

WIC Events

Department
Development
Grant Deadline
-
Feb. 27, 2006

Faculty and
International Students
Viewing of Film
"Writing Across Borders"

-
February 1st
Noon — MU 206



In this issue

Writing about Ethics 1

Pre/Views 1

Mechanical Engineering:
Focus on Writing 3

WIC in Dual Majors 4

About Teaching With Writing 4

Writing and Thinking about Ethics: An Interview with Courtney Campbell

by Sarah Ghasedi (WIC TA)

According to Philosophy Professor Courtney Campbell, writing is one of the best tools for sharpening intellect. Dr. Campbell hypothesizes that this is because of the way it promotes and enhances thought, which can lead to a better understanding or challenge of both personal assumptions and other views.

When asked why writing seems to facilitate the critical thinking process, Dr. Campbell speculates that it has to do with the "wholeness" of the activity: "My sense is that it has something to do with the nature of ourselves as embodied beings. Writing engages the whole person, body and mind . . . It is your mind in connection with your body. Once you commit yourself to an embodied ac-

tion such as writing, I think that you're able to gain focus, clarity, and concentration. People always talk about how hard it is to get their thoughts from their head out on paper, or to express them verbally. It's an enormously hard practice, and you have to practice it a lot.

"That's what I really like about WIC. You're doing writing every class. Students are going to process/absorb better if they do a writing exercise. I know I find that if I get stuck mentally, if I just start writing, I'm able to find out what some of the weaknesses are in the perspectives I'm trying to offer. This wholeness of the being that's involved in writing is for me what really separates writing from standard kind of philosophizing or lecturing in front of a class."



Professor Courtney Campbell
Chair of Philosophy

I recently had the opportunity to interview Dr. Campbell, who is Chair of the Philosophy Department, Director of the Program for Science, Ethics, and the Environment, former research associate and Editor of the Hastings Center Report (the leading professional journal in Bioethics), and prolific author of numerous books and publications, including a recent

cont'd on pg 2

Pre/Views Coming Soon to Your Department: Writing Across Borders



by
Vicki Tolar
Burton,
WIC Director

How can we as teaching faculty best understand and help international student writers in our classes? If writing conventions are culturally constructed, what adjustments do international students need to make as they learn to write at OSU?

OSU's Writing Intensive Curriculum and Center for Writing and Learning have co-produced a film to help answer these questions. Written and directed by Wayne Robertson, Assistant Director of the Center for Writing and Learning, *Writing Across Borders* invites students from OSU's international community to speak about how writing is taught in their home countries, what is difficult for them here, and what helps them improve as academic writers.

During winter term, a copy of *Writing Across Borders* will be sent to the chair/head of each

academic department of the university to use for faculty and GTA development. It is our hope that viewing this film will help OSU teachers address issues of difference as they apply to international writers and contribute to forming a culture of writing where all students can accomplish outcomes and experience success.

To view a clip of the film, review discussion questions for faculty development, or to order a personal copy of the film, see: <http://wic.oregonstate.edu/writingacrossborders/> after January 9, 2006.

Writing and Thinking about Ethics: An Interview with Courtney Campbell

series of papers for the National Bioethics Advisory Commission. Dr. Campbell's dynamic views on the nature of writing and its potential use as a tool to facilitate rich, meaningful discussions in our society are both unique and thought-provoking. His beliefs about the way writing can function as a learning tool have profound implications on the way he uses it in his classroom.

As a former student of Dr. Campbell's, I was personally influenced by his approach. One of my most memorable experiences as an undergraduate in Environmental Science took place in his Biomedical Ethics course during a class discussion on abortion. In an event that was nothing short of miraculous, a large group of students with mixed beliefs on this polarizing issue sat together discussing shared values and grappling with difficult ideas in a probing, civil manner that seems impossible even among Supreme Court Justices. We did this after engaging in a series of writing activities Dr. Campbell designed utilizing WIC strategies.

At the time, I had no idea that Dr. Campbell had been through the WIC Seminar, or that the intriguing discussion on abortion (one of many such talks that term) was in any way based on WIC pedagogy. I only knew that I had never witnessed anything like it before. The experience



College of Liberal Arts
Philosophy Department

broadened my understanding of the communication level that was possible in a classroom and gave me a sense that writing activities had played a significant role.

From my current position as an English graduate student and WIC GTA, I find myself wanting to understand Dr. Campbell's teaching methods. What is it about the way he formulated his classes that made them work? What assumptions about the nature of writing were fundamental to his approach? How might he explain his rationale to use writing as a tool to guide the critical thinking process?

“More than changing how I viewed writing, the WIC Seminar changed how I viewed teaching, which really had been, for the most part, myself seen as the repository of wisdom and students taking notes from this authority...”

Dr. Campbell explains that all of his classes borrow on approaches learned in WIC and include a mixture of in-class writing activities – including informal, ungraded writing assignments, write-and-pass activities, and peer review. In an approach he also developed from WIC, Dr. Campbell formulates students into groups where they become secure and comfortable with each other as a way to encourage communication.

But Dr. Campbell did not always use writing activities this way. The WIC seminar dramatically changed not only his approach to writing, but also to the teaching profession itself: “More than changing how I viewed writing, the WIC seminar changed how I viewed teaching, which really had been, for the most part, myself seen as the repository of wisdom and students taking notes from this authority.

Writing provided for me much more the interactive, dialogical approach to teaching, and changed the way I tried to understand teaching so that it becomes what I call a ‘partnership of learning,’ in which we’re learning from each other, and the best way for me to learn from students is through writing. It helped me articulate what I hoped to accomplish with the use of writing in the classroom. But much more profoundly for me, it helped me to become a better teacher.” Dr. Campbell explains that it requires a shift from conventional teaching to rely on this self-generated knowledge.

When I remind him of the abortion discussion and ask how he designed those particular writing assignments to facilitate it, Dr. Campbell describes his rationale: “Writing exercises were designed to see if there was some middle-ground or shared values. Even if students disagreed on all the big questions, were there nonetheless some shared common values? The way to articulate those was to ask students what they felt about different kinds of statements about various aspects of abortion, and then from that try to work toward some commonalities that they shared, regardless of whether they were pro-life or pro-choice.

cont'd on pg 4

Mechanical Engineering: A Focus on Writing

by Sarah Ghasedi

A room full of dedicated Mechanical Engineering graduate students and faculty recently spent their Friday afternoon at a WIC seminar, where they thoughtfully discussed writing outcomes for engineering graduates over coffee and cookies. A series of WIC presentations to the Mechanical Engineering Department, initiated by ME Department Head Belinda Batten and organized and facilitated by WIC Director Vicki Tolar Burton, have inspired some intriguing conversations about writing at OSU and beyond.

Dr. Tolar Burton's November 4th presentation, entitled "Writing Outcomes for Engineering Graduates: Finding a Path for Students and Teachers," was the second of the term in the series and focused on the following questions: What should Engineering graduates be able to do as writers? What are the risks if they are poor writers after graduation? How can students learn, practice, and demonstrate essential writing skills throughout the curriculum. How can faculty handle the workload associated with grading?

Dr. Tolar Burton began her talk by presenting the group with a powerful example of engineering writing gone awry. Her audience immediately recognized a NASA Power Point slide, composed by Boeing engineers, that may have contributed to the tragic Columbia Shuttle disaster. In this document, the results of tests showing that tremendous damage could have occurred to the shuttle, which was at that moment orbiting in space, were buried in a poorly organized sea of Power Point bullets. ME faculty and staff discussed various ways in which the Power Point writers' choices were flawed, breaking down the memo to decipher places where meaning was lost and clearer writing might have emphasized the key data, perhaps even saving the lives of the Columbia crew. The dramatic example set the stage for an in-depth and valuable conversation about what constitutes good writing in the Engineering department. John Parmigiani, who teaches ME 418 and 419, the Department's Writing Intensive

Courses, credits this example with "making the subject relevant and getting everybody interested."



Belinda A. Batten

*Professor and
Department
Head*

ME faculty and graduate students generated the following list of characteristics of effective writing outcomes expected of engineering graduates:

- Clarity
- Conciseness
- Appropriate organization
- Attention to audience
- Appropriate conventions for the field and use of standard written English
- Skillful integration and use of figures
- Accurate content
- Document completeness – no parts missing
- Technical correctness
- Effective collaborative writing skills
- Effective peer review and revising skills

One of the goals of this meeting was to address the common misconception that writing is not as important in Engineering as in other disciplines. This mistaken view is held by many students, who seem to feel that when they go out into the "real world," all they will need is technical expertise because someone else will be there to edit all their writing. As one professor observed, engineers will most likely have to write to many different audiences – possibly even to people who provide funding for their work but have no specific experience with the technical details.

Another topic of interest to faculty was the use of figures in text, which is routinely problematic. Often Engineering students use figures, but they cannot compose two or three clear sentences explaining what the figure means. Or, they do not use a strong figure at the appropriate time. There are many ways to

incorporate writing into the Engineering curriculum without overwhelming teachers or students. Writing as an engineer should be learned over long periods of time, in smaller increments, rather than being taught all at once in a few upper-division courses. The group observed that since many students leave for their internships at the beginning of their junior year, employers often complain that they lack critical writing skills that are needed by the time they begin internship work. Thus the ME Department may begin looking at ways to incorporate specific writing outcomes, beginning in lower division courses, over a longer period of time.

Dr. Batten says that the presentation inspired her to think more about writing in the ME curriculum: "Writing doesn't happen consistently enough in the curriculum. And there are lots of opportunities to use little informal writing exercises that our faculty aren't taking advantage of. I would like it to be that students don't see writing as something special, but as something they just do. That's something I took out of the seminar."

The departmental writing seminars are helping faculty break out of the box and consider new approaches. Dr. Batten notes that in Dr. Tolar Burton's first seminar she told the group that line editing was not necessary or beneficial: "I think having that kind of thing said specifically by somebody who knows is breaking faculty out of the box," she says. Batten also notes that future presentations with specific examples and discussions about ways to incorporate small doses of writing into the Engineering curriculum will be helpful.

The ME Seminar Series sets the stage for similar events in other departments. Contact Dr. Vicki Tolar Burton for more information.

**OREGON STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Waldo Hall 125
2250 SW Jefferson Way
Corvallis, Oregon 97331

Phone: 541-737-2930
Fax: 541-737-4173

E-mail:
Vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu

We're on the Web!

<http://wic.oregonstate.edu>

**"The WIC
program works to
support all
teaching faculty in-
terested in using
writing to help
students learn."**



**Writing Intensive
Curriculum**

"Once you were able to identify the commonalities, you were able to have some good discussion," Dr. Campbell continues. "At least we'll know why we're disagreeing, and we'll be doing it on rationally articulated written grounds and not just spontaneous emotional eruptions."

According to Dr. Campbell, reasoned discussion is something that occurs much too infrequently in our society: "I really want to tell students that we can have that in our society if we really work at it. But the problem is that we're intellectually lazy and we don't spend the time we need, or even try to make an argument for another person if we disagree."

Does he have any final thoughts on the use of writing as a critical thinking tool for

faculty? Dr. Campbell suggests that instead of attempting to cram everything into a lecture, teachers remember that students only absorb so much at a time. Try focusing on 2-3 things you most want your students to learn. Use writing as a way of keeping them fully engaged, providing transitions, and developing the thinking process. Rather than a place to simply record knowledge, writing is a place where thinking takes place and knowledge is actually generated, where we discover our meaning, connect with each other, and if we are lucky, learn something about ourselves in the process.

The Department of Philosophy Writing Guide, which Campbell helped design, can be found at <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/philosophy/resources/resources/guidestuff/index.html>

**WIC Requirement for Students
with Two Majors Clarified**

In May, 2005, the Baccalaureate Core Committee of the Faculty Senate clarified the policy regarding WIC courses for students with more than one major. This is the new policy:

The purpose of the Writing Intensive requirement is to insure that each graduate is prepared to write in the discourse, conventions, and genres of his or her major field.

A student completing requirements for two majors including Double Degrees as well as Dual Majors (one degree with two majors) may request that one WIC course satisfy the WIC requirement for graduation in both majors.

This opportunity is available if and only if:

1. The discourse, written conventions, and genres of the two majors are closely related,

and

2. The substitution of a WIC course from one major for that in another major is approved in writing by the Chairs or Heads of both departments involved and the approval is placed in the student's academic file.

Students and advisors should be aware that in some cases, the WIC course in a major is an integral part of the degree and substitution may not be appropriate. The final decision rests with the Department Chair or Head.

About Teaching With Writing

**Editor: Vicki Tolar Burton
Assistant Editor: Sarah Ghasedi
Design Editor: Jeanna Towns**

Teaching With Writing is the newsletter of the Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum Program. As part of the Baccalaureate Core, all OSU students are required to take an upper-division writing-intensive course in their major.

The content of WIC courses ranges from radiation safety (Nuclear Engineering) to the History of Photography (Art). While subject matter differs by department, all WIC courses share certain commonalities defined by the Faculty Senate:

- Informal, ungraded or minimally graded writing is used as a mode of learning the content material.

- Students are introduced to conventions and practices of writing in their discipline and use of borrowed information.

- Students complete at least 5000 words of writing, of which at least 2000 words are in polished, formal assignments.

- Students are guided through the whole writing process, receive feedback on drafts, and have opportunities to revise.

For complete information on WIC guidelines, contact Vicki Tolar Burton by email at Vicki.tolarburton@oregonstate.edu, visit the WIC web site at <http://wic.oregonstate.edu>, or consult the OSU Curricular Procedures Handbook.