

**TO:** Sue Abbotson, Chair of Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC)  
**FROM:** Mike Michaud, Chair of Writing Board (WB)  
**DATE:** 10/21/16  
**SUBJECT:** Report on WB Activity (Summer/Sept/Oct)

## **Work of the Writing Board**

### *Writing in the Disciplines Workshop (6/3/16)*

The Writing Board held a workshop on Writing in the Disciplines (WID) on June 3, 2016 and because that event was held after I submitted my annual report for the 2015/2016 academic year, I'd like to say a quick word about this event.

During the 2015/2016 academic year, the Writing Board began a process of reviewing and revising its budget. Whereas in previous years virtually all budget allocations were allocated to the annual Faculty Development Workshop (FDW) in January, in 2015/2016 the Board trimmed its FDW budget and freed up funds for additional professional development activities during the year. In large part, we used those funds for this new event, the WID workshop. Significantly, this was the Board's first attempt to provide professional development to RIC faculty on their departmental WID plans. The purpose of the workshop was framed as a discussion of curriculum, not individual classroom pedagogy. Our hope was to get our colleagues talking about their departmental WID plans and to investigate the extent to which they were working or in need of revision.

We encountered a few problems with this plan:

- a. Of the seventeen faculty members who attended the workshop, more than half were attending a workshop of this kind for the first time. As such, their knowledge of best practices in the teaching of writing in the disciplines was limited. Despite our framing of the workshop's purpose, many saw this workshop as an opportunity to think about the role of writing in their own classroom(s).
- b. Discussions of departmental curriculum obviously require multiple members of departments and most of our attendees were the only ones in their unit to attend.
- c. Discussions of departmental curriculum are obviously fraught with complications and shaped by highly local circumstances. Without a mandate or at least some tangible outcome for the work we were taking on, there was no guarantee that work done on departmental WID plans at the workshop would lead to actual curricular change or even departmental discussion. We were, in essence, a

group of faculty talking about a departmental matter, divorced from the larger context of the department and operating without a tangible goal or outcome.

To my mind, these issues worked against the intention of the workshop. Having said this, I view the workshop as a success to the extent that it a) raised awareness about the existence of departmental WID plans (most in attendance had not seen their department's plan), and b) offered faculty who had never attended a professional development workshop a chance to begin learning about effective writing pedagogy.

In the end, we were able to keep WID on the radar of a small group of our colleagues and bring new faculty members into the community we have been working to build over the last several years around the teaching of writing across the curriculum.

It's worth asking: What would have made this workshop more effective?

A few things, I believe:

- a. Faculty attendees who already had a shared baseline knowledge about best practices in the teaching of WID (i.e. participants/graduates of the Summer Seminar for Teaching Writing)
- b. Small cohorts of faculty from a few departments focused on their departmental WID plans, instead of a random sampling of individual faculty members from many departments (ideally senior or established faculty members with political influence in their departmental units).
- c. Some sort of mandate or shared goal or outcome for the workshop (i.e. from COGE or UCC or the VPAA)

A few more things of note: Faculty who attended the WID workshop were compensated \$150 for their time and we provided lunch and a consultant to guide the work. In future years, we might pass on the consultant, free up additional funding for professional development allowances, and target cohorts of faculty from departmental units in order to address some of the concerns I've raised above. Providing a shared mandate or outcome for the work is a harder nut to crack. Our current WID requirement does not specify that departments must continue to revisit and revise their WID plans and so there is no mechanism, as yet, to ensure ongoing work and conversation on WID at RIC. WID at RIC, at the current moment, is a one-time only requirement. Nothing in the language of the requirement requires that departments do anything more than submit the plans that they all submitted in 2012/2013. To my way of thinking, this is a flaw in the design of the original requirement.

### *First Pages Reading and Exhibit*

This was the fourth year that the Writing Board hosted the First Pages event. Again this year, we had a terrific turn-out for the reading with nine RIC faculty members and two members of the administration participating. We were pleased that our new president Dr. Frank Sanchez joined us and read a poem he is working on as part of his inauguration address. We were also joined by Dr. Jeffrey Mello, the new dean of the School of Management. Around thirty First Pages submitted by RIC faculty and staff were on exhibit at Adams Library all week.

First Pages is an interesting event in that it showcases faculty as writers and draws attention to the written work that we do here at the college, as scholars, as teachers, as individuals who serve the college in numerous capacities. Following upon the First Pages reading this year, at our second monthly meeting, the Writing Board discussed ways to expand on the First Pages event. While our work traditionally takes the form of professional development on writing pedagogy, we wondered how we might further this mission by holding an event which showcases faculty writing in perhaps a more substantive way. We also wondered how we might create a new event which showcases student writing. One of our members suggested that we initiate a First Pages student event in the spring term. This is an especially interesting and potentially promising idea. In the weeks to come, the WB chair is meeting with the chair of CRCA to investigate ways to collaborate, in order to highlight or showcase student writing.

In sum, I am interested in considering ways to make highlighting or showcasing writing, both of faculty and of students, a more substantial part of what the Writing Board does each year. I do think that a case can be made that such work, while not directly connected to our charge of providing professional development, does function as a form of professional development. It also build community around writing, which is an important part of the work we do.

### *Plans for 21st Annual Faculty Development Workshop (January 2017)*

The Writing Board will host its annual Faculty Development Workshop on Wednesday January 11, 2017. Our theme will focus on responding to student writing and our speaker will be Neal Lerner of Northeastern University. Neal was our consultant at our June WID workshop and he was well-received. As he is a well-known and respected regional scholar in Writing Center work and brings a background in WAC work in math and the sciences, we feel that Neal will be a good speaker for this year's workshop. As

we've done in years past, we will turn a good portion of the morning over to Neal to conduct a workshop on responding to student work (as opposed to a lecture). Our format for the rest of the day will be the same as it has been in past years, where we recruit local faculty to share their knowledge in break-out sessions before and after lunch.

### *Write-In (Writing Week)*

Again this year, the Writing Board collaborated with the Writing Center and the First-Year Writing Program to host the Write-In event at the Writing Center on 10/19/16. This event, which began only a year or so ago, continues to grow and the number of students checking in for tutoring and free food seems to grow each year.

### *WID Listening Meetings*

The Writing Board is collaborating with COGE and the FCTL to hold a series of listening meetings on the RIC WID requirement. As of this writing, no date for these meetings has been scheduled.

### **Work of the Writing Board Chair**

This fall, in my work as Writing Board chair, I continue to offer professional development opportunities to our faculty to improve their practice of teaching writing across the curriculum. I'd like to briefly highlight my activities for the fall 2016 term:

### *Individual Consultations with SSTW Faculty*

This year we have a small class of faculty participating in the annual Summer Seminar for the Teaching of Writing. Seven faculty from across the college are participating. They are:

1. Young, Benjamin (Physical Science)
2. Hawk, Brandon (English)
3. Meade, Jennifer (Social Work)
4. Abrahamson, David (Math/CS)
5. Chaudhuri, Tanni (Sociology)
6. Thayer, Jeremy (Social Work)
7. Del Vecchio, Andrea (Physical Science)

This “class” brings the total number of RIC faculty who are or have participated in the SSTW to 64.

This fall, as part of the requirement of the SSTW, I am meeting for individual consultations with each of the faculty members listed above, to support them as they work to implement what they learned about best-practices for teaching writing across the curriculum in the first phase of the seminar, the week-long seminar in May.

### *FYS Workshops on Writing and Pedagogy*

I am collaborating with the First-Year Seminar program and the Faculty Center for Teaching in Learning to offer two workshops on teaching writing in FYS. Here are the descriptions for these workshops:

Introducing the Process of Writing (9/16/16) The purpose of FYS is to help students transition from high school to college. In high school, students are asked to summarize information when they write. This workshop will teach professors how to teach students that writing is more than just a book report. It is about forming arguments, expressing ideas and writing persuasively. Facilitated by Mike Michaud (English and Chair, Writing Board).

Giving Effective Feedback in FYS (10/21/16) Are you frustrated because you spend endless amounts of time editing and reworking student writing, only to have your advice and efforts ignored? Effective feedback is not line-by-line or word-by-word editing, it is strategically helping students become better writers. Facilitated by Mike Michaud (English and Chair, Writing Board).

### *Student Writing Group*

I continue to host the Student Writing Group (SWG), an informal gathering open to all faculty but targeted at those who have completed the SSTW (as a means of providing ongoing opportunities for dialogue about teaching and learning writing). The SWG meets the first Wednesday of the month after the free period to discuss a single student paper or faculty assignment. Seven faculty members attended our first meeting on 10/5/16. Our second meeting will be 11/2/16 in the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning.

Thank you for providing this opportunity to share news on the work of the Writing Board.