

Teaching with

WRITING Across the Curriculum

wac.gmu.edu

Fall 2010

writingcenter.gmu.edu

Our fall issue includes contributions from presenters at the October 4, 2010 Innovations in Teaching & Learning Conference. How wonderful it was to see so many interesting and informative cross-curricular teaching presentations with writing at the center!

Writing Center News

In the fall semester, the **Writing Center**:

- saw more than **785** clients, for a total of more than **1825** appointments; and
- met with **95** workshop attendees.

We are sad to say goodbye to Anna Habib, interim director of the writing center for the past year and a half. Anna is leaving Mason after this semester to take a position with a charter school in the District doing faculty development in WAC and ESL writing. As interim director, Anna has developed a number of new initiatives, including the **ESL Opt-In program**, which allows ESL writers to make up to 15 appointments a semester with the same tutor. A national search is being conducted for a new director who will begin his/her duties in Fall 2011.

WAC News

We did it again! For the ninth year in a row, Mason's WAC program has ranked among the top 23 programs for writing in the disciplines in the 2011 U.S. News College Issue.

The WAC Committee is currently collecting syllabi from all writing-intensive (WI) courses as part of its three-year review cycle. If a syllabus does not explicitly note that the course fulfills the WI requirement and/or does not meet the writing-intensive requirements, the instructor and department chair are notified and asked to revise the syllabus for subsequent semesters. Once all syllabi have been collected and reviewed, the WAC director, with the assistance of the committee, will draft a report with the results and recommendations. The committee thanks the WI faculty who responded so quickly to the request for syllabi and also those who sent links to assignments and writing materials they've developed.

Building a Personal Brand for Professional Purposes with Social Media

The Social Media project *Prof. Melissa Martin* assigns in Marketing 315 teaches students how to create a personal "brand" for professional purposes using Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs. The project also prepares them to assume responsibility for a potential employer's social media presence.

See page 2

Social Media Projects to Enhance Second Language Learning

Social media provide authentic situations beyond the classroom walls for second-language learners as they learn to become competent communicators in a language other than their native ones. *Prof. Esperanza Roman-Mendoza* describes the digital multimedia portfolio project she assigns in Spanish 336 to help students acquire both linguistic and multicultural competence.

See page 5

Transform Your Connection to Students: Using Jing to Give Audio-Visual Feedback on Writing

A passive, asynchronous approach to using technology tools for facilitating writing and response can diffuse the vitality of the teacher-student relationship. *Prof. Twila Johnson* describes the benefits and how-tos of using Jing, a free downloadable audio-video platform, to respond to student writing.

See page 3

The One-Minute Paper: Big Ideas and Burning Questions

Minute papers, written on index cards at the end of the class period, offer students the opportunity to reformulate "big ideas" from the readings and class discussion and to ask "burning questions" in need of clarification. Students report that the succinct format forces them to make sense of the day's work and, when they read *Prof. Suzanne Scott's* responses, they can see that she takes their work seriously.

See page 4

AND ALSO...

Writing Blog Style

See page 2

Rediscover the George Mason Review

See page 6

Library Corner: RSS as Academic Research Tool

See page 2

More WAC news

See page 6

Building a Personal Brand for Professional Purposes with Social Media

ONE OF THE JOYS OF THE INTERNET MARKETING CLASS (MKTG315) I TEACH IN THE SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT is how easily we can engage with the real world virtually. Websites, advertising campaigns, and social media initiatives are accessible with the click of a mouse, allowing us to view and analyze current examples in this dynamic area. This semester, we are focusing on developing the students' expertise in social media by encouraging them to promote a brand close to their hearts: themselves.

Most discussions of employment prospects and social media focus on caveats—tales of employees fired or of prospective employees denied jobs due to ill-considered Facebook posts. Indeed, about two-thirds of employers report that they check social media sites for information about job candidates. But Facebook is not the only forum available, as my students learn from the Social Media project I assign. Other tools—Twitter, LinkedIn, blogs—offer an opportunity to build a personal “brand” for professional purposes, enhancing rather than detracting from the chances of being hired.

The Social Media project I assign requires students to demonstrate a range of writing skills—the ability to be concise (Twitter), to summarize one's strengths (LinkedIn), and to hold an audience's attention (a blog). Students must connect their accounts to the full social media universe with “sharing” links and incorporate multimedia elements such as photos and videos to enrich their content. The project also includes a significant peer review component, done virtually, giving students a real audience for the public documents they create.

At the end of the semester, students will have benefited in a number of ways from completing the interconnecting elements of the project. They become savvy creators of online professional identities, preparing them for tasks that might be assigned to an entry-level marketer. They may, for example, inherit responsibility for the employer's social media presence. The project prepares them for this task by building a solid foundation in the technical, social, and cultural aspects of using the tools. In addition, they will have assembled a professional presence online available to any hiring manager who chooses to investigate.

Melissa Martin, School of Management

Hook the Eye and Ear: Writing Blog Style

BLOGS HAVE TAKEN PUBLISHING FULL CIRCLE. BEN FRANKLIN, AFTER ALL, WAS AN 18TH CENTURY JOURNALIST AND publisher because he, too, owned the means of production of his time, the printing press. In addition to the writer owning the means of production, blogs also have returned to earlier writing styles and conventions: conversational, personal and fluid, based on the blogger's audience and purpose(s). For college bloggers, that means that those old rules still apply.

Blogs communicate best when they reflect the writer's voice. But writers also need to hook a reader's eye—to think presentation as well as content. Because reading comprehension online is only about 25 percent of the printed page, simple devices such as boldfacing names, bullet-pointing a list, or breaking up blocks of type with subheads allow a reader to focus while scanning the content.

Blogs also tend to read best when they're written in a journalistic style. While journalists base their writing on “The Associated Press Stylebook,” bloggers can also utilize a style closer to Strunk and White's “The Elements of Style.” Turabian and the academic MLA/APA voice just don't work for the cross-platform, online world of blogs.

That said, the rules for good writing still apply: Be clear; be aware of your audience; use proper punctuation, good word choice and sentence structure; and keep the language simple enough to be read in sound bites—longer than tweets but shorter than the style of traditional academic papers.

Steve Klein, Communication

Library Corner: Teach Your Students to Use RSS as an Academic Research Tool

RSS, OR REALLY SIMPLE SYNDICATION, IS A TECHNOLOGY THAT DELIVERS CONTENT FROM THE WEB IN A standardized format. New content comes directly to your RSS reader when it's posted, so you do not have to visit individual sites. You may use RSS to keep track of blogs, news sources, podcasts, and other sites with frequently updated content; however, RSS can also be used as an academic research tool. As you're searching library databases, you can set up journal and search alerts to conveniently track the latest scholarly articles related to your field or topic, much the same way you receive content from your favorite websites. *Journal alerts* allow you to receive notifications of new articles in specific publications. *Search alerts* let you save database searches and rerun them automatically. Titles of articles matching your alert criteria are delivered to your RSS reader; then, to find the full articles, use the E-Journal Finder.

To get started with RSS, sign up for a Google Reader account.

To start adding feeds from the web, look for the RSS icon or “subscribe” link on any site.

To add journal and search alert feeds from library databases, follow the instructions at http://support.epnet.com/uploads/kb/ehost_onestepsrch_alerts.doc

Jackie Sipes, Educational Services, Libraries

Transform Your Connection to Students: Using Jing to Give Audio-Visual Feedback on Writing

TEACHERS RECOGNIZE THAT STUDENTS THRIVE THROUGH COMMUNICATION AND GROUP INTERACTION. YET EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY IS IN DANGER OF GENERATING A STATIC LEARNING EXPERIENCE. A PASSIVE, ASYNCHRONOUS APPROACH can diffuse the vitality of the teacher-student relationship. Teachers might post lecture materials on Blackboard to substitute for a face-to-face lesson or type comments in a cascade of red bubbles rather than hold conferences. Even the term *face-to-face* is now streamlined to an abbreviation (f2f), thus reflecting the challenge to reach students efficiently without sacrificing their individual needs. *But how do teachers embrace technology without losing intimacy with their students?*

A simple way to connect to students with technology is through Jing. Jing provides an audio-visual platform for teachers to record whatever happens on their computer screen while simultaneously recording audio feedback. The videos, taped in five-minute increments, are saved as hyperlinks that can be linked through syllabi, Blackboard, wikis, blogs, emails, or any web page. These links may be kept private or be made public, and teachers can track how often each video is viewed.

Jing's Time-Saving Applications for Teachers

Comment on students' work through audio-visual feedback: Speaking is faster than typing, so Jing allows teachers to include more comments in an engaging, personal tone. This is especially helpful in reducing the distance in online and hybrid courses.

Supplement individual critique with embedded lessons: Rather than merely making corrections, teachers can describe a rule or link the student to a web page for further instructions.

Assist students with research: Teachers can quickly produce a video that is personalized to the student's essay topic and research needs. This is helpful for teaching effective search terms.

Type in explanations during the video: The Jing video feature is live-action, so teachers can type corrections as they explain a concept. This is particularly helpful for ESL students.

Create a video lesson to reinforce class concepts: Teachers can post lessons on Blackboard, a blog, or a wiki to expand on important concepts such as avoiding plagiarism. This also works well in responding to students' emailed questions or responding to students who have missed class due to illness.

Have students give presentations online: In-class presentations can be time-consuming or impossible (online courses). Students can create PowerPoint or e-portfolio presentations using Jing so that classmates and instructors can view them online.

How to begin using Jing right away, even for teachers who are technophobes

- Download the free Jing software by visiting <http://www.techsmith.com/jing/>.
- Choose a platform where the video hyperlinks can be stored for future use. Jing has a partnership with Screencast.com, which will store videos for free. Visit <http://www.screencast.com> to see its multiple uses for storing documents and videos.
- Click on the Jing sun icon in the upper right corner of the screen, expand the framing to the document on your computer screen, and hit "record." Save the video, and the program will automatically generate the hyperlink for you to paste. It's that simple.

Teachers may never understand every text abbreviation that surfaces on their students' cell phones, and students may never know the glory of inserting a cassette tape into their car stereo system, but Jing can join teachers with their students in an ongoing "conversation" about writing. By personalizing feedback, teachers are no longer a keystroke away, but a voice that enables students to more clearly see their potential.

Twila Griffin Johnson, English

The One-Minute Paper: Big Ideas and Burning Questions

A FEW YEARS AGO, I BEGAN ENDING EACH CLASS WITH THE ONE-MINUTE PAPER DESCRIBED IN KEN BAINS' *WHAT THE BEST COLLEGE TEACHERS DO* (HARVARD UP 2004). THE IDEA WAS TO ASK STUDENTS TO QUICKLY WRITE DOWN ONE NEW BIT OF INFORMATION THEY LEARNED IN CLASS THAT DAY AND ALSO TO ASK ABOUT SOMETHING THAT REMAINED UNCLEAR. INITIALLY, THE GOAL WAS TO ASSESS WHAT STUDENTS WERE TAKING AWAY FROM THE CLASSES AND TO CREATE A VEHICLE FOR REVISITING COMPLEX MATERIAL. THIS PRACTICE WAS ALSO DESIGNED TO HELP STUDENTS CLARIFY THEIR LEARNING AND TO STRENGTHEN THEIR ABILITY TO MAKE CONNECTIONS AMONG VISUAL AND WRITTEN TEXTS.

How humbling to read one-minute papers with 27 “take away lessons,” many of which were only tangentially related to my own! After only one semester, the one-minute paper practice evolved to my “big ideas and burning questions” practice—on an index card. Although similar, the emphasis of the practice shifted subtly from what students were (or were not) taking away from the class to what I as a teacher needed to improve.

The “Big Idea and Burning Question” Practice

- At the end of class, hand out an index card to each student and ask them to:
 - » Write down on one side of the index card the one “big idea” they are taking away from the class.
 - » Turn the card over, and write one “burning question” that remains for them at the end of the class.
- Type the big ideas, and do not be surprised if they are legion.
- Type the burning questions, and type the answers in red.
- Post the document to Blackboard, send it via email, or print copies for the class.
- Use the big ideas and burning questions as a springboard for wrapping up the previous week's work and ensuring that you are moving ahead with clarity.

Early in the semester, when students are learning the vocabulary and building a common core of issues, I may spend 20 to 30 minutes at the beginning of the next class talking about misconceptions and filling in the gaps that emerged from their lists of big ideas and burning questions. Some of our best discussions, for example, have arisen from grappling with such misunderstood concepts as “difficult art” and “Orientalism.” As the students' knowledge and competence grows and my explanatory skills improve, I find that I need to spend no more than 5 to 10 minutes at the beginning of the class on their big ideas and burning questions.

Each semester I ask students if this “big ideas and burning questions” practice is valuable. They report that the process of writing down points from the lesson in a succinct format forces them to make sense of the day's work and that viewing my responses helps them take their own ideas and questions seriously!

Suzanne Scott
Women and Gender Studies and New Century College

Social Media Projects to Enhance Second Language Learning

THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT SOCIAL MEDIA OPEN FOR COMMUNICATION IN AUTHENTIC SITUATIONS beyond the classroom walls are particularly important for second-language learners, who need to become competent communicators in a language other than their native ones. Because of the increasing familiarity of most students with digital media, it is reasonable to assume that the integration of social media in the foreign language curriculum can only bring positive results in terms of language interaction with native speakers and, as a result, the acquisition of multicultural competency.



But this is not always the case. Students may, for instance, enjoy watching YouTube videos and writing on their friends' Facebook walls, but when it comes to participating in a cyberspace dialogue, a variety of factors can prevent them from taking full advantage of their ability as authors and creators of information—more so if they have to do it in a foreign language. For this reason, instructors who want to use social media in their classes should first appraise their students' digital literacy skills and then build upon them. Using surveys at the beginning of the course is a good way to find out what students know, and what a “safe” but at the same time challenging use of social media could be for that particular class. Course topic and language proficiency level are, of course, another determining factor in creating online assignments for the foreign language curriculum.

From the many possible social media-based assignments for language instruction, I briefly describe here an activity that encourages students to express themselves through a digital multimedia portfolio. In my class, SPAN 336: Spain as Portrayed in Social Media, each of my students was asked to create an online photo calendar with pertinent comments. In each calendar entry, students had to combine text and images—taken with their own cameras or from the web—to reflect twice a week on what they had learned in class. The cal-

endar was also used as the basis for a final oral individual interview. By working on this project, students not only practiced their Spanish but they also learned to deal with unsolicited comments from Internet users; to pay attention to copyright and privacy issues; to give appropriate credit to information sources; and to become more aware of the concepts of authorship and digital identity. They also could observe their peers' work and realize that the same course content can cause different reactions in different people.

Projects like this are also very useful to instructors, as they can have an overview of the most relevant class topics as viewed by their students. More importantly, these activities prepare students for a world that is increasingly digital, and that demands from each of us to become responsible online citizens.

To know more about the project:

SPAN 336. YouTube video clip: *Atrévete a pensar y crear en español*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxcSQ-5-te8>

Project description (in Spanish): *Una imagen vale más con mil palabras*. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/32237587/Una-imagen-vale-mas-con-mil-palabras>

*Esperanza Román-Mendoza
Modern and Classical Languages*

Faculty—Check out the online writing guides in the majors on the WAC site at http://wac.gmu.edu/supporting/gmu_guides.php

THE WAC PROGRAM HAS FUNDED THE PRODUCTION OF 12 ONLINE WRITING GUIDES IN THE MAJORS. Writing guides are developed by faculty in the disciplines, typically with the assistance of a WAC graduate student.

Biological Sciences	New Century College
Criminology, Law & Society	School of Nursing
English	Philosophy
History	Psychology
Information Technology	Public and International Affairs
School of Management	Religious Studies

If you've already developed a writing guide for your students, please let us know. We'd like to feature your guide on our list! If you're interested in developing a writing guide for your majors, email Terry Zawacki at tzawacki@gmu.edu.

WAC News cont.

This fall we welcomed Jackie Brown as the new WAC graduate research assistant (GRA). Jackie's responsibilities include working with coordinators of WIN(ning) programs to collect materials and identify next steps (see article on WIN(ning) programs below); collecting WI syllabi across all units for the three-year review; investigating WI requirements at other institutions with notable WAC programs, and assisting the director with additional tasks as needed. Jackie has a background in English, Social Work, and Women's Studies; she is currently pursuing an M.A. in English literature.



Is Yours a WIN(ning) Program?

If you can answer "yes" to the following questions about the undergraduate program(s) offered by your department, you might be interested in learning more about how to receive a WIN(ning) (writing infused) designation from the WAC program.

- Does your program pay attention to the writing skills students learn as they move from course to course across your program curriculum?
- Does your program explicitly articulate the expectations/outcomes for student writing?
- Does your program have a plan for assessing students' growth as writers?
- Does your program provide faculty development in teaching with writing?
- Does your program acknowledge students' accomplishments as writers?

If you answered "yes" or "somewhat" to these questions, contact Terry Zawacki to learn more, or visit <http://wac.gmu.edu/program/initiatives/winning.php>

Terry Zawacki delivered a **keynote address** at the **May 2010 WAC conference**. Her talk, "Researching the Local/Writing the International: Developing Culturally Inclusive WAC Programs and Practices," can be read at <http://www.indiana.edu/~wac2010/zawacki.shtml>

Sarah Baker also presented at the same conference on the strength of WAC agency, on a panel titled "Adjusting, Surviving, Sustaining: Tales of WAC Program Upheaval and Change."

Introducing Fall Peer Tutors from Across the Curriculum

ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY OF OUR TUTORS ARE GRADUATE STUDENTS, THE WRITING CENTER ALSO MENTORS A SELECT GROUP OF PEER TUTORS, WHO play an important role in the Writing Center's dynamic culture of writing and scholarship. Our peer tutors come from variety of disciplines, and all of them have demonstrated academic excellence. Potential peer tutors are interviewed by the writing center director, who also looks at their transcript, writing samples, and two faculty recommendations.

In the fall, the writing center was pleased to mentor four outstanding peer tutors.

- **Taryn Brooks-Faulconer**, a junior with a double major in *Biology* and *Psychology*, and a minor in Creative Writing.
- **George Buzzell**, a senior pursuing a B.S. in *Psychology*.
- **Kim Ruff**, an *Individualized Studies* major concentrating in Applied Music Cognition.
- **Paula Salamoun**, a senior *Government and International Politics* major with a minor in Economics. This year, Paula also became the new editor-in-chief of the *George Mason Review* (see story below).

Former spring 2010 peer tutor **Conner Morgan**, *English*, is now a WAC Writing Fellow in **BIS 390** (Interdisciplinary Studies) with **Dr. Jeannie Brown Leonard**.

Kathy Goodkin, Assistant Director of the Writing Center

Rediscover the George Mason Review, Now Led by an All-Undergraduate Editorial Team

The *George Mason Review*, the university's only journal to publish undergraduate writing from all disciplines, is undergoing a transformation with the goal of better aligning the journal with the Students as Scholars focus of Mason's QEP. For the first time, the *Review* is being led by an undergraduate editor-in-chief and is fully staffed by undergraduates. As one of its first actions, the new editorial board, with the assistance of faculty advisors and graduate editorial advisors, drafted a mission statement that reimagines the scope of the journal.

The new mission statement articulates the journal's focus on publishing "scholarship that demonstrates creativity and critical thought," through both online and print editions. The journal's staff and advisors, understanding and embracing the obstacles posed by publishing a wide array of content, made explicit in the mission statement that the journal will be "challenging the boundaries of how writing has traditionally been defined."

The 2010-2011 editorial team consists of editor-in-chief Paula Salamoun, a government and international politics major and economics minor; assistant editors Justin Voigt, English/linguistics; Candace Baker, English/non-fiction writing; Brittany Hill, graphic design and multimedia; Rheal Radwany, undeclared; and Iman Bahabib, integrative studies. The graduate editorial advisors are Whitney Poole and Jay Patel, both MFA candidates in creative writing. Faculty advisors are Terry Zawacki, English and WAC director, and Lynn Constantine, art and visual technology.

Paula Salamoun, student, PIA

The George Mason University WAC Program Newsletter

Editor: Terry Myers Zawacki, Director, WAC, tzawacki@gmu.edu
 Production Editors: Sarah E. Baker, Assistant Director, WAC, sbaker@gmu.edu & Whitney Poole, MFA TA/Tutor