# Murray State University
# Writing Across the Curriculum Annual Report 2010-11

Kelley Wezner, Coordinator

Because of its dedication to improving student learning outcomes, Murray State University (MSU) aids the acquisition, integration, and development of critical skills and content knowledge across the university experience. Part of this enrichment of the MSU experience is supported by the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which, according to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), is a carefully designed course of action that addresses a well-defined and focused topic or issue related to enhancing student learning. MSU's revised QEP is written communication, and MSU's endorsement of improving student writing takes several forms. The newly reconstituted Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program assists faculty in their improvement of student writing.

The writing across the curriculum (WAC) pedagogical movement believes that writing and thinking are closely related; therefore, when students use writing for inquiry and problem solving, they simultaneously learn the material and become better writers. WAC programs, like MSU's, believe that writing and writing instruction should occur across the university curriculum and throughout a student's education. Like other WAC programs, MSU's program acknowledges the differences in writing conventions across the disciplines, and believes that students learn their discipline and discipline- specific conventions best by practicing those conventions. MSU's WAC program is designed to help faculty help their students become stronger and more informed writers.

## Writing Ambassadors and the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Committee is comprised of eight Writing Ambassadors, representing the academic colleges and the Schools of Agriculture and Nursing, and is chaired by the WAC Coordinator. The College of Business and the College of Humanities and Fine Arts each had two Writing Ambassadors because of the broad range of disciplines and writing within these colleges. Characteristics of Writing Ambassadors include

- an enthusiasm for student writing and improving student writing, both within their discipline and across the curriculum
- an interest in fostering discussions about improving student writing at MSU, ranging from departmental to campus-wide conversations
- a willingness to learn about discipline-specific writing standards, research strategies, reading strategies, citation formats, key genres, discourse community goals and values, and appropriate writing sequences for typical writing tasks for the disciplines housed within their college or school
- an interest in an open-minded and critical consideration of a range of writing instruction techniques

Duties of the Writing Ambassadors include

- meeting regularly as a part of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) committee
- serving as a liaison between their college or school and the WAC program, including identifying the student writing needs or concerns of colleagues in their college or school and promoting the WAC program goals, values, and events within their college or school
- discussing their writing pedagogy and experiences at a WAC panel or program
- reading scholarship on writing in the discipline (WID) concerns for disciplines within their college or school and discuss their work with the WAC committee and program
- identifying possible faculty development programs and resources
- aiding the assessment of student writing with their college or school

Writing Ambassadors met at least once a month during the 2010-11 academic year; minutes are available on request from Kelley Wezner, 2010-11 WAC Coordinator. In 2010-11, the WAC Committee members were

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| Brandon Wilson | HutsonSchool of Agriculture |
| Debbie Owens | College of Business |
| Joy Roach-Duncan | College of Business |
| Sharon Gill | College of Education |
| Kala Chakradhar | College of Health Sciences and Human Services, School of Nursing |
| ZB Smetana | College of Humanities and Fine Arts |
| Jeff Osborne/Gina Claywell* | College of Humanities and Fine Arts |
| Ted Porter | College of Science, Engineering and Technology |
| Caitlin Bagley | University Libraries |
| Kelley Wezner | Chair, Coordinator of WAC |

*Jeff Osborne resigned in February 2011; Gina Claywell replaced him in the same month.

## Faculty Development Programs

The WAC program was charged with providing faculty development programs to two groups of faculty: faculty who teach writing-intensive courses and any faculty interested in improving student writing in their courses. These interactive and collaborative programs drew on the prior experience of the attendees in the use of writing in their classrooms, and then suggest, demonstrate, and brainstorm additional methods of teaching or using writing. While examples from specific disciplines were presented and discussed, the emphasis was on how any pedagogical technique might be modified for use in another discipline or at another grade level.

Program selections were based on faculty input from interviews with writing-intensive faculty across the university, from an early Scholars Week program, and from WAC Ambassadors who asked their constituents; from suggestions from WAC program attendees, faculty, and Ambassadors; and from WAC literature about national pedagogical concerns.

Possible topics and/or presenters were presented, discussed, and selected during WAC Committee meetings.

Faculty interests, suggestions, and concerns also informed decisions about the length, format, and scheduling of programs. In response to suggestions and concerns about the length and format, faculty development programs were designed to be interactive programs about an hour in length. During the fall semester, WAC presented one program a month, on Wednesdays at 1pm in a central location—the Waterfield Library. One department and several individual faculty members requested that programs be offered at alternate times to allow faculty with teaching commitments at that time to attend. Accordingly, in the spring semester, WAC presented two programs a month and attempted to schedule the programs at varying times and days. The spring semester included a spotlight series focusing on the writing in disciplines and an all-day, hands-on workshop on writing and inquiry presented by writing pedagogy specialist Dr. Bruce Ballenger, Boise State University.

The following programs featuring local experts were offered:

- Scholars Week brown bag lunch discussion on Writing Across the Curriculum at Murray State University (April 22, 2010)
    - Presenter: Dr. Kelley Wezner, College of Humanities and Fine Arts
    - Attending: 7 people
- Engaging Student with Writing (September 29, 2010)
    - Presenters: Dr. Sharon Gill, College of Education, and Dr. Debbie Owens, College of Business
    - Attending: 26 people
- Avoiding and Responding to Plagiarism (October 20, 2010)
    - Presenters: Dr. Seid Hassan, College of Business, and Dr. Sue Sroda, College of Humanities and Fine Arts
    - Attending: 26 people
- Effective and Efficient Feedback (November 17, 2010)
    - Presenter: Dr. ZB Smetana, College of Humanities and Fine Arts
    - Attending: 29 people
- Writing Mathematics (February 23, 2011)
    - Presenter: Dr. Ted Porter, College of Science, Engineering and Technology
    - Attending: 12 people
- Effective Writing Assignments (February 28, 2011)
    - Presenters: Dr. Kathy Callahan and Dr. Rusty Jones, College of Humanities and Fine Arts
    - Attending: 14 people
- Writing and Inquiry: Composing, Discovery, and Research Workshop, cosponsored by CTLT, URSA, QEP, the Office of the Provost, and WAC. (March 10)
    - Presenter: Dr. Bruce Ballenger, Boise State University
    - Attending: 41 people.
- Racer Writing Center(March 23, 2011)

    - Presenters: Dr. Jeff Osborne, College of Humanities and Fine Arts, and RWC consultants and graduate students Jenny Wilkins (psychology), Adam Meredith (history), Kaylee Chesser (English), and Kala Dunn (English)
    - Attending: 14 people
- Business Writing: Genres, Attitudes, and Effective Techniques (April 20)
    - Presenters: Dr. Joy Roach and Professor Teri Ray, College of Business
    - Attending: 11 people

The WAC program also promoted other writing-related programs via the listserv and Ambassador's relationships with their constituents, including the Racer Writing Center's programs and seminars, the Freshman Reading Program's activities and essay competition, Scholars Week activities, and a presentation and forum by renowned science writer, Stephen Ornes.

Assessment and Accreditation

WAC assisted in OSH's ASAC/ADET site visit for reaccreditation in October, 2010, providing information to on-campus reviewers about the role of WAC and writing in the OSH programs. Moreover, WAC serves as an important component of Murray State University's Quality Enhancement Program (QEP), and its programming, resources, and assistance with assessment help MSU implement and sustain the QEP. In particular, the WAC program facilitated the assessment of writing-intensive courses in the 2010-11 academic year, which provided information about the level of writing in upper-level courses in 13 fields.

WAC began its own assessment efforts, appointing a subcommittee charged with designing and implementing surveys of students, faculty, and employers hiring MSU alumni. Drafts of student and faculty surveys were completed by the end of the spring semester. Additionally, a writing-intensive courses subcommittee was created to write research-based definition and guidelines for writing-intensive courses that would aid institutional effectiveness efforts.

Newsletters

Electronic newsletters were sent on a monthly basis during the spring and fall semesters. Newsletters reported on best practices in writing pedagogy, writing pedagogy practices used at MSU, upcoming professional development seminars, as well as links to or descriptions of useful writing resources for faculty and students. Additionally, two newsletters, tailored to incorporating writing into upcoming courses, were distributed in the winter and summer breaks. Newsletters were sent to all faculty and relevant administrative staff.

Website

Based on faculty feedback and WAC research, MSU's WAC program felt that a website would be a useful venue for providing resources. Additionally, WAC explored the interactive

possibilities available through a website, such as soliciting questions and feedback, allowing for online registration for programs, and imbedding webcasts or other videos. A subcommittee comprised of three ambassadors, including the WAC Ambassador from University Libraries, who has expertise in information science determined the best structure and content for the website, and began compiling resources. Working with Publications and Printing, WAC designed a homepage for "Writing at MSU," which provides links to the Racer Writing Center, the QEP, and the WAC program. Resources complied for the WAC website include lists of the writing-intensive programs, general writing resources intended for both students and faculty, writing resources specific to discipline, and writing standards specific to discipline.

Collaboration, marketing, and promotion

Because the WAC program was reconstituted this year and because it is a part of the Quality Enhancement Plan, the WAC program focused on developing working relationships with other university constituents and on announcing and promoting the WAC program and QEP.

The WAC Coordinator was a member of the University Writing Advisory Board, chaired by the QEP Director. In addition to its advisory function, the University Writing Advisory Board invited discussions about collaborative efforts to improve student writing and writing pedagogy and facilitated dissemination of writing-related information to stakeholders. WAC was an initial member of the University Libraries' Learning Commons Council, which provides a forum for communication and collaboration for the library and academic services and non-library units housed in Waterfield Library. WAC worked with the Racer Writing Center to promote RWC, sending flyers and information out about the Racer Writing Center to the WAC listserv and creating a faculty development seminar featuring RWC consultants and their findings. WAC Ambassadors were included in the events of the Racer Writing Center dedication and openings. Additionally, the WAC Coordinator met with individual writing-intensive course faculty to discuss their impressions and concerns about student writing and writing pedagogy, to ask about the types of writing their students engage in, and to identify resources that might be useful to them in their teaching.

Presentations about WAC were made at Scholars Week, the 2010 New Faculty Orientation, the Humanities faculty meeting, and the School of Nursing's annual meeting. Information about WAC was distributed to colleges and schools at their college-wide meetings at the start of the school year. The appointment of WAC Ambassadors was announced in the Roundabout and through the MSU News Bureau. Flyers announcing upcoming events and programs were distributed through the listserv. The QEP "On the Write Path" logo was incorporated into materials, and the QEP "On the Write Path" notepads were distributed at faculty development seminars and other presentations to promote QEP.

Individual Writing Ambassadors presented information and solicited feedback about WAC, WAC resources, and professional development programs at program, departmental, or collegiate meetings, in individual meetings with faculty, via emails, and through a collegiate WAC wiki.