies was established in 1990 with three missions:

1) leadership in developing a WAC Program for faculty and TAs across the campus,
2) individual tutoring through an expanded writing center (the Writers’ Workshop), and
3) development and coordination of a cross-disciplinary graduate specialization in Writing Studies to support the first two missions.

CWS offers varied programs in relation to its WAC mission, including short topical workshops and intensive WAC seminars for faculty and graduate TAs (the later each August and January) that introduce the principles and practices described on back of this sheet. Since 2016, we have collaborated with College of Engineering faculty and graduate students in a Strategic Instructional Improvement Project (SIIP) initiative designed to study and improve the writing of undergraduate engineering students across the college. CWS has also designed, staffed, and supervised an advanced multimodal Writing Studies course, INFO/WRIT 303 Writing across Media. Upon request, we consult with instructors on course design and give presentations to departments or groups of instructors working in a common course. Finally, we have engaged in evaluation research to better understand the ways WAC is being implemented in diverse programs across campus. To find out more about CWS programs, you may contact Debbie Carrier, the CWS Office Manager (carrier@illinois.edu, 333-1527) or Professor Paul Prior, the Director of CWS (pprior@illinois.edu, 333-3024).
Basic Principles of the WAC Program at Illinois

Writing is a tool in making, unmaking, and negotiating knowledge in and across disciplines. Writing involves multimodal chains (reading, talk, visualization, making) as well as writing. Writing conventions and practices are diverse, shaped by discipline, purpose, and context. Writing should be an object and mode of instruction, not a constant test. Writing should help students generate meaning and explore identity. Writing, content, and development are inextricably connected.

WAC Practices Emphasized in CWS Seminars and Workshops

Process
- multiple opportunities, i.e., multiple drafts or repeated tasks
- shorter, more frequent writing (e.g., breaking up larger tasks into shorter steps)
- structured occasions for in-progress invention and response from self, peers, instructors

Assignment Design
- considering student interest or motivation
- building process into tasks and sequencing tasks over time
- structuring a resource-rich environment to support student writing and learning
- integrating writing with disciplinary conventions and content

Writing to learn
- writing as a means of inquiry and discovery
- quick writing, various kinds of logs and journals, microthemes
- writing as a tool to enhance reading, observation, activity, and class discussion

Response/Evaluation
- responding in progress
  - substantive, preferably ungraded, response by instructors
  - fitting response to purpose and stage in process (e.g., not proofreading first drafts)
  - peer and self response (guided by relevant models)
- minimal response as an option for some kinds of writing (e.g., quick writing, journal assignments, responses to peers)
- utilizing multiple audiences (public, external professional, other students)
- enhancing the clarity of instructor written responses to text
  - avoiding paradoxical comments like “be clear” and “don’t use contractions”)
  - avoiding underspecified rules (e.g., do not change tenses, do not use “I”)
  - considering the clarity of telegraphic responses (awk, log, dev)
- including process components in grading (i.e., counting engagement in the process)
- making evaluation better grounded and clearer (e.g., portfolios, primary trait scales)

Multimodality
- understanding writing as embedded in multimodal genre systems
- structuring and tuning such system as critical to writing (and writing instruction).

Diversity
- understanding disciplines and professions as heterogeneous and evolving
- recognizing the diversity of language and literate practices and how they mark social identities
- encouraging diverse forms of participation in disciplines and professions