Please Announce to Students:

Upcoming Writing Center Student Writing Workshops

Tips for Timed Writing
Friday, November 18, @ 12:00pm

How to Analyze/Interpret Evidence in your Paragraph
Monday, November 21, @ 2:00pm

Finding a Topic for your Paper
Friday, December 2, @ 12:00pm

Academic Essay Organization and Development
Tuesday, December 6, @ 2:00pm

2nd Annual Sacramento State
Reading & Writing Across the Curriculum Conference

The Writing Across the Curriculum program invites all full-time and part-time teachers, administrators, and staff to propose an individual presentation or panel for a half-day conference on successful approaches to reading and writing across disciplines.

When: Friday, February 17, 2006, 10:00-3:00
Where: University Union Hinde Auditorium and Orchard and Forest Suites

Proposal topics could include:
• Effective writing assignments or approaches to student reading and writing
• Departmental initiatives and projects that have been successful at improving student reading and writing
• Using technology to improve reading and writing
• Research or theory relevant to reading and writing across the curriculum at Sacramento State
• Any other topics relevant to improving student literacy (including oral, visual, and information literacy)

Individual presenters will be given 15 minutes, and panel presentations will be given 45 minutes.

A conference program will be available in January at http://www.csus.edu/wac/conference.
Questions about the conference? Send an e-mail to wac@csus.edu.

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 278-6925.
During the Fall semester of 2004, Writing Across the Curriculum began a pilot for a research project aimed at finding out information about the types of writing alumni are doing at their places of employment. The project also involved asking alumni to consider how their undergraduate degree prepared them for on-the-job writing. We felt that this information would be valuable in helping Sac State instructors draw connections between their curriculum and the types of writing their students will be faced with in their future careers.

Initially we surveyed alumni who still maintained contact with Sac State instructors. At the WAC conference at Sac State in February 2005, we presented the findings from these surveys of 13 alumni from various majors, including those with positions in law enforcement, business, engineering, and TV news. These initial findings confirmed some of the assumptions we had about the importance of writing in students’ future careers, regardless of the career they chose. One engineer summarized the importance of writing in his job: “The ability to adequately convey ideas, procedures, findings, technical specifications and design details through writing is extremely important in the engineering workplace and definitively sways management when considering an individual for promotion.” Similarly, a Sacramento county sheriff conveys the importance of writing in his field: “the ability of an officer to convey information in a grammatically correct and understandable format is imperative to maintaining credibility and professionalism among a varied audience.”

One of the surprising findings was the diverse range of writing that alumni were handling in their careers. Most of those who responded were of course writing memos, letters, or email. Their responses also included 17 different types of written documents: staffing rosters, operational plans, meeting agendas/minutes, proposals, executive summaries, legal declarations, reports, legislation, and employee performance evaluations, to name a few. By contrasting their responses with the written materials that we ask students to complete or develop in our own courses, we could see the importance of the university focus on encouraging writing within the student’s major.

Another interesting aspect of this survey was the variety of audiences included in the alumni’s workplace writing. The audiences these alumni write for include 18 different entities: attorneys, judges, juries, co-workers, upper management, government agencies, vendors, contractors, architects, supervisors, private developers, public agencies. Often in college courses, the only audience students practice writing for is the instructor.

Other findings included an emphasis on concise well-written prose that must be revised until it properly communicates the right message to the audience. Most alumni felt that teaching writing in school should be general and give students the basics that would serve as a foundation in any career. They felt that providing samples of the writing done in a specific career or encouraging students to intern in a potential career were good ways to familiarize them with the types of writing done in that particular job. One alumna captured the revision process that is required in the workplace, saying, “Writing in college is much different because you do not have to deal with re-writing or editing documents until they meet the...”
standard. I was graded on what I completed, but I did not have to go back to correct the errors or go through an editing process. Sometimes (in the workplace) it can take many versions of a document before it is edited and ready for signature.”

Now that the initial pilot has been completed, the WAC program plans to study alumni writing further by collecting enough data for a statistically valid sample. From there we will be writing a journal article about workplace writing and will be making the survey information and writing samples available to Sac State instructors to help them in planning their curriculum or advising their students.

Stay tuned for the results of the broader study in future newsletters.

I strongly believed that once I graduated, I was not going to need many writing skills because I was going into engineering. I was wrong. I am writing daily. If I knew this back then, I would have taken additional writing courses.

—Staff Engineer

“Writing is an important method of communicating in order to accomplish tasks and move activities forward to completion.”

Every order placed, every query I have to follow up, and every problem I handle has some form of written communication attached to it.

—Purchaser for a wholesale manufacturing firm

Writing is an important method of communicating in order to accomplish tasks and move activities forward to completion. I think good writing skills do affect decision-making when hiring of qualified candidates.

—I received very little direct training for on-the-job writing in my education. To be able to take multiple pieces of information and present it clearly to another clearly and concisely was obtained in writing papers and in-class essays.

—Purchaser, Wholesale Manufacturing Firm

In many cases, whether writing to current or potential clients or writing to co-workers, the type of writing that I do is generally persuasive…this is different than simply reporting experimental results; which is what I thought of engineering writing at the time of graduation.

—Lead Bridge Engineer

I don’t know what [student’s] expectations are, but they need to be flexible in their writing styles. They may have to adjust their style to meet the company’s needs.

—Staff Analyst

In the interview process here they have you write a writing sample right when you get to the interview.

—Assistant Civil Engineer

If you have alumni contacts who you think would be willing to participate in the survey, please send us their contact information by emailing us at wac@csus.edu.
A PAGE FROM
THE WRITING CENTER

Considering the Writing Center Through the Eyes of a Student Writer: An Interview by a Staff Tutor

By Rachel Brumfield, Writing Center Staff Tutor

Lights are humming as chairs scrape the floor; conversations build at every desk crowding the spacious room. Students, tutors, and staff mill in and around the conversations and the desks intent upon their tasks. It’s a Wednesday afternoon, and the Writing Center is functioning at full capacity during the sixth week of the Fall 2005 semester. I’ve worked in the Writing Center for two semesters, and now as a Staff Tutor, I find myself curious about the student-writer’s perspective on their experience here at the Writing Center. I consulted Eddie Jackson, a Junior here at Sac State studying primarily Theatre but also minoring in RLS. Eddie has been coming to the Writing Center since Fall semester 2002 when he first signed up for tutoring in order to get help on his assignments for his Learning Skills class. Last semester, he successfully completed English 20, and this fall he is looking to prepare himself for the WPE. In the following interview, he answered thoroughly questions I had prepared in hopes to investigate a student-writer’s experience at the Writing Center.

1) What motivates you to come to the Writing Center for as long as you have?
   I feel more confident coming here because I feel like the tutors are helpful, mostly because they are able to adapt to whatever writing assignment I have for whichever professor. Tutors are able to work with me on any writing assignment for any department.

2) When you first came to the Writing Center, what kind of help did you have in mind?
   I wanted to try and better my grammar skills. My downfall is always my grammar.

3) When you got to the Writing Center, was that the help you received?
   When I got to my very first appointment, the tutor told me that she couldn’t “edit” my papers, but that she would do her best to help me learn writing skills that help me to organize my ideas and structure my paper. That way I could complete my writing assignments.

4) In what ways did you tutor help you begin to accomplish those goals?
   She basically showed me how to read and reread my writing prompt. I’ve also become more practiced at revising. It was the really basic stuff that made me a better writer, stuff like jotting down my ideas ahead of time, constructing a thesis, checking to make sure that I don’t go off topic.

5) Finally, what difference has coming to the Writing Center done for you?
   It did two things. One, it made me more confident. When I first got to the Writing Center, I had wanted to be a writer, but so many of my former teachers had put my writing down. Even though I had won some short story awards in middle and high school, so many of my teachers told me that my writing skills were not up to par. With my writing tutors, I feel more encouraged. And two, I feel like I have a space to write in. Sometimes school and class can feel all about the grade, but at the Writing Center, I can leave the game behind more.