

Indiana University of Pennsylvania WAC Writing Across the Curriculum

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Dr. Palmquist speaking to IUP faculty and administration

Palmquist Addresses University Community on Writing Across the Curriculum

On Thursday, November 9, the Writing Across the Curriculum program hosted a talk by Mike Palmquist, Associate Provost and University Distinguished Teaching Scholar at Colorado State University.

In his address, Palmquist began by **defining WAC as “the use of writing activities to help students learn, engage with information and ideas, and improve their communication skills.” He connected WAC to Bloom’s Taxonomy of critical thinking.**

By utilizing WAC, instructors can help their students to gain critical thinking skills by writing to learn (remembering and understanding), writing to engage (analyzing and evaluating), and writing in the disciplines (analyzing, evaluating, and creating).

Palmquist also discussed how to design effective WAC programs at the university level. Faculty and administrators from various departments at IUP attended to

learn more about WAC and how its pedagogies can be used in their own classrooms to aid in student learning.

Author of *Joining the Conversation: Writing in College and Beyond*, *The Bedford Researcher*, *Designing Writing*, *The Bedford Bibliographer*, and *The Bedford Research Room*, Palmquist is also the coordinator of Writing@CSU and the Writing Studio. He is the founding editor of the WAC Clearinghouse, an ever-growing resource of open-access journals, free-to-download books, news archives, conference proceedings, and research exchanges related to the teaching of writing in disciplines across higher education.

Palmquist’s visit was sponsored by the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Office of the Provost’s Associate, the Department of English, and the IUP WAC program. ■

Teach. Write.
Teach Writing.

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program provides support for faculty university wide in implementing writing into their courses.

The program aims to create and sustain a community of writers at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

If you have questions about WAC, please contact Bryna Siegel Finer at brynasf@iup.edu.

WAC Director, Bryna Siegel Finer
Newsletter Editor, Melissa Lutz



Faculty Teaching WAC

Jodie Seybold and Nicole Clark, Department of Food and Nutrition

"One more thing to do in our already full lives in academia." These were our thoughts when we began moving from writing intensive courses to a WAC model. "Just 'wac' us over the head with another thing to do!" However, we knew that formalizing the writing our students were doing and the efforts we were making to teach them to write into an organized document would be helpful for everyone in the department.

To understand what Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) is, we started working with WAC Director, Bryna Siegel Finer. We learned that WAC has many advantages over writing intensive. Now, instead of students taking one course that required a lot of writing, the courses throughout their major help them understand why and how writing is used in specific jobs they might go into.

We also adjusted some assignments to focus more on student exploration and less on assessment, and we learned that we don't always need to grade everything our students write for them to learn from it. We made some compromises when writing the actual plan, and this is where we learned about our own writing skills and ways to better them as well as our students' writing. Over time, we agreed on verbiage of a department syllabus statement, specific assignments to be implemented in some courses without impeding individual instructor freedom, and we now have the flexibility of adding and taking courses out of the plan as the department needs.

We are now the first department to have a WAC plan, which offers great advantages when talking to prospective students and parents, and will help us graduate students who can communicate effectively about nutrition. At first the process seemed overwhelming, but it was worth the journey. We are now collecting assessment data and looking forward to seeing how this data changes over time as our writing plan develops and more students encounter WAC in our department.

So, when you see Dr. Siegel Finer talking to your chair or dean, do not panic. Though not without some hard work, developing a Department Writing Plan will make you a better teacher-scholar, and your students will understand how writing is used and why it is valued in their discipline. ■

Faculty Workshops on Demand

If you have a group of colleagues (graduate students and/or faculty) interested in a WAC workshop, contact Bryna Siegel Finer at brynasf@iup.edu to set up a personalized workshop at a time that works for you.

Creating Effective Writing Assignments

Help your students who struggle with writing assignments succeed by making simple changes to the design and language in your assignment sheets.

Getting More Bang for Your Buck: An Introduction to Writing to Learn

Implement quick, low-stakes writing into any classroom to help students improve their writing without increasing your workload.

Strategies for Efficiently Grading Student Writing: Faster Response that Benefits You and Your Students

Maximize your feedback with response strategies that improve student writing and save you time.

Teaching Students to Write-to-Learn

Give your students more practice with writing without taking up too much class time.

What's Grammar Got to Do With it? Teaching Writing Without a Red Pen

Comment effectively on student writing and still respond productively without spending time editing and correcting grammar.

Essay Exams: Writing Prompts for Student Success

Create better essay exam prompts.

Teaching and Grading Writing in Larger Classes

Teach and grade writing in large classes.

Have a great writing assignment that's working well and you spent a lot of time crafting? Looking for inspiration to create writing assignments for your students? The new online refereed journal, *Prompt*, publishes academic writing assignments for undergraduates and graduate students from courses across the curriculum. Their mission is to disseminate writing assignments as a mode of intellectual work that is too rarely circulated in public venues, and to provide a resource and a site of engagement for faculty who incorporate writing in their teaching. To read the first edition or to learn more about how to submit, go to <http://thepromptjournal.com>.

After reading a report of assessment results on student writing at IUP in summer 2016, Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Yaw Asamoah, said, "No. No, not in my college." The report showed that students come to IUP writing at a basic level, and they leave at the same level. "I'm not willing to accept that as a standard in CHSS," says Asamoah. He decided then that all departments in CHSS would work with Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Director, Bryna Siegel Finer, to develop Department Writing Plans (DWPs), and that he would support an AWE for one faculty member in each department to have the time to do the work.

In 2013, Food & Nutrition was the first department to begin working with the WAC program to develop a customized Department Writing Plan for their majors. A DWP is a way for departments to map writing outcomes and activities onto existing course objectives, and to be more conscious and thoughtful about how writing is positioned throughout their curriculum. The plans begin as a template of questions that ask faculty to think about the type of writing that students will possibly do in desired careers or graduate programs, and then work backwards into the coursework to make sure writing skills are scaffolded to prepare them for those types of writing. A DWP is also a way for a department to demonstrate how they meet the university's strategic plan to adopt high-impact practices (Goal 2, Strategy 1, Tactic 3) by offering courses that emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and encouraging the production of various genres for various audiences. The DWP process helps demonstrate how writing is currently taught in majors courses, addresses gaps in curriculum, and ensures that students get practice writing throughout their four years in order to meet writing challenges in advanced courses and in their career fields.

Developing a DWP is time-intensive on the part of a department liaison(s) who takes on the workload on behalf of the department. When Food and Nutrition WAC liaisons, Nicole Clark and Jodie Seybold, began a DWP for their department, they had no idea it would be more than two years before the plan would be implemented. "It was a lot of work," says Seybold. "We had to do a lot of research, gather information from our colleagues, and sort through a ton of material. We met with Bryna almost every month even though we were unable to obtain the release time necessary to do this type of major curriculum revision."

"Our WAC plan will be ready to implement for Spring 2018; the major parts are written and our department



CHSS Dean Supports All College Departments in Move to WAC Model

has approved it. Now we're fine-tuning and planning an assessment of student writing samples," explains Valerie Gunter, Associate Professor in Sociology. As part of a small pilot, Asamoah gave release time to Gunter to see if the Sociology DWP completion time could be expedited, and it was. Sociology will finish their plan in a total time of two years.

DWPs are designed to make visible how writing is situated throughout a curriculum, and they can assist faculty in any department or program to create a more meaningful relationship between the content they teach and the writing they assign. A DWP can help with assessment, accreditation, and five-year department reviews, as well as provide research and scholarship opportunities for faculty who are interested in how students write in their disciplines. Most importantly, the addition of writing-to-learn pedagogy can have the dual effect of helping students become better learners and better writers.

"I'm thrilled to have CHSS spearhead this movement at IUP."

- Dean Asamoah

Says Dean Asamoah, "As a High-Impact Practice, we know that writing across the curriculum is an effective teaching and learning model. All of our students are headed toward careers where communication skills and writing are going to be essential, so I'm thrilled to have CHSS spearhead this movement at IUP. I'm willing to make this investment in our students because I believe in this program and in their future."

In addition to the eleven departments in CHSS, Geosciences, Hospitality Management, Mathematics, and Art are also working on Department Writing Plans. For information on creating a customized Department Writing Plan in your department, contact brynasf@iup.e.edu. ■

Reilly, WAC-Advocate, to Direct Liberal Studies

Following a semester-long search, Dr. Edel Reilly, Professor of Mathematics will take over as Director of Liberal Studies this spring. Reilly, who has co-led the Liberal Studies May Writing Workshop for the past 7 years, is no stranger to WAC pedagogy. **"I believe that learning should be interdisciplinary. The world's problems are complex, and so we need to give students a complex education to prepare them to handle the challenges they will face in the future. Using writing in classes where students aren't expecting to write – like math – helps students to make connections they might not make otherwise," says Reilly.**

As a teacher and scholar, Reilly has always been interested in how writing can be used as a teaching tool for helping students to **learn mathematics, going as far back as her master's thesis, *MAC Meets WAC: The Isolation of the Disciplines and Its Consequences for Student Learning***. She continued this work in her dissertation, *Writing to Learn Mathematics: A Mixed-Method Study*, now a book, *Writing to Learn Mathematics* (2014). In her book, Reilly describes **middle school math students' perceptions of how writing helped them learn math, as well as evidence of their mathematical knowledge growth through writing. Students' writing samples** showed how the students were learning to use writing to explore alternative solutions to problems and also to check and reflect on their understanding of new mathematical concepts. Says Reilly, **"My study showed that** using writing to learn math can work for middle school students. But we know that using writing as a tool in disciplines in higher education works, too. As the Director of Liberal Studies, I'll be particularly interested in how we're

Across the Disciplines Examines High Impact Practices in Special Issue

The Association of American Colleges and Universities has identified writing across the curriculum as a High Impact Practice (HIP) and IUP has identified the use of such practices as part of its strategic plan: Goal 2, Strategy 1, Tactic 3. In a special issue, the journal *Across the Disciplines* recently addressed the way in which writing across the curriculum programs and HIPs interact to challenge the dominant narratives of student failure due to a lack of engagement.

HIPs are **"an investment of time and energy over an extended period that has unusually positive effects on student engagement in educationally purposeful behavior"** (Kuh, 2010). Some examples of practices the American Association of Colleges and Universities consider to be HIPs are capstone courses/projects, learning communities, collaborative assignments and projects, and undergraduate research. Data suggests that these and other HIPs positively correlate with improved performance for all students.

In their introduction to this special issue, Beth Boquet and Neal Lerner **identify the common trope of the "academically adrift"**

implementing AACU High-Impact Practices like writing across the curriculum, especially in liberal studies courses, since there is so **much evidence that shows it helps students learn."**

Reilly has published several articles and book chapters on teaching **math through writing, including "Improving Girls' Interest in Mathematics Through Writing"** (2014) and **"Writing+Math=Opportunity"** (2011). She has been awarded five Senate Research grants for projects that connect writing and math.

"I can't think of a better Liberal Studies Director than Dr. Reilly," says Bryna Siegel Finer, director of WAC at IUP. "We've been working together for several years now, teaching workshops on writing across disciplines, and I know we will collaborate well in enhancing students' exposure to writing activities through the liberal studies curriculum."

At IUP, Reilly teaches math education courses including **"Using Writing to Teach Math at the Elementary and Middle School."** She has been an active member of the University Senate, serving as secretary, a member of the Rules Committee, on the Student Affairs Committee, and as senate representative to the University Planning Council. She is a member of the Teacher Education Coordinators Council and is co-chair of the Center for Teaching Excellence Advisory Board. She was co-chair of a Middle States reaccreditation steering committee and was on the Common Freshman Reader Selection Committee. She has been active in the CNSM, serving on the College Curriculum Committee, the New Science Building Committee, and the Women in Science program. She is also a member of several professional development organizations and is an active member of the Pennsylvania Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

student who does not engage with their academic life. They go on to discuss the fact that more often writing scholars see students **who "are having high-impact learning experiences that will shape the rest of their lives"** (Boquet and Lerner, 2016).

This special issue includes 10 articles which explore the range of curricular and extra-curricular projects which allow students to engage in HIPs. Elder and Champine look at high-impact writing-to-learn math assignments. In addition to the articles that explore HIPs within the classroom, Henrickson looks at how writing within student organizations functions as a HIP as well. These are only a few of the articles and topics explored through this special issue of the journal.

Ultimately, what this special issue seeks to demonstrate is that an understanding of the role of writing programs in promoting HIPs will help to keep the student experience with writing and learning at the center of the future of higher education.

This issue of ATD is open access and available at <https://wac.colostate.edu/atd/hip/index.cfm>. ■

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