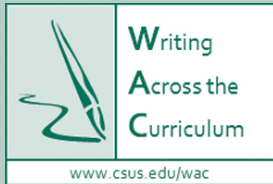




WRITING

across the curriculum

NEWSLETTER



WAC NEWS & EVENTS

**Call for Submissions:
Undergraduate Writing Journal**

The Faculty Senate Reading and Writing Subcommittee is now accepting submissions for Writing the University, an online journal of undergraduate writing across disciplines at Sacramento State. We encourage submissions of writing in any genre (critical analysis, book review, lab report, case study, etc.) from students in courses in any discipline (natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, etc.). See website for submission guidelines and deadline: www.csus.edu/wac/journal.



Using Writing to Increase Student Engagement

Did you know that writing is the most effective tool to increase student engagement? According to research by Light (2001), Astin (1993), and Pascarella and Terenzini (1991), the relationship between the amount of writing for a course and students' level of engagement is stronger than any relationship between student engagement and any other course characteristic. The importance of the role of writing in student engagement was reaffirmed by the results of the 2008 National Study of Student Engagement.

Results of the 2008 National Study of Student Engagement: The Connections between Writing and Student Engagement

In spring 2008, for the first time the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) added questions about writing and student engagement. The results of the enhanced survey, collected from 23,000 students at 82 campuses, affirms that students can benefit from writing more in all courses.

NSSE and the Council of Writing Program Administrators developed the supplemental survey to get a deeper picture of how writing affects learning. The survey showed that, "The amount of writing was positively correlated with engagement, i.e., the more students wrote, the more they engaged in active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching experiences, and deep learning" (21). The survey also showed that responding to students' work in progress increases engagement, which supports the Writing Across the Curriculum practice of encouraging responding to drafts or giving students a revision option.

What Kinds of Writing and Reading Assignments Engage Students?

The research confirms that writing increases student engagement, but we know from our own experiences as teachers that not every writing assignment we design captures our

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To find out more about the WAC program or to schedule a consultation, contact Dan Melzer, University Reading and Writing Coordinator, at melzer@csus.edu or (916) 278-6925.

students' interest. Here are some ideas for creating reading and writing assignments that truly engage students, based on research on reading and writing assignment design:

Assignments that connect to students' personal lives and goals

Assignments that ask students to explore topics that connect to their personal life or their career goals can be more meaningful to students than topics they feel they have no personal investment in.

Assignments that give students some freedom in the choice of topic/genre/audience

In much of the writing students are assigned in school, the teacher chooses the topic, genre, and audience. Allowing students to control these variables will lead to better and more engaged student writing.

“The amount of writing was positively correlated with engagement, i.e., the more students wrote, the more they engaged in active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching experiences, and deep learning.”

– 2008 National Survey of Student Engagement.

Assignments written for a target audience other than the instructor

Unfortunately, students don't often perceive of the teacher as an audience they are motivated to write for, even though we are interested in hearing what they have to say. Experiment with asking students to write to their peers (for example, in class anthologies or websites aimed at future students), to an audience outside the classroom (for example, letters to the editor or book reviews on Amazon.com), or for a specific project beyond the classroom (for example, service learning projects like a newsletter for a non-profit agency or the Writing Partners program of letter writing to school children).

Assignments that make use of the new media students are immersed in outside of school.

Many of our students engage in rich “digital literacy” practices outside of school—Facebook, Twitter, blogging, YouTube, etc. Tapping into our students' digital literacies makes assignments more relevant and allows us to draw on the types of writing students are motivated to do on their own, outside of school assignments.

Assignments that ask for creative writing

Storytelling is a powerful and basic tool for human expression, but sometimes in our desire to immerse students in “academic” writing we miss the opportunity to draw on the power of creative writing to engage students. For example, in a history class we could ask students to tell a historically accurate story from the point of view of a historical figure, in a science class we could have students write a science fiction story that

draws on real science, or in a sociology class we could have students write a protest poem or song about a social issue.

References

Astin, A.W. (1993). *What matters in college?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Light, R.J. (2001) *Making the most of college: Students speak their mind.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

National Survey of Student Engagement (2008). Promoting engagement for all students: The imperative to look within. Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. Online: <<http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm>>

Pascarella, E.T., & Terenzini, P.T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Introducing the new *Sacramento State Student Writing Handbook*

A new student writing handbook created by the Faculty Senate Reading and Writing Subcommittee is now available for students and teachers in any class. The handbook contains rubrics, writing advice, assignments, and example student writing from Sacramento State teachers and students across the curriculum: chemistry, music, anthropology, communication studies, English, geology, biology, sociology, geography, and more.



Inside the handbook students will find...

- Information about the Sacramento State Comprehensive Writing Programs, from composition courses to the GVAR to Writing Intensive courses to the University Writing Center
- Advice for college reading, writing, and researching processes, with example rubrics, advice, and assignments from Sacramento State teachers across disciplines
- Guides to writing in specific fields: the natural sciences, the social sciences, the arts and humanities, and business and professional communication
- Help with documentation styles like MLA, APA, and CSE

This year the handbook is required in all English 20 and English 109 composition courses, and next year the handbook will be required in all composition courses, including ENGL1A. There is no buy-back on the handbook, so students should keep the handbook for their entire career at Sacramento State.

Interested in using the handbook in your courses?

Contact Dan Melzer, Chair of the Reading and Writing Subcommittee, at 278-6925 or melzer@csus.edu to obtain a free instructor copy of the handbook and for information about ordering copies for your classes. The handbook is \$11.00 for students.

A Page from the Writing Center



Graduate Studies and the University Writing Center: Working Together to Help Graduate Students

By Tori Wolfe, Writing Center Graduate Associate Coordinator

The University Writing Center (UWC) serves many important functions in regards to student writing. Any student can receive one-on-one help at the UWC on a paper of any subject. The UWC also has handouts on various topics such as theses, transitions, and grammar

that students can take with them when they leave. While all of these services may seem necessary only for the novice writer, there are a multitude of ways in which the UWC can help a graduate student, with the help of funding from Graduate Studies.

Writing is of profound importance in Graduate Studies. All graduate programs require writing, including extensive culminating theses or projects, and because of this Graduate Studies has contributed to the funding of the UWC. For graduate students who are working on theses, the UWC can be especially helpful. Thesis writers can schedule regular appointments and meet for up to an hour a week with a tutor. International graduate students might find it useful to visit the UWC to get help with the conventions of American academic English. The evening tutoring hours at the library are especially convenient for graduate students, since many of them work full-time during the day. All of the tutors in the UWC are experienced college writers who will take the time to help any writer, from first semester to graduate student, become better writers.

Sometimes it's difficult for the UWC to emphasize just what can be done in order to help graduate students with their writing; it is not just students in first-year composition who can gain from the services there. Tutors are always willing to offer an extra set of eyes to any paper being worked on. Everyone, from first-year students to grad students, can benefit from the UWC.

For information and fall 2009 hours of operation, visit the University Writing Center Web site at www.csus.edu/writingcenter.



Writing Center contact information:

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Web site:

www.csus.edu/writingcenter