

TO: Sue Abbotson, Chair of Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC)
FROM: Mike Michaud, Chair of Writing Board (WB)
DATE: 10/16/15
SUBJECT: Report on WB Activity (Sept)

Work of the Writing Board

The Writing Board met for its opening meeting on 9/16/15. After welcoming our newest members, Deb Britt (Biology), Jennifer Meade (Social Work), Deborah Kutenplon (Nursing), our most pressing issue was planning our third annual First Pages event and exhibit, a collaboration between the Writing Board and the First-Year Writing program. First Pages is an effort to showcase and celebrate the role of writing in the professional lives of RIC faculty and is held in conjunction with national Writing Week, a celebration of writing held across the U.S. at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels.

A First Page is, essentially, the “first page” of some written document that a faculty member is currently composing. It can be drawn from the faculty member’s teaching, service or scholarship. The idea is to share our work and make the diverse kinds of writing faculty produce “visible” to the community. We, like our students, are writers and our first pages, like our students’, are sometimes great and sometimes...in need of revisions. Our First Pages exhibit will be on display at Adams Library Oct. 19-23, 2015.

The third annual First Pages event, a faculty reading, will be held on October 19, 2015 from 4-5pm in the Reinhardt Room of Adams Library (refreshments to follow). The format is “rapid-fire”--each faculty member gets five minutes to set-up and read his/her First Page. In this way, we hear from many of our colleagues in a condensed amount of time.

In addition to planning for the First Pages event, members of the Board have recently begun discussions about reconfiguration of professional development funds. These discussions are ongoing and in the early phases.

Work of the Writing Board Chair

This fall I am leading a co-op workshop series once again, in collaboration with the FCTL. The series is entitled, “The Research Says...” and in it I share research from the field of Writing Studies that I believe will be of interest to our faculty. Here is a list of the three workshops, with descriptions and dates:

What Do 'Good Writers' Know?: A Model of Writing Expertise for Faculty and Students

Are 'good writers' born or made? Conventional wisdom suggests that some people are just born knowing how to write well. The research on writing suggests otherwise. In this presentation I'll share a model of writing expertise developed by Anne Beaufort, a researcher of academic and professional writing, that will help you think differently and more productively about what makes someone a 'good writer.' The implications of Beaufort's work are relevant for faculty in their own writing and in their work with students.

What We Assign When We Assign Writing: Results of an Empirical Analysis of College-Level Writing Assignments

If you've ever wondered whether your writing assignments are any good or whether you're even assigning writing "right" in the first place, this presentation is for you. Writing researcher Dan Melzer wanted to know what kinds of papers college professors assign when they assign writing, and why. Do they ask students to make arguments? Keep journals? Write reports? The internet offered him a new and interesting way to investigate this question. Melzer downloaded and analyzed over 2,000 writing assignments. In this presentation I'll share his findings and discuss the relevance of his work for faculty in the disciplines.

But Does Their Writing Ever Improve?: A Summary of Longitudinal Research on Writing Development During the College Years

Many college faculty across the disciplines get frustrated with student writing, wondering whether all the time and energy they spend reading and commenting on student papers really makes any difference. For years, writing researchers have tried to understand exactly this problem. Do college students improve as writers during college? What, if anything, do they learn? Is the time faculty spend trying to help them time well spent? And how can we spend our time more wisely? This presentation shares results of case study research which investigates these questions. If you've ever wondered how, at the end of the day, students actually develop as writers during the college years (and what you can do to help them), this presentation will offer some interesting answers.

I have begun a new initiative this year, to attempt to provide opportunities for faculty to engage in ongoing discussion around writing and pedagogy. Here is the description of

this new program that I recently sent out to all graduates of the Summer Seminar for Teaching Writing:

The Student Writing Group

The Student Writing Group is an informal opportunity for faculty to gather to discuss student writing and disciplinary writing instruction. Because faculty are busy, there will be no preparation in advance of the meetings, each of which will last just one hour. The facilitator, Mike Michaud, will solicit a student paper from one faculty member in the group ahead of each meeting and make copies. At meetings, we'll take the first 10-15 minutes to read the student paper that will be under discussion that day and then spend the remaining 30-45 minutes talking and reflecting.

The goal of The Student Writing Group is to foster ongoing discussion and dialogue around teaching and learning and, in particular, around the teaching of disciplinary writing. Faculty may attend as many (or as few) meetings as they choose. If you plan to attend a meeting please let me know in advance so I can make the appropriate number of copies. As the group gets underway and begins to form a community, the goals and purposes of our meetings will be open to ongoing negotiation and discussion.

Meeting Dates/Times (fall 2015):

10/7/15, 2-3pm

11/4/15, 2-3pm

12/2/15, 2-3pm

Location: Faculty Center For Teaching and Learning (Adams Library)

Our first meeting was attended by six faculty, including me. The discussion of student work was interesting and thought-provoking and the discussion was actually carried over via email, after the meeting had ended. I feel as though this first meeting was a success (despite the small turnout).

In addition to these professional development opportunities, I continue to work with this year's SSTW class and will do so for the remainder of the academic year. This fall I will meet with the class twice as a group and I have already begun meeting with the individual faculty in one-hour consultations. These one-on-one meetings provide really

great opportunities to mentor the faculty as they attempt to implement actual changes to their teaching.

I also continue to collaborate with and support faculty in the disciplines on matters related to teaching writing, most recently meeting with Dave Thomas (9/16) of History/Global Studies to discuss the role of writing in the new Global Studies major.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these developments.