

Teaching with

WRITING Across the Curriculum

wac.gmu.edu

Spring / Summer 2012

writingcenter.gmu.edu

As we bid farewell to Terry Myers Zawacki, WAC's director since 1998, we focus this issue on the program's history and its influence and reach across the university.

WAC News

Congratulations (again!) to Terry Zawacki on her richly deserved 2012 Mentor Award from the Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities & Research (OSCAR).

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Each semester, outstanding undergraduate students who have completed a semester's training and experience in the Writing Center are eligible to be course-embedded writing fellows or curriculum-based tutors through the WAC program.

Spring 2012 WAC Writing Fellows:

- **Nicholas Hager**, Philosophy and Government double major, with a double minor in Philosophy and Law and International/Comparative Studies: fellow in COMM 300 with *Prof. Susan Tomasovic*.
- **Emma Kouguell**, English and Communications double major: fellow in BIS 390 with *Prof. Jeannie Brown Leonard*.
- **Hannah Menefee**, Global Affairs major, with a concentration in International Development and a minor in Public Health, and **Olivia Stockmann**, Dance major and Business minor: fellows in Forensic Science 201 and 302 with *Profs. Jocelyn Prendergast and Amandeep Gill-Lang*.

Writing Center News

In spring 2012, the **Writing Center**:

- saw more than **1500** clients, for a total of more than **2600** appointments
- met with **229** students in **10** workshops

A Look Back: WAC's History at GMU

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) at Mason dates as far back as 1977, when the Faculty Senate formed a Literacy Task Force in response to complaints from faculty about their students' poor writing skills. *See page 2*

The Role of the Senate WAC Committee

To oversee the writing-intensive course mandate, the Senate created the Writing Across the Curriculum committee comprising one elected representative from each of the academic units offering undergraduate degrees and the WAC director as an ex-officio member. *See page 4*

CISA: Cross-disciplinary Writing and Instructional Opportunities for L2 Writers Across the Curriculum

One of the most unique aspects of the Center for International Student Access (CISA) is its approach to coupling disciplinary credit-bearing coursework with English language support, offered in partnership with the English Language Institute (ELI). *See page 8*

Writing Together: The Northern Virginia Writing Project Model of Professional Development

For more than 30 years, the Northern Virginia Writing Project's goal has been to make the power of writing available to all, and the strategy for accomplishing this goal is a simple one: Teachers Teaching Teachers. *See page 6*

WAC and University Libraries Share Mission To Support Student Writers Across the Disciplines

The University Libraries' objective to enhance information fluency is a natural fit with the ideals that are central to WAC's mission to encourage critical thinking and creativity through writing across the university. *See page 8*

AND ALSO...

- Where WAC Happens at Mason: Diagram *page 3*
- Editing *The George Mason Review*: Staff Perspectives *page 7*
- Complexity of Learning To Write in a Discipline: Diagram *page 5*

A Look Back: WAC's History at GMU

As a WAC program Graduate Research Assistant (GRA), one of my responsibilities was updating the timeline featured on the WAC site as well as converting WAC archival documents to pdfs so that this institutional history would not be lost. Now, as I graduate and the long-standing director steps down in preparation for retirement, it seems appropriate to look back. What follows is a historical narrative compiled from relevant Faculty Senate meeting minutes, WAC Committee annual reports, the WAC program's timeline, and documents handed down from founder and former Mason English professor, Christopher Thaiss. For a more detailed overview, please visit the timeline at http://wac.gmu.edu/program/culture_of_writing/wac_timeline.php.

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM (WAC) AT MASON DATES BACK TO 1977, WHEN THE Faculty Senate formed a Literacy Task Force in response to complaints from faculty about their students' poor writing skills. This university-wide issue was a direct reaction to the more public concern over the "literacy crisis" in the U.S., which culminated in *Newsweek's* issue attempting to define "Why Johnny Can't Write" (1975). Both sources reflected public discourse and the nationwide concern over students' poor writing as well as the need for change in the educational structure.

One of the recommendations that Mason's Literacy Task Force suggested was to offer WAC-based faculty workshops, in which faculty from across the disciplines could learn ways to use writing as a tool of teaching. The Northern Virginia Writing Project (NVWP) was the first to sponsor a series of these grant-funded workshops in 1978 and, over the next few years, Chris Thaiss and Don Gallehr, then director of the NVWP, led annual two-day faculty workshops and monthly follow-up meetings. In 1982, Thaiss helped create and subsequently direct the interdisciplinary Plan for Alternative General Education (PAGE), which also received funding for faculty development workshops. Additionally, the Linked Courses program, created in the late 1980s, offered as many as 30 sections of English 101 linked with courses in eight disciplines. (In 1999, the Linked Courses program was restructured and renamed Mason Topics.)

While all of these programs had a WAC mission, it was not until 1990 that the Provost's Office first formalized the WAC program with the appointment of Thaiss as its director/coordinator, who at the time had already taken steps to shift the second semester composition course to what is now the English 302 course, which focuses on writing in the disciplines. Concurrently, the Fac-

ulty Senate voted to require four writing-intensive (WI) courses in the majors, a university requirement that, based on a 1993 feasibility study, was reduced to one WI course in the major at the 300-level or above, along with the general education requirements of English 101 and English 302. To oversee the WI requirement, the Faculty Senate established the University WAC Committee, which was, and still is, a standing committee made up of representatives from each undergraduate college/school.

Together, Thaiss and the WAC Committee were charged with implementing the new WAC program and defining WI criteria, which focused on graduates of Mason being able to think about, understand, and apply concepts from their fields; to competently carry out the writing tasks typically demanded of professionals in their fields; and to express clearly the concepts of their disciplines to non-specialists. While these general goals have remained the same since their original construction in 1991, the current WI criteria have evolved to include more specific requirements (see http://wac.gmu.edu/program/wi_requirement/ for a list of these requirements).

Both Thaiss and current director Terry Myers Zawacki, who took over the WAC program in 1998 (as well as the University Writing Center, from which she stepped down in 2009), brought national and international recognition to Mason's WAC program. In 2012, the program once again made *U.S. News & World Report's* list of highly ranked colleges for Writing in the Disciplines (WID). The program has grown to include an undergraduate writing fellows and peer tutors initiative; a writing-infused WIN(ning) initiative; a robust, resource-filled website (wac.gmu.edu); and two full-time GRAs.

Jackie Brown, WAC GRA

Other noteworthy developments:

- WAC teamed up with the Writing Center in 1992 to produce a newsletter (originally *Writing @ Center* and now *Teaching with Writing Across the Curriculum*) to disseminate best practices in teaching with writing across the disciplines.
- In 1997-98, the WAC at Mason website was launched (<http://wac.gmu.edu>).
- In 2009, WAC began developing the WIN(ning) Initiative to recognize writing-infused programs at Mason (<http://wac.gmu.edu/program/initiatives/winning.php>).

Where WAC Happens at Mason



The Role of the Senate WAC Committee: Our Charge and Our Actions

IN 1996 THE FACULTY SENATE MANDATED THAT EACH UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR REQUIRE ITS STUDENTS TO complete at least one writing-intensive (WI) course in the major. To oversee the mandate, the Senate created the Writing Across the Curriculum committee comprising one elected representative from each of the academic units offering undergraduate degrees and the WAC director as an ex-officio member. The official committee charge is “To advise and work closely with the University WAC Coordinator on Writing Across the Curriculum on current and projected activities and events and to assist departments in the identification and definition of writing-intensive courses in their curricula.” The WAC committee carries out its charge, not by carrying a big stick, but rather by offering “candy” in several flavors. We nurture appetites for writing in the various disciplines by:

- Inviting faculty (in addition to those elected to the committee) to serve as “consultants” to the committee. Consultants are selected based on their interest in and experience with using writing to teach. They provide two-way channels between their units and the committee.
- Encouraging departments to offer awards to recognize and celebrate excellence undergraduate student writers/writing in the majors.
- Assisting the WAC Director in developing online writing guides in the discipline.
- Suggesting ways to recognize exemplary teaching with writing in the majors and the curriculum, such as, for example, the writing-infused initiative, dubbed the WIN(ning) initiative by one of our members.

On the other hand, every two years we bring out our big stick—university-wide distribution of the WAC report, sent to the Senate, Provost, Deans, and Chairs, summarizing the level of compliance with the writing-intensive requirement and a reminder to the university community of the central role played by writing in teaching and learning.

The success of the WAC program and the writing-intensive mandate follows from the hard work of many teaching faculty and the inspirational guidance of Mason’s WAC director. This academic year (2012) Terry Myers Zawacki, Mason’s WAC director, is retiring. Over the following academic year the committee will assist in evaluating candidates for the position of WAC director and will work closely with the interim director to ensure that our WAC program continues to flourish.

Stanley Zoltek, Computational Sciences and long-time WAC Committee Chair

WAC at Mason: A Program Assessment

THIS YEAR, AS WE STARTED TO COME TO TERMS WITH WHAT IT MEANT TO SAY FAREWELL TO—among many other titles—longstanding WAC director, former Writing Center director, English faculty, University Teaching Excellence Award and OSCAR Mentor Award winner Terry Zawacki, it seemed appropriate to stop and take a look at the Writing Across the Curriculum program’s standing in the Mason community and beyond.

As the other articles in this issue show, since its informal beginning in 1977 and its formal genesis in 1990, the WAC Program has had a foundational and collaborative relationship with many other organizations and programs across Mason. Looking at a timeline and history is one way to record a program’s influence and reach (see p. 2), but in addition to being a best practice, another way to capture more concretely the idea of the culture of writing that the WAC program has fostered is to conduct a program and needs assessment. To do this, staff looked through meeting minutes and program reports, gathered and analyzed data, and tracked the growth of programs, initiatives, and institutional and administrative responsibilities related to WAC. The final program assessment report includes recommendations for sustaining and growing the program in preparation for a new director.

Sarah E. Baker, WAC Assistant Director

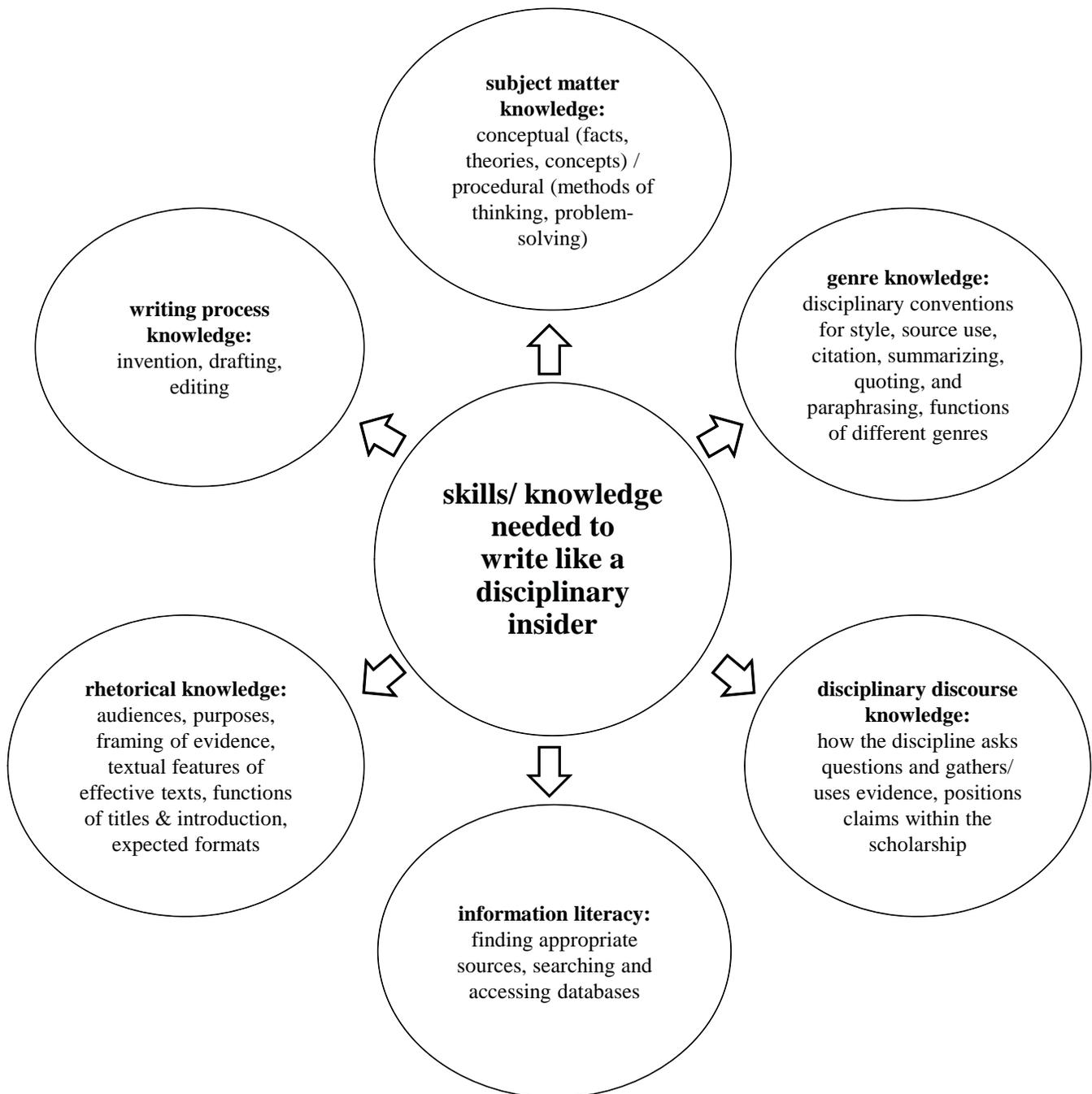
Thanks for their service to the 2011-2012 WAC Committee members:

Joan Bristol (CHSS)
Susan Durham (CHHS)
Tamara Maddox (VSE)
Agnieszka Paczynska (S-CAR)
Gregory Robinson (CVPA)
Nicola Scott (SOM)
Miruna Stanica (CHSS)
Shahron Williams van Rooij (CEHD)
Stanley Zoltek (COS, Chair)

Thank you also to the WAC Committee consultants who help keep Mason’s culture of writing thriving: *Melissa Allen* (English Language Institute), *Dawn Fels* (University Writing Center), *Karyn Mallett* (English Language Institute), *George Oberle* (University Libraries), *Shelley Reid* (Composition), *Larry Rockwood* (Biology), *Paul Rogers* (English; Northern Virginia Writing Project), and *Bethany Usher* (Center for Teaching Excellence, OSCAR).

Complexity of Learning to Write in a Discipline

Adapted from John Bean, who adapted it from Susan Peck MacDonald's
Professional Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences.



The Writing-Infused, or WIN(ning), Initiative at Mason

WE CONTINUE TO WORK WITH AND RECOGNIZE THE PROGRAMMATIC EFFORTS OF DEPARTMENTS that infuse writing throughout their undergraduate curriculum rather than in just one or two designated writing-intensive courses, by way of the Writing-Infused, or WIN(ning), initiative (<http://wac.gmu.edu/program/initiatives/winning.php>). WIN(ning) programs include descriptions of the most typical genres/kinds of writing assigned to student writers; attention to scaffolding writing tasks with a description of necessary skills as students move through the program; explicitly articulated expectations/outcomes for student writing; and a plan for and commitment to assessing students' growth as writers and/or student writing competence in the course and the curriculum.

Many of the WIN(ning) programs are also connecting their curricular efforts to the OSCAR (Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, & Research)

Track B scholarship development grant which supports a scaffolded learning experience for Mason students as they progress through their program and acquire a more complex understanding of their field and discipline (<http://oscar.gmu.edu/fac-staff/scholarship-development-grants.cfm>).

Jackie Brown, WAC GRA

WIN(ning) Programs In Progress (Spring 2012)

- Criminology, Law and Society
- English
- History
- Philosophy
- Social Work
- Systems Engineering

Writing Together: The Northern Virginia Writing Project Model of Professional Development

WRITING IS A POWERFUL TOOL OF THINKING, LEARNING, SELF-EXPRESSION, COMMUNICATION, and knowledge creation. Today the ability to write well can make the difference in getting a job interview, a promotion, or a salary increase. Writing abilities also factor into the work of the growing number of social entrepreneurs who are seeking to identify and implement solutions to global challenges in the arenas of education, health, the environment, economic development, and civic engagement. These changemakers rely on written communication to forward agendas, change government policies, coordinate activities, communicate with the stakeholders and fulfill their missions. Writing can also help us as individuals to live more meaningful and integrated personal lives. Executive coaches frequently use journaling and reflective writing practices as they work with clients to achieve peak performance. Further, over 25 years of writing research has demonstrated that writing can significantly improve mental and physical health (See Singer and Singer 2007 for a review).

If indeed writing serves as a kind of fundamental life technology, teachers of writing have an awesome responsibility: one that extends far beyond preparing students to pass tests or complete assignments. Sadly, most classroom teachers today have received

very little intensive instruction on how to teach writing.

For over 30 years, the Northern Virginia Writing Project [nvwp.org], a local site of the National Writing Project [nwp.org] has sought to fill this gap between what students need and the overall state of writing pedagogy. Our goal is to make the power of writing available to all, and our strategy for accomplishing this goal is a simple one: Teachers Teaching Teachers. Each year, we invite 25 of the most skilled writing teachers in the Northern Virginia from across the disciplines, in public and private schools, and from kindergarten through college to share their best writing lessons with each other and to write. We write everyday and share our writing in writing groups because we believe that the teaching of writing must be grounded on own personal experience as writers who know first-hand the struggles and satisfactions of the writer's task. When we approach our students as fellow writers and share with them our difficulties and triumphs we demystify the writing process. When we write alongside our students we create a kind of intellectual empathy that helps us identify areas where we can better support their full participation in today's world.

Paul Rogers, NVWP director/English faculty

Editing *The George Mason Review*: What the Undergraduate Editors Have Gained from the Experience as Writers, Learners, and Students

OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, WE HAVE COME TO REALIZE THE IMPORTANT ROLE THAT *The George Mason Review* (GMR) plays in the culture of writing at Mason and also how important being involved in editing the journal has been to the all-undergraduate volunteer staff. As students, our experience and awareness of Mason's writing culture is sometimes limited. We engage with writing in our coursework and may even have opportunities to engage with the writing of our peers in group projects or peer-review assignments. Yet these exposures are generally personal and confined to the context of that class or those assignments; they do not often connect us to Mason's broader community of student writers or cause us to engage with writing beyond the classroom.

This limitation can leave us uncertain about our own writing as well as hesitant to engage with writing outside the classroom. GMR Marketing Director Iman Bahabib (Integrative Studies) explains this sentiment:

"I found that one of the most challenging aspects of my responsibilities... was encouraging students to submit their works to the GMR. Students often underestimate the value of their work and feel that their work is not remarkable enough for publication."

Yet GMR Managing Editor Taryn Brooks-Faulconer (Biology & Psychology) points to the simple enjoyment that she experienced reading through submissions as a member of the peer-review staff:

"Looking back on my first semester as a peer reviewer, I recall many hours were spent sifting through submissions, some of which had excellent potential and others that did not. At the final meeting of the semester, I was assigned one of the most engaging research papers I had ever read. It was the sort of paper one would savor over a cup of coffee at leisure. It was then that I knew that the time I had spent reviewing the scholarly writing of my fellow undergraduates was one of my most worthwhile endeavors at Mason."

As GMR Assistant Editor overseeing the peer review process, Myu Rubaharan (Biology) notes that he had been exposed to traditional scientific writing as a biology major and had come to know how writing differs across disciplines "as a voracious reader," but, when he led a group of nine undergraduates in reviewing submissions from their peers, he says:

"The thoughts and suggestions from these peer reviewers led to many new insights into how writing can re-vision scholarship. This review process got especially exciting when disagreements arose between a pair of reviewers about a submission; these disagreements often generated a discussion about undergraduate scholarship, the accessibility of a work, and what it means to review writing from across the disciplines."

Similarly, Ashley Parker (English), the journal's Editor-in-Chief, explains that the peer-review sessions "strengthened [her] ability to analyze and

critique works of scholarship."

As one of the two faculty advisers for the GMR and director of Writing Across the Curriculum, Prof. Terry Zawacki had the opportunity to sit in on several peer reviewer meetings. "Listening to the peer reviewers' astute observations about how well the writing fulfilled the publication criteria," she says, "was a wonderful experience for me as a writing teacher and WAC director." In the review process, she remarks, the student reviewers demonstrated "how rhetorically wise they are about the purposes, audiences, structures, and academic conventions they valued in the pieces of writing submitted by students across a wide range of majors." Dr. Zawacki notes some of the following comments the reviewers made at an April meeting as they weighed the merits of the different papers:

"I don't know what to think about these subheadings since it's only a five-page essay, not a report."

"The conclusion was really short, just two sentences. I'd like to see more complexity."

"College students might enjoy reading this paper, but I didn't learn anything new; there's a fine line between accessible writing and simplistic writing."

"I like how the article says 'Now I'm going to discuss X, but then the writer didn't do that.'"

"Some of the claims weren't supported, so it seemed overgeneralized."

"You don't know if statistics are reliable, especially when the prose gets kind of soap-opera-ish."

In his very different role as the GMR Web Director, Jon Dang (Information Technology) explains how his experience with the journal has affected his writing beyond the classroom:

"I think the most interesting part about my experience at the GMR has been writing emails. That hardly sounds like it should be something I, as an IT major, should have found interesting, but it was. I have learned that my emails should be courteous and diplomatic at the same time. I feel that this concept will stick with me as I continue onwards with future careers. Writing effective emails is especially important when working collaboratively online (which I happen to do a lot)."

In a sense, we have found that the journal causes students to engage in writing beyond the classroom—whether they are involved as submitters, readers, or journal staff members. Furthermore, we believe that many have come to the same realization that we have about the journal. For example, Lynne Constantine, assistant professor in the School of Art and a GMR faculty adviser, notes the extraordinary commitment and creativity of the GMR board members and peer reviewers: "The GMR brings together an incredibly dedicated, focused, and professional group of undergraduates committed to promoting student scholarship... They are a delight to work

The George Mason Review (cont)

with, and I view them as a model of what student leadership is all about.”

What draws these student leaders to volunteer 10-plus hours each week to the journal? *GMR* Graduate Adviser Justin Voigt suggests, “Two things have kept me involved with *The George Mason Review*: 1) *The commitment and enthusiasm of the undergraduate volunteers who work as GMR staff, and 2) the distinct importance of the journal in the writing development of undergraduates. In fact, I find the former is simply a reflection of students’ realization of the latter.*”

This same realization is what caused Ashley to want to become more involved with the *GMR* by transitioning from peer reviewer to editor-in-chief so that she could “work not just on reviewing submissions, but promoting the journal and designing the next volume.” This realization attracts the student leaders that so impress Lynne. And this realization—the realization of the *The George Mason Review’s* importance to the culture of writing at Mason—is what motivates *GMR* Design Director Rachel Newdorf (Art & Visual Technology) to characterize her semester working with the journal as “one of the best experiences I’ve had my entire college career.”

In this and other ways, *The George Mason Review* plays an important—perhaps vital—role in the culture of writing at Mason. We make available to students a variety of new and cross-disciplinary undergraduate works, which encourages engagement in Mason’s writing culture.

GMR Staff

The George Mason University WAC Program Newsletter

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CISA: Providing Cross-disciplinary Writing and Instructional Opportunities for Second-Language Writers and the Faculty Who Teach Them Across the Curriculum

THE CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ACCESS (CISA), HOUSED IN THE OFFICE OF THE PROVOST, OFFERS TWO ACADEMIC PATHWAY programs for international and immigrant students to support their successful matriculation to university degree programs—ACCESS for freshmen and BRIDGE for graduate students. One of the most unique aspects of CISA is its approach to coupling disciplinary credit-bearing coursework with English language support, offered in partnership with the English Language Institute (ELI). For example, ACCESS students take a year-long Enhanced English Composition course, team-taught by English Composition and ELI faculty, which is designed to develop linguistic and rhetorical skills. BRIDGE students take a Graduate Communications Across the Disciplines course, designed to develop graduate-level writing and research skills.

During the past two years, 90 international students have enrolled at Mason through the ACCESS and BRIDGE programs, and more than 50 American students have been enriched through structured mentorship and research interactions. By the end of the current academic year, more than 70 percent of the students who complete these programs will move on to full-time participation in diverse majors across campus.

As the Center continues to grow, we are looking for many more opportunities to connect with academic departments. For example, as part of the effort to aid graduate multicultural writers at Mason, CISA will soon appoint a Provost Faculty Fellow and multiple BRIDGE Scholars from various graduate programs to research and develop more discipline-specific resources. Engaging faculty within the academic units in this research promises to be a powerful collaboration for strengthening discipline-based resources available to all students. For more information about the ACCESS and BRIDGE programs, visit cisa.gmu.edu.

*Nicole J. Sealey, CISA Director, and
Lindsay Kenton, CISA Program Support Specialist*

WAC and University Libraries Share Mission To Support Student Writers Across the Disciplines

THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES’ OBJECTIVE TO ENHANCE INFORMATION FLUENCY IS A NATURAL FIT WITH THE IDEALS THAT ARE CENTRAL TO WAC’s mission to encourage critical thinking and creativity through writing across the university. Thanks to the active collaboration between many people for many years, WAC and the Libraries have developed a strong partnership built around the principle that writing and research are intertwined processes. In the “Library Corner” feature of this newsletter, librarians write about how to use new research tools and, more broadly, about how new modes of communication have changed the way we think about research. The Libraries support the WAC mission by closely aligning with key programs associated with WAC, e.g. English 302 and the Writing Center, which, for many years, could count on part-time research tutoring services by a library GRA. Currently the Libraries at Fenwick and the JCL are providing spaces for the writing center to hold tutoring hours. We look forward to a time when our budget will allow us to expand the connections we’ve already forged to a much wider interconnected web of services tied together by the common goal to amplify student learning.

George Oberle, Head, JC Library and WAC Committee consultant