



# THE WRITE STUFF

## WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM @ SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

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**WELCOME** to *The Write Stuff*, written for faculty at SCSU who teach with writing or would like to do so. The Writing Across the Curriculum Committee of UCF has been working hard to improve the WAC program for faculty and students. As you will read below, this includes a survey in which we seek your perspective on the WAC program and how to improve it. Please participate in our efforts!

As always, we also welcome your comments, suggestions, requests and submissions for this newsletter.

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### Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program

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#### PLEASE COMPLETE THE FACULTY SURVEY

Now that we have completed one full year following the transition from L to W-courses, the WACC of UCF is currently examining all aspects of the WAC program at SCSU as part of its goal of developing a culture of writing across the entire university.

WACC has posted an online survey that seeks your perspective on a variety of issues. You can find the survey at:

[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=92t2usODsv7YEKZW\\_2fOs0Aw\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=92t2usODsv7YEKZW_2fOs0Aw_3d_3d)

The survey should take only about 10 minutes to complete; space is also provided for open-ended comments. Your thoughtful participation is very much appreciated.

#### STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF W SECTIONS

As a second part of the WACC's program evaluation, students in several W sections recently completed assessments of their learning experiences. WACC is using these pilot assessments to plan for additional surveys of students in W sections. Please agree to assist this

process whenever possible in your W course.

Preliminary results suggest that students in the surveyed sections have come to understand that learning with writing is both more difficult and more rewarding than they had previously understood: they were happy with their courses and with what they had learned, but not satisfied with their own writing.

In other words, these seem like very realistic – and therefore satisfying – assessments of the attention to writing in their educations.

#### UPDATE FROM NEWAC

Debby Carroll and Steve Corbett recently attended the North East Writing Across the Curriculum's first semi-annual meeting. This newly formed group is comprised of WAC Directors and faculty from a variety of colleges and universities in the northeastern U.S. The April meeting focused on assessment of WAC Programs.

As a result of ideas gleaned from this meeting, SCSU's WACC is developing a WAC assessment project for summer and fall of 09. Please check

your email in the next two weeks for an opportunity to participate in the first phase of WAC assessment.

### **LOWER LEVEL WS**

Most W sections are upper level courses. There are both practical and pedagogical reasons for this pattern. Nonetheless, some faculty have begun to think about how lower level courses might appropriately be taught as W sections. Shirley Jackson (SOC) wrote us the following:

#### **“W-Courses & Ability Based Learning”**

Shirley A. Jackson, Sociology Department

After my first semester at Southern I realized that not every student expects to learn skills like writing in introductory level courses. I recall vividly one student’s comment on one of my teaching evaluations criticizing my incorporating writing into a course not designated as writing intensive. I was bothered by the fact that this student seemed to believe that writing was something that was not expected as part of the college experience. It was only to occur in designated courses.

Several years ago, I decided to teach W-courses on a broad-scale because I had become deeply concerned that students in the sociology capstone courses were not writing at a level appropriate for their class rank. I began converting the majority of my undergraduate courses into writing intensive courses. I decided that the process of writing should begin much, much earlier. It was also important for me to encourage students to take W-courses not only as they fulfilled requirements for the major but also in general education courses before the students have even selected a major.

While all of my courses, regardless of level, have a good deal of writing in the form of short writing assignments (4-5 pages) and research/final paper assignments that take place outside of class, writing in class is also important. I would argue that the emphasis on teaching W-courses should not be solely on writing and revisions out-of-class. In-class assignments can offer students a variety of opportunities to hone their skills by gaining feedback from the professor or their peers.

For my students, this includes writing memos, peer reviews of in-class writing assignments, and, of course, essay exams. Students are even encouraged to come up with their own essay

exams in preparation for the course exams, to learn how to think about the course material and to help them to study on their own. They learn how to evaluate essay questions that are too broad, too vague, etc. In introductory level courses, this is really important because it teaches students how to “know” rather than “memorize” the material. It also helps students learn how to manage their time (I supply notations that let students know what amount of time they should spend on each portion of the exam).

In teaching W-courses at various class levels we must be mindful of our students’ abilities due to their skill-level. This type of scaffolding of skills is useful to the student in other courses as they progress through their academic careers. Thus, while writing, in general, is certainly important, learning different kinds of writing skills is also important.

### **W-COURSE WAIVERS**

It is the responsibility of the Academic Vice President to determine whether all graduation requirements have been fulfilled by individual students. At SCSU, the Director of WAC has been charged with determining completion of the W requirement. The waiver system established in 1999 is still in place.

Because a small number of legitimate hardship cases occur each year, students may apply for consideration of a request to waive a single W course. A description of the process of applying

for a waiver, and an explanation of the criteria on which applications will be judged, are available on the WAC website: <http://www.southernct.edu/WACC/supportforstudents/>

Call Debby Carroll at 2-6878 if you have questions about the waiver process.

### **WAC @ THE TEACHING ACADEMY**

The SCSU Teaching Academy is scheduled for June 2 – 4, 2009. The WAC programming includes a keynote address and workshop by Leslie Roldan, Ph.D. from MIT. Dr. Roldan will share her expertise and provide practical methods for incorporating writing to learn activities in non-typical writing intensive courses – especially the Sciences.

Please check the WAC website <http://www.southernct.edu/WACC/> for up-to-date information.