Faculty Focus

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Introduction to Writing Across the Curriculum at UCF
Pavel Zemliansky

Pavel Zemliansky is Associate Professor in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric where he teaches composition, rhetoric, and professional writing. He is also the Director of UCF's Writing Across the Curriculum program.

As the Director of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program at UCF, I am happy to be joining other members of the UCF faculty. My job as WAC Director is to collaborate with faculty from other departments on the development and implementation of writing initiatives. In my short time here, I have already met many colleagues who are enthusiastic about writing and who understand the role it can play in their students' education.

In this short piece, I'd like to describe the ways in which the WAC program can collaborate with faculty from various departments on the integration of writing into their teaching. I'd also like to outline the foundational pedagogical principles upon which the work of the WAC program is built.

Writing well is important for any university graduate. Being a competent writer will not only help college graduates find a good job in the information-based economy, but will also enable them to participate more fully in a democratic society. Writing is also a powerful tool for learning. Learning through writing involves thoughtful analysis and reflection. These activities help students become independent thinkers and actors capable of applying their knowledge to real-life situations.

Learning to write is a complex and gradual process. From our own experiences, we know that becoming a proficient writer means understanding the conversations and conventions of professional and academic communities. Good writers are keenly aware of the purposes, audiences, and contexts of writing in those communities and of the conventions of language use adopted by those communities. Studies of writing in the workplace confirm the importance of knowing those conventions.

The Writing Across the Curriculum movement began several decades ago as an effort to help teachers in different disciplines incorporate writing into their teaching. The movement came out of the realization that required, first-year composition courses are simply not enough to teach students everything they needed to know about academic writing. To become proficient thinkers and writers, students need regular and well-structured practice throughout their college careers. They need to write frequently, for a variety of purposes and audiences, and in different situations, both formal and informal. They need to receive regular feedback from their teachers and their peers. Ultimately, all writing done in a course or a program should be tightly connected to the learning goals and objectives of that course or program in order to help students achieve them.

The Writing Across the Curriculum program at UCF was created in the summer of 2010. It is a part of UCF's Writing Outreach Programs, which also include the First-Year Composition Program and the University Writing Center. The WAC program is housed in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric located in Colbourn Hall. In my work as WAC Director, I am assisted by WAC Coordinator Lindee Owens and several members of our department's faculty who are interested in WAC issues.

The WAC program seeks to improve student learning by helping faculty in all disciplines to learn about the best practices of writing instruction and to incorporate writing into their teaching. We collaborate with faculty from different departments on the creation of theoretically and pedagogically sound and sustainable models of writing instruction across the curriculum.

To achieve these goals, the program conducts the following activities:

- University-wide workshops on the teaching and learning of writing
- Department and discipline-specific workshops, workgroups, and presentations
- Small group and individual consultations with faculty
- Training of tutors for specific disciplines and courses
- Help with revision and implementation of Gordon Rule courses
- Other specialized programs and initiatives

Some notable projects that the UCF WAC program has implemented in less than two years of its existence include the "embedded tutor" initiatives with the departments of Nursing and History, presentations on various aspects of writing for faculty and students in Nursing, Computer Science, and some other departments. While continuing to work on those projects, this year we are also developing new relationships with the departments of Chemistry, Engineering, Physics, and others.

We see our role as consultants who collaborate with faculty across campus on the creation of meaningful and effective systems and ways of using writing in their teaching.

If you are interested in incorporating writing into your teaching, contact us. Because the role of the WAC Program is one of collaboration and consultation, we will work with you to find out about your needs and to design a plan of action that makes sense to you, your students, and your department.

We look forward to working with you on your projects.

Faculty Writing Club

Join faculty colleagues for a focused period of writing each Thursday and Friday from 10:00 a.m. – noon at the Faculty Center. We'll provide coffee, a library stocked with useful resources, a reasonably quiet space, comradery, and computers. You bring your writing challenges and ideas.

First-Year Composition at UCF:
An Entry Point to Writing in the University
Elizabeth Wardle

Elizabeth Wardle is Associate Professor in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric where she teaches first-year composition and courses in writing theory and pedagogy. She also serves as Director of Composition and Associate Chair for Writing Outreach Programs.

Complaints about student writing in colleges and universities might seem new, but they aren't. These laments have been with us since before the first-year composition course was invented at Harvard in the late 1800s. There, the composition course was created as a stop gap measure, a remedial "inoculation" for what Harvard professors dramatically called the "illiteracy of American boys." The so-called illiteracy of American boys actually reflected a cultural shift—a shift from an emphasis on speaking to one on writing, and a shift from an education in Latin and Greek to English. Prior to the late 1800s, students rarely wrote in their mother tongue, so when tested on their English writing, they did poorly. The reaction to this finding could have been to implement more writing instruction in high schools and colleges, but instead, Harvard created one class intended to fix all that was wrong with student writing. They typically assigned this new class to people who had little interest in teaching it, but were powerless to refuse—untenured professors, graduate students, and later women from the community whom Susan Miller, one of our disciplinary historians, refers to as "the sad women in the basement." (See Berlin, Brereton, Crowley, Kitzhaber, and Ohmann, among others, for a full history of the creation of the composition course.)

This "one course fixes all" model of writing soon spread to other institutions, where it continued to be unsuccessful in "fixing" the problems with student writing. The comprehensive rhetorical training students once received in college became increasingly narrow and undervalued.

So How Do Students Improve as Writers?
An easy way to consider how students become better writers is to consider how *you* became a better writer. How does one become better at *anything*? None of us improves in writing unless we write—a lot. And even when we are very good at writing one kind of text—say, grant proposals—we often falter when faced with a new kind of text, say a research article or a short story. We know these things about writing to be true because we live them every day, yet often we don't make the same connection for our students and their writing. Given this

one common sense piece of knowledge—that improving as writers requires writing over time in multiple situations—we can infer that a return to a more comprehensive writing education across four years is the best way to help students become effective writers.

This means first-year composition courses cannot be expected to fix all that is wrong with student writing, or teach students to write "once and for all." We may *wish* that writing courses could achieve these goals, because then responsibility for helping students write would lie solely with the composition teacher. But if we accept what we know to be true for our *own* writing, then we must accept a more limited role for composition courses. They *can* serve as effective *entry points* to college and university writing—when the writing faculty members teaching those classes have disciplinary expertise in writing, and the writing courses teach useful and transferable knowledge *about writing* that students can build on.

Change in the UCF First-Year Composition Program
In 2009, some tuition differential money was set aside to make improvements in the First-Year Composition Program at UCF. We hired six new permanent instructors to teach composition (replacing a number of part-time lines), lowered composition class size from 27 to 25, piloted a revised curriculum in ENC 1101, and began a three-year class size study with comparison groups of 19. In return for the fiscal investments, we assessed student writing portfolios, grades, pass/fail rates, and attitudes, and also observed teachers in the classroom. Our assessment found that the changes were better helping students meet program outcomes on all 12 items we measured through our portfolio assessment. In particular, the smaller sections of the new curriculum taught by the new, full-time, well-trained teachers showed especially significant differences on items related to higher order thinking skills like analysis, reflection, and ability to explore ideas through writing.

Subsequently, Dr. Hitt provided the resource to completely change the labor model for composition instruction at UCF, replacing what had been 35-40 part-time lines with full-time instructor lines over a period of several years. At most public universities around the country, composition is taught primarily by part-time instructors, creating both ethical and pedagogical dilemmas. When composition is taught instead by a core group of full-time faculty, they remain with the program, participate in ongoing professional development, and are available as resources for students after they leave the composition class.

The UCF Composition Curriculum
The composition curriculum at UCF is based on four assumptions from the research about writing:

1. *Composing is a complex activity* that occurs differently in different contexts. Consequently, a single class can't teach students to write once and for all, in all situations, because genres and conventions vary from community to community and context to context.
2. Composing effectively in new situations requires a *complex repurposing of previous knowledge* and experience. In order to successfully use what they already know in a new situation, students need meta-awareness and faculty in all courses need to create affordances for transfer.
3. Composing successfully entails expertise in *both form and content*; form and content are inseparable. Trying to teach through acontextual "skill and drill" or by instilling general rules about form does not help and can actually harm student writing later.
4. Composing involves *both declarative and procedural knowledge*. Teaching writing is not just about "how to" but also about how writing works and how it's learned and how it varies from place to place.

Given these assumptions, our composition courses make *content about writing* central. There are declarative concepts about writing that students benefit from knowing, just like there are declarative concepts about biology and history they benefit from knowing. For example, it's useful to know that group goals impact the texts that are written and read, the conventions used in writing them, and the meaning attached to them. And the same texts could be written, read, and interpreted very differently in another community. This is a declarative concept which, if understood, can help students take control of the various competing writing rules they've been taught, contextualize them, and use them when appropriate—in other words, this is the kind of knowledge that leads to what Shannon Carter calls "rhetorical dexterity."

Activities in our composition courses are designed to encourage transfer, helping students be reflective about what they know about writing and about what they do when they write. Without meta-awareness, knowledge rarely transfers. If knowledge doesn't transfer from composition classes, those classes have not served as effective entry points to writing in the university.

Our composition courses proceed from the assumption that students have to write differently in different kinds of writing situations, and that expertise in a particular genre and context is only gained within that context. So, in other words, if a student is going to write well as a biologist, she can only learn to do that when writing with other biologists about biology. A sound, research-based composition course prepares the ground for that learning. The faculty in the subsequent courses will not find students who are perfectly able to write anything, but they should find students who can approach new texts with

confidence and the right questions, and who can learn quickly with appropriate help.

What our Composition Classes Assume About the Rest of the Curriculum
The content of our composition courses assumes that more writing is to come in students' college careers; that students will, in fact, be asked to write in nursing, biology, engineering, and elsewhere once they leave composition, and that the faculty in those subsequent courses will have the support they need to assign, respond to, and assess this writing.

Producing better student writers requires all of us to engage in this vertical writing experience with students. It requires the First-Year Composition Program to teach composition courses that prepare students for what faculty across the university will ask them to do later, and it requires faculty from all disciplines to provide guidance for the writing they assign rather than assuming students can already produce it when they walk in the door. Our University Writing Center and new Writing Across the Curriculum program (highlighted in this issue of *Faculty Focus*) stand ready, along with FCTL, to assist faculty and students with this work.

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The University Writing Center: Supporting Your Teaching of Writing
R. Mark Hall

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A new addition to UCF, I was introduced at faculty orientation as head of the University Writing Center (UWC). During a break, a colleague asked, "Writing Center? What's that?" On cue, I launched my pitch: The UWC has a dual mission, I explained. One goal is to provide individual and small-group writing support via peer tutors to students from first-year to graduate in every discipline. A second goal is to provide student writing consultants with a rich teaching and learning experience through ongoing education and professional development in writing center research, theory, and practice.

Quickly, my new colleague and I, both recent transplants to Florida, moved on to other pressing topics, such as hurricane preparedness, the dangers of amoebas common to local warm-water lakes, and how to secure a campus parking permit. But her initial question lingered. Many faculty don't know about the UWC, I suspect, because specialists like me routinely describe it in narrow terms, as a resource for students. But the UWC is also a resource for faculty.

Although you may not consider yourself a writing teacher, you become one whenever you assign writing. Designing writing assignments, providing feedback, coaching students through the revision process, helping them to develop literacy practices from one assignment to the next—these activities make you a writing teacher. As a resource for faculty, the UWC supports the writing instruction you provide.

To supplement your teaching, consultants in the UWC focus on literacy learning over time. While students and faculty may wish for a quick fix—someone to go over a paper and make corrections—consultants target writers rather than papers, asking what literacy tasks they can help writers learn and practice in order to improve, both in and beyond the university. Consultants offer support at every stage of the writing process, from brainstorming, to gathering and deciphering sources, to drafting, to revising, to proofreading and editing. Motivating our approach are three assumptions about knowledge and learning.

Knowledge and Learning are Situated

First, consultants understand that writing emerges from specific activities within particular contexts. Students can't learn to write in construction management by writing in first-year composition. Instead, students in construction management must participate in writing in that community. As activities change, so does writing, and the rules and conventions of writing change too. A nursing care plan does different work and thus follows a different form than a feature story in journalism or a lab report in biology. To learn to write in nursing or journalism or biology, students must engage in the activities that animate those disciplines. Students need time to learn and practice the particular ways of seeing, thinking, and communicating values within disciplines.

This assumption informs writing consultants when, for example, a writer comes to the UWC without a paper, with only an assignment in hand. In dialogue with a writing consultant, who is trained to ask lots of questions about the situation for writing, the writer may come to understand what she knows—and what she doesn't yet know—about how to approach the task. Together, writer and consultant brainstorm ideas and make a list of questions to ask the professor in order to clarify assignment expectations. Because knowledge and learning are situated, the consultant understands that she cannot act as an expert. She may have lots of experience writing in psychology but little knowledge of writing in biomedical science. But because she understands the situatedness of knowledge and learning, she can serve a valuable role, helping to guide the writer to discover what she needs to know.

Knowledge and Learning are Social

Second, writing consultants understand that knowledge is not something either "out there" or "in our heads." Knowledge and learning are created in our interactions with others. We learn best not by being told about a subject, but by engaging in dialogue and activity. Commonplace notions of writing, however, tend to envision an individual writer working in isolation. But all writing is social. Ideas are always informed by and in conversation with others. Talking and doing, then, in collaboration with a peer, are the work of a writing consultation.

For instance, a writer may visit the UWC, for assistance not only with writing, but also with reading a challenging academic text. A consultant may guide the reader to talk about a difficult passage, to discuss what makes sense—and what doesn't. He may introduce strategies used by proficient readers, such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. Reader and consultant may work to construct meaning jointly. They may practice those strategies, perhaps in weekly appointments, over an entire semester.

Knowledge and Learning are Mediated

Third, writing consultants understand that, in addition to talk, writing is mediated by a variety of activities and tools. One goal of the UWC is to teach writers to use a variety of tools or writing resources.

For example, a writer may visit the UWC with a draft of a chapter for a thesis. Rather than proofread and edit for the writer, a consultant may invite her to focus on a specific section, perhaps a few pages that were difficult to write, or a part that the writer identifies as needing revision. With guidance, the writer may come to see a pattern of repeated errors, which she may then work to correct on her own. To mediate these activities, consultants draw on a myriad of tools, including handbooks, style guides, handouts, and web-based resources.

You can help the UWC support your teaching of writing in several ways:

- Explain contexts for writing and how they relate to your course objectives. Detail the purpose, audience, genre, rules and conventions, and kinds of sources required.
- Design writing resources, including annotated sample papers, highlighting moves you find effective and ineffective.
- Don't mark every error. Instead, direct students to work on a limited number of concerns with each assignment. In the UWC, writers and consultants can then discuss your advice, setting priorities for revision, identifying new questions, and practicing moves to improve.
- Treat students like real writers, who write, revise, and revise again. When planning writing assignments, build in opportunities for revision based on your feedback.
- Recommend the UWC to your students. Encourage—but don't require—them to engage in dialogue with a consultant. Genuine dialogue is more likely to develop when it is voluntary.
- Identify students who may be interested in writing and peer-to-peer teaching, then recommend them to become consultants in the UWC.

SAGrader:
Can a Computer Grade Student Writing?
Pam Thomas

Pam Thomas is an Instructor of Biology. She has taught at UCF for the past 10 years. During this time she has worked in the extreme large class environment with multiple sections of up to 1,400 students. Her interests include student engagement in large classes, critical thinking pedagogies, adaptations for learning-challenged students in large classes, and learning technologies.

Providing students the opportunity to write is essential. We've all seen the data that indicate writing assists students to develop critical thinking skills and increases their academic performance regardless of discipline (Karpicke, J. 2011 and Graham, S. 2010). Everyone agrees in theory on the benefits of student immersion in writing via the traditional instructional methods. And then there is the reality of the large class. Class size has a direct impact on the process of teaching. I am not complaining; I enjoy large classes, the bigger the better. I ask to teach them. Imagine that you are teaching 1,400 students per semester. You may come to the realization that not even by working 24 hours per day, as motivated as you are to preserve writing assignments in your classes, can you keep up with the grading in a remotely timely manner…. And neither can the TAs if you have them. Do you give it up? No way! As one of my favorite professors at UCF once told a class in which I was a student, "Intelligent people create their own environment. If you have a challenge, you solve it."

I like a good challenge. So I embraced my reality. Realizing the importance of writing for my own students, I started to explore the topic of artificial intelligence programs in writing more than five years ago. One summer I went into a "high-speed" essay grading center and worked there. I wanted to gain experience from one of those large companies that offers extravagantly priced software that seems to "walk and talk and grade essays automatically." In that center, we were grading FCAT, Colorado, and every other standardized test essay from all over the U.S., while the program was trying to learn from the people who were grading the essays. The program was often in error, and the raters frequently did not fulfill the machine's essay quota (hundreds per day) so were soon gone, to be replaced by new people with less experience, which resulted in a wobble in reliability. Not pleased with what I saw and experienced, I determined that such a program was not appropriate to use in my classes, and I moved on.

After much further research and testing, I discovered a tool called SAGrader. I use it as a means to achieve my dream. Maybe you have the same dream. You know everything academically possible about your class, by individual in real-time, no matter the size. It has nothing to do with not wanting to grade. I do still grade and monitor this program. I can see what is happening every day or evening if I want to. Even though over a thousand students are registered in my classes, I can have a fireside chat with them. It is similar to the way in which they mentor lessons at Oxford, with a cup of tea… because I can see intimately how they think and why. SAGrader is unlike clickers or multiple choice or 80 discussion sections in my Webcourses@UCF. Those tools are also extremely valuable and have their place. SAGrader is much more amazing. The students react differently when confronted with a blank space to write into. That blank space provides me the window into their minds and a manageable way to grade their responses.

Recently I read the responses to over 400 entries. SAGrader was right on target with the rubric I created. It was working perfectly, grading the questions that I had created. I read, not out of necessity, but because I couldn't resist learning about my class. Again, in order to help them, you need to know them.

What class information could I ascertain? Student One had not read the additional materials; Student Two had a reading comprehension problem; and Student Three had not attended lecture based on the answers provided. Many students had deficits in retention of the prerequisite material required for the upper division class. Student Four had spelling deficits. Student Five could not adequately express ideas in written language. Also, the entire class was in need of additional practice. Having anticipated the need for practice from previous experiences, I had used the program in the practice mode and watched the students learning a topic that is traditionally very difficult in genetics. Some of them had it in 30 minutes. In the end, the majority of the class was on skill level and right on target. My class was on the way to learning to express ideas in written form, clearly and concisely, while also learning vocabulary, technical scientific information, and critical thinking skills.

Now, homework is back, even essay tests are back; knowledge of student progress before the test or quiz is back, and critical thinking has increased. I have the freedom to design questions that require synthesis to get to the answers. Students must develop analytical skills rather than rote responses from open books or notes. A large number of different sections can be created simultaneously, and each section can be assigned an alternate equivalent question. The program can just as easily be used in the final assessment mode or for simple questions.

Recently, a great deal of media attention has been focused on SAGrader. The word "robot" has frequently been used in reference to the program. I want to assure you that R2-D2 and his brethren are not roaming the halls of UCF. No tasks are being outsourced. And no one is learning how to write like a robot. Reporters have asked me, "What are you doing?" Answer: Something reporters did not understand very well. I am utilizing multifaceted learning technologies to foster individualized learning plans by creating the small-class environment in large classes. One of my tools is a program known as SAGrader.

SAGrader is the antithesis of outsourcing; it is the ultimate insourcing to the teacher. No TA inter-rater reliability worries—unless you want to do that. The program does not just look for blind key words; it is much more complex than that. You can respond in real time, delay the response, or not respond at all and set "autoresponse." Typical automatic response is in seconds. The program provides you with choice and opportunity.

There is more interaction going on in my classes now than ever before, inside lecture and out. You can see exactly why and when students don't understand, and you can use it to help them learn during the next class or right away if you desire. Students will come into the class after an assignment and beg to ask questions about it. Can you imagine? Lively discussion with 450! Sometimes they immediately send an e-mail. The program allows my students to write the answers/essays, solve problems, and think critically all by my design, and then I can see all the answers they have provided… thousands of them, if I want to. As an added bonus, the students can challenge any answer, so there is feedback between student and teacher. I use protocols for feedback and challenges because you need a bit of air traffic control, but it is easy to master. The feedback can be "grouped" for those with common issues to make the response time very rapid, yet only be seen by each individual.

The writing that my students do in SAGrader is not a substitute for the ways in which writing professors teach students, and I am not advocating that. I teach biology. My students have a different format that includes a specific kind of introduction and sections for methods and materials, yet I use this program in a hundred different ways and still counting. I saw my proctored, in-class test grades increase 12.5 percent in a freshman class using SAGrader. I did not ever expect a bonus that large. I can see when my students can't spell words or write sentences. I carefully address those issues. I am talking to the writing professors. I ask their advice about non-threatening ways to address some of the issues, like spelling "mirror" as "mere." And yes, the inter-rater reliability is higher than using multiple TAs on the same rubric.

Some other teachers at UCF are thinking about using SAGrader. Each faculty member decides what the appropriate integration is for his or her subject and discipline. This is something that you do one step at a time, very carefully, and with verification. If you want to discuss this topic, I will be happy to talk with you. The developers of the program are really helpful. They are also professors that love to teach. They use it themselves to foster student practice and to stimulate learning and critical thinking. They have years of experience.

And yes… This is after all the texting generation. I see you = I c u. Many students have not been even marginal writers in the traditional sense. Some students do not have the expectation that activities such as writing and problem solving will go on in large classes, and they hoped to avoid those activities, but R2-D2 is not involved.

Oops, got to go now. I just got an e-mail. One of my students is asking me if I will reopen the text and responses to a genetics SAGrader assignment because they want to study. Operative words: "want to study" using SAGrader! No robots, no outsourcing, just the teacher interacting with the students and many more opportunities to create teachable moments.

2011 Winter Conference
Please consider participating in the FCTL 2011 Winter Faculty Development Conference. This event focuses on community building and interdisciplinary collaboration. To access the Request for Proposals, go to the FCTL website.

Challenges of Teaching Technical Writing
Patricia Weinstein

Pat Weinstein is Assistant Professor in the College of Nursing where she teaches undergraduate Nursing Care of the Adult and Nursing Research. Her research interests are autoimmune diseases and prevention of disease-related organ damage. Pat has been a member of the College of Nursing faculty since 2009.

There are some who would argue, based upon the Institute of Medicine's report on medical errors, *To Err Is Human* (2000), that writing skills are more important among nurses than other professionals because individuals' health and safety depend in part upon accurate written communication. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing recognizes communication among healthcare professionals as an essential competency of baccalaureate nursing education and recommends using "writing intensive assignments to promote reflection, insight, and integration of ideas across disciplines and courses" (AACN, 2008). Nurse educators have long recognized the importance of developing writing skills and have endorsed Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) initiatives in schools of nursing across the country not only to improve students' communication skills, but also to promote critical thinking.

Students entering the UCF College of Nursing have satisfied all university general education requirements, including composition courses, and are given advanced writing assignments throughout their nursing program. Some of the assignments, such as reflective writing and journaling, are similar in style to writing assignments they have had in non-nursing courses. However, students also are presented with assignments that require a new type of writing—technical writing. Technical writing conveys specific information about a technical or scientific subject to a specific audience for a specific purpose (Markel, 2010). It employs scientific language conventions characterized by clear, accurate, and concise but comprehensive prose abundant with symbols and abbreviations particular to medicine.

Most students entering the College of Nursing have had minimal experience with technical writing. In prerequisite science courses that do require inquiry-based lab reports, those assignments bear little resemblance to the progress notes, health interviews, analyses of health policies, critiques of research reports, and reviews of the literature that students now are assigned. For many students, this new style of writing poses a challenge. It poses a challenge to teachers, too, who are responsible not only for grading those assignments in classes with 40 or more students, but also teaching technical writing.

Nursing faculty members have implemented strategies to facilitate the acquisition of technical writing skills. Technical writing assignments are integrated throughout the curriculum, progressing in scope and complexity as the student advances through the program. Assignments are aligned with clinical activities so that students have something authentic as well as meaningful to write about. There are opportunities to share their writing with other students and instructors through peer-reviewed assignments and poster presentations. Nursing students who participate in the Honors in the Major undergraduate research program have the opportunity to write about a scientific idea of their own.

Over the past year, College of Nursing faculty members have collaborated with Dr. Elizabeth Wardle, Director of Writing Outreach Programs, on developing innovative and time-saving strategies to facilitate the acquisition of writing skills. One result of that collaboration was a pilot project undertaken by Dr. Vicki Loerzel [see following article by Dr. Vicki Loerzel]. The purpose of the project was to provide assistance to students as they wrote their critique of a research report in an online nursing research course. A dedicated tutor from the Writing Center was embedded in the course. Tutoring sessions were conducted online via Adobe Connect. Dr. Loerzel provided assignment requirements to the tutor and was accessible to the tutor if any questions arose. The tutor sent documentation of the writing consultations with students to Dr. Loerzel, who then provided feedback to the tutor on the sessions with the students. As a result, the tutor was able to provide consistent feedback to students. Student priorities were refocused from just APA formatting to broader writing skills. The impacts, described in Dr. Loerzel's article, were positive. A potential benefit of embedded writing tutors, not always noted by faculty, is a reduction in time instructors spend grading papers that are well written.

Teaching writing skills is the responsibility of the entire academic community. The College of Nursing is committed to developing creative but authentic technical writing assignments and innovative methods to implement them throughout the curriculum, and thus plans to continue to work with faculty in the Department of Writing and Rhetoric and WAC to accomplish those ends. We also welcome hearing from other faculty who have found engaging ways to promote acquisition of technical writing skills in their students.

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Experience with an Embedded Writing Tutor in Nursing Research
Vicki Loerzel

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One of the greatest challenges we face in nursing is helping our students go from memorizing information to analyzing and synthesizing information.   As a discipline, we have shifted our practice from doing things by habit to examining the evidence that supports our actions and using the best evidence to improve the health and well-being of our clients within our practice setting.   Not only do nursing students need to know that research exists and where to find it, they also need to know how to evaluate research and determine if a study has enough merit to consider using it in practice. One of the most challenging assignments at the undergraduate level in the nursing curriculum is writing a critique of a nursing research article. This exercise teaches them to think more critically about the research they may use to support their clinical practice or to answer clinical questions. However, this assignment has been frustrating for students and faculty due to the high level of writing required to adequately demonstrate their knowledge of research and to support their conclusions about the quality of the research they are reviewing. Although the University Writing Center has always been available to students, it has been underutilized by students in the online environment.

As my colleague Dr. Patricia Weinstein has noted above, during the spring semester of 2011, faculty in the College of Nursing collaborated with the University Writing Center and the new Writing Across the Curriculum program to pilot embedding a writing tutor directly into an online nursing research course.   Although students were informed that they could meet with the writing tutor at any time during the semester to explore ways to improve their writing in the course, students waited to seek help until they began to work on the research critique assignment. Students were given the option to make an appointment and send the tutor their paper in advance for review. Appointments took place in Adobe Connect videoconferences and students were offered five extra credit points if they met with the tutor. In preparation, the tutor was provided a copy of the assignment and de-identified examples of an exemplary research critique and another critique that would have benefitted from writing help. Since the tutor was naive to the assignment, the tutor and the faculty met to discuss assignment expectations and to review key concepts that should be addressed in the paper.   The tutor and faculty having open communication throughout the semester was key to the success of this project.

Initially, several students met with the tutor to receive feedback on APA formatting, which constituted only a small proportion of the assignment grade.   In response, consultations were refocused to concentrate on providing feedback to students regarding the papers' focus, clarity, organization, follow through of ideas, support of assertions, and general writing style.   Thirteen out of 40 students took advantage of the support provided by the writing tutor for the research critique. Outcomes from the pilot program indicated that student grades on the research critique improved 10 points when compared to the mean score for the assignment from the previous three semesters. Feedback about the use of the tutor was provided by an anonymous survey and was largely positive. Students appreciated the tutor's feedback and believed that the suggestions they incorporated into their final paper improved their grade. The few negative comments involved the use of the technology. While this was a successful pilot, some limitations were noted. Unfortunately, some students do not have a solid foundation in the mechanics of the English language, and the tutor could not solve these fundamental issues. Additionally, some students who could have used help with their writing chose not to access the tutor. Funding was not available to make this a mandatory requirement for the paper.

Writing continues to be a challenge for many students throughout the nursing programs. The College of Nursing will continue to partner with the University Writing Center and the Writing Across the Curriculum program to address these challenges and find ways to improve the writing skills of our nursing students.

Designing and Facilitating Courses as Communities of Practice

Naim Kapucu

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Learning is a continuing social action that takes place through interactions with the environment and other individuals. Forming communities of practice provides participants with an environment that combines knowledge and practice and the opportunity to learn through relationships with their peers and practitioners in the community. This short essay for the *Faculty Focus* explores the classroom as a community of practice and examines the role classroom activities have on students' collaborative learning. The essay uses a graduate-level public administration course as a case.

The classroom activities in this course were designed to enhance peer interaction in the classroom and to facilitate learning by balancing theory and practice. The results of two separate surveys conducted at the begining and end of the term indicate that providing environments that blend practice with classroom knowledge lead to highly positive outcomes. Activities that foster peer interaction result in a dramatic increase in friendship relations among students and increase in collaborative learning. The results of the study will be published in the *Journal of Public Affairs Education* in 2012.

Communities of practice are formed by people of similar concerns with the aim of addressing these concerns and solving problems. Communities of practice assume that engagement in one's social life is the fundamental process by which students learn in professional degree programs. Philosopher John Dewey emphasized that learning can only occur in the context of engaged networks of relationships. In every course I teach, I do encourage students to collaborate in well-structured contexts that focus on student learning and activities designed with this expectation in mind. Students are encouraged to form and work in groups, complete their assignments through a team effort, work with community partners, and interact with each other for other class activities. Besides traditional classroom environments, there are now new information technologies available, such as social networking and online teaching platforms, that can provide additional venues for teaching and learning as well as networking and relationship-building among students, community members, and faculty. These networks can play a significant role in disseminating knowledge among the participants of the communities of practice.

I use the classroom environment as an example of a community of practice. A master-level course on emergency and crisis management was developed and designed to enhance students' understanding of these issues and build the analytical and practical skills needed to perform effectively in emergency management related positions. The focus of the delivery system of the class is interactive learning. Lectures, case presentations, practitioner guest speakers, group discussions, and presentations that actively involve students were included in the course. When possible, the processes of learning activities included comprehensive discussions not only on "what" was learned, but also the "so what" questions, which helped to complete the learning cycle.

Students are usually assigned to read an article on network building and management before they come to the first class. The importance of relationship building is emphasized in the first class and throughout the term. One of the most important factors to promote collaboration and, thus, learning within communities of practice is the all-inclusive ice-breaking activity that aims at establishing closer relationships. Ice-breaking activities specifically create an environment of better understanding and greater awareness of others' goals and motives for participation. One such activity utilized in the course is the self-introduction of students to other peers, which requires every student to remember the names of the students in the class. In addition, students are asked to introduce themselves on the web-based course system with a paragraph about themselves and their expectations from the course. Every student in the class is required to share an unusual fact about themselves in the introduction posting on

Webcourses@UCF. This provides a more striking picture of the students' identities and helps to establish remembrance through a non-conventional method. The formation of project groups is the next stage of ice-breaking activities in which students establish relevance and try to find a midpoint based on class discussion to determine the term project goal. The main contribution of this set of activities to the notion of communities of practice is that participants break the borders separating each other, opening space for deliberate discussion around issues of importance.

The course also focuses on the importance of real-world examples. Practitioners from the emergency and crisis management field are invited to class for a discussion pertaining to their insights and firsthand experience. Including guest lecturers has been an effective way to promote nonconventional discussion in class supported by real-world examples. Specifically in terms of communities of practice, this approach presents an opportunity to substantiate or supplement in-class activities and propositions with outsider expertise. This helps link the formal setting of education with the informal setting of practitioners, which eliminates the gaps in solutions enlisted in term projects.

The class environment can be designed in a way that promotes learning through social interaction. Social interaction in class should be facilitated and directed toward the deliberate actions of collaboration, which in turn result in learning. It is also important to have a course design that reflects both the theoretical and practical insights of the field taught. To me, having a balanced design of theory versus practice as well as lecturing versus discussion-based teaching is an essential part of presenting the classroom environment as a community of practice. Classroom activities give students the opportunity to become embedded in a learning environment consisting of peers and professionals. Tailoring similar practices to different classroom settings would enable students of different courses and disciplines to learn from their peers and connect classroom knowledge with real world examples.

Does Anyone Want to Share? Notes from the Summer 2011 Faculty Writing Workshop
Jeffrey Kaplan

Jeffrey S. Kaplan is Associate Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning Principles in the College of Education and an FCTL Advisory Board Member. He is the Director of the National Writing Project at UCF, Chapter Counselor for Kappa Delta Pi, and Associate Faculty Fellow for the UCF Academy for Teaching, Learning and Leadership.

"Does anyone want to share?" Silence fell across the room. The scene is the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL) and the occasion is a group of faculty members from across the university who have come together to do what faculty members do well – sit and talk about writing.

"Does anyone want to share?" Again, silence falls across the room. The setting is the Summer 2011 Workshop – Writing for Publication (conducted by Dr. Anna Jones) and the focus of this gathering is faculty members who are eager to share in the common joys and frustrations that come with writing for publication.
"Anyone?" Anna looks plaintively around the room and finally, someone says, "I will!" and quickly we are off and running. Nothing breaks the ice faster than a brave soul willing to bare all – or at least the first draft of a piece they are developing for publication.

And so we shared. This past summer, I participated in a terrific FCTL workshop, designed to help faculty shape their manuscripts into pieces worthy of consideration for professional journals. On-line and in person, we shared, laughed, and thought hard about word choice, syntax, and more importantly, meaning. What are you trying to say? How are you saying it? Are you being clear? Are you using the right words? The right phrases? The right opening? Are your sentences too long? Too short? Too dense? Too obscure? And what about your voice? Your style? Your content? Your sources?

For after all, we were presenting our manuscripts – in small and large groups – and in so doing, acting as editors and peer reviewers, asking ourselves, "Is this ready for publication?" And as we shared, we learned firsthand what it is like to share a manuscript with someone who is outside our discipline. For example, to share a piece on the importance of teaching young adult literature to someone who teaches biology. Or a manuscript on the results of a chemical experiment with a

person whose primary interest is art history.

This, by itself, can be most instructive. Teaching, by its very nature, can be a very isolating experience. You teach, you write, you share with colleagues, often at a distance, but rarely do we come together as instructors of diverse disciplines and share not only information about rules and regulations that drive the governance of a university, but the ideas and values that govern our very existence as teachers and researchers and scholars.

This summer's faculty workshop about writing for publication did just that and more. With the lure of a modest stipend and the chance to convene in a relaxed setting, faculty from across the campus assembled to share and engage in extended discussions our writing, and more importantly, about our roles as teachers, as scholars, as academics and as eager and erstwhile writers who desire, above all, to share our findings and understandings both in-person and in-publication. For in our sharing, we learned to refine our ideas (or at least, we tried) and we re-thought what we were writing so as to define ourselves before complete strangers.

Nothing could be more invigorating. I found myself re-thinking not only my passions – about teaching and learning and educating young people about the value of young adult literature – but, how best to share my knowledge with individuals who might not have given my passion a second thought. This – in and of itself – was probably the most instructive moment for me in this workshop. I learned to re-think what I was doing. I learned to self-examine my ideas and my writing- for I so wanted to share my knowledge and understanding of young adult literature with a group of individuals who shared different passions and interests. Yet, still, I learned (something I knew instinctively) that we all had the same thing in common – a love of learning, a desire to publish, and a fondness for language.

Armed with our own excuses as to why we were not as prolific as we liked, we managed to find time in our daily lives to unpack our reasons and explain our hesitancy. We talked of busy schedules and hurried lunches, of babysitters and house repairs, and of the prickly, but necessary issues of time management, mission statements, and personal objectives. We left our insecurities at the door and discussed what it means to be a teacher at a university – where often life's daily necessities require inventive solutions to accomplish meaningful and productive scholarship. The core of our workshop was essentially to mimic the work of Peter Elbow, a renowned teacher of writing whose approach to teaching writing is to turn the focus towards encouraging ways of developing confidence and inspiration. By thinking of writing as similar to 'cooking,' Elbow urges all to think of the writing

process as something that 'bubbles to the surface' and only when sharing with others do writers start to refine their writing and begin to find their voice.

The ultimate objective of this workshop was to produce a viable piece of scholarship worthy of publication. I am happy to report that I succeeded – submitting chapters for an edited collection on young adult literature and an article for a referred publication about the same. And, I have to thank - in no small part – the faculty of this summer workshop who shared their knowledge, guidance and good-natured 'ribbing' as they gently pushed all of us to succeed. For after all, writing is sharing – and what better way to start than in your own backyard?

I urge you to participate in the many opportunities provided by the Faculty Center to share your writing – both at the weekly faculty writing sessions and in the many workshops offered by the center – where one often hears the repeated refrain, "Does anyone want to share?"

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Submissions

The *Faculty Focus* is a publication for all instructors at the University of Central Florida. This includes full-time and part-time faculty and teaching assistants at all UCF campuses. Its purpose is to provide an exchange of ideas on teaching and learning for the university's community of teachers and scholars. It is envisioned that this publication will inspire more dialogue among faculty whether in hallway discussions, departmental meetings, or in written articles. This represents an opportunity for faculty members to reach their peers throughout the growing UCF community. The *Faculty Focus* invites you to contribute your ideas on teaching and learning in a short essay.

See the guidelines for submission online at <http://www.fctl.ucf.edu/Publications/FacultyFocus/submission.php>. Please send your submissions to fctl@ucf.edu.

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