

Writing Across the Curriculum at the Community Colleges: Beating the Odds

Overcoming Obstacles: How WID Benefits Community College Students and Faculty

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Abstract: While those teaching and learning at community colleges face challenges unique to their institutions, this article demonstrates how the theoretical concepts at the heart of WID programs—incorporating writing across all disciplines, writing-to-learn rather than learning-to-write exercises, low- and high-stakes writing assignments, and transparent rubrics—are particularly well suited to the needs of community college students and faculty members. It details a research assignment developed for an ENG 101 class as well as a film created about the project, addressing the successes and challenges of incorporating WID pedagogy into the community college classroom.

Introduction

Like many faculty members at community colleges, I am always looking for ways to improve my skills in the classroom. For many of us, teaching is considered our primary responsibility, making the pressure to perform well even greater. While a variety of professional development opportunities may be available to us, our busy schedules often make them difficult to pursue. In addition, since community college students and faculty face challenges unique to their institutions, not all of these approaches are as well suited to our needs as they might be. After participating in a yearlong Writing in the Disciplines (WID) seminar, I have found that WID principles can be especially useful in meeting these unique challenges. In this essay, I share my experience using WID in an English 101: Introduction to Composition I class at LaGuardia Community College with the hope that it can demonstrate how this pedagogy can be of particular benefit to community college students and faculty.

At LaGuardia, faculty members participating in WID are organized into small groups led by a program coordinator and assisted by two Writing Fellows—graduate students in various disciplines, who help lead bi-weekly meetings, create content for large group seminars, and work one-on-one with faculty members. I value the work I did so much that I am now a WID program coordinator, assisting other faculty members as they integrate these ideas into their classes. Though I write here of my experience using WID to teach English, these principles are applicable to any discipline.

When teaching English 101, I soon realized that many of my students have never written a formal research essay before. Lacking experience with this sort of discourse, students are often fearful of and resistant to writing practice. To address this issue, I created and revised a scaffolded assignment for a research essay on graffiti, breaking the process down into six stages, including informal writings, oral presentations, peer review workshops, and multiple essay drafts.

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As I developed this assignment, the WID Writing Fellows assigned to my group, Karen Gregory and Thomas Meacham, asked if they could create a film about the process. At first I was concerned about dedicating precious class time to the project, not to mention the inevitable infringement on my own time that would otherwise be spent grading essays and preparing lessons. Despite this hesitation, I agreed. I soon discovered that the film project reinforced many of the WID principles already incorporated into my syllabus, enhancing learning for students and allowing them to reflect on both the writing process and what they were writing about. It allowed me to reflect, as well, and forced me to be incredibly clear about my goals for each stage of the essay.

WID Principles

When conducting writing-across-the-curriculum workshops, Toby Fulwiler (2002) shares with participants the three key components "crucial to developing a truly interdisciplinary writing program. We wanted teachers to understand (1) that the act of composing a piece of writing is a complex intellectual process; (2) that writing is a mode of learning as well as communicating; and (3) that people have trouble writing for a variety of reasons; no quick fixes will 'solve' everybody's writing problem" (p. 345). National WID programs propose that using writing as a learning tool can help students improve their critical thinking skills, enhance student-centered learning opportunities, and strengthen student writing. WID suggests that writing be required in all classes, not just those that purport to teach writing. As John C. Bean (2001) writes in *Engaging Ideas*, his "owner's manual" to incorporating writing across the disciplines concepts into college classrooms, "The underlying premise is that writing is closely linked with thinking and that in presenting students with significant problems to write about—and in creating an environment that demands their best writing—we can promote their general cognitive and intellectual growth. When we make students struggle with their writing, we are making them struggle with thought itself" (p. xiii). In other words, expressing thoughts through writing is integral to learning in every discipline.

Within this framework, WID programs offer specific guidelines to assist faculty in creating effective learning tools that lead students to achieve academic success. These include the use of low- and high-stakes writings, writing-to-learn exercises, collaborative learning groups, and staged writing assignments to encourage writing as process, all using transparent grading rubrics that are shared with students. Given the fact that community college faculty members often teach 4 or 5 classes each semester, time and resource constraints are serious considerations. However, using WID concepts in your teaching can maximize the amount of learning that occurs within a limited amount of time, allowing students to write, think, and learn during class hours, and modeling at-home study behaviors that can make class preparation more efficient and effective.

Benefits for Students

Community college classrooms host a wide range of academically, culturally, and economically diverse students. Students often juggle classes with employment and care-giving duties. Many are new to college and lack experience with academic discourse. Others are second language learners, struggling with basic sentence and paragraph issues. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (n.d. & 2009), 39% of community college students are the first generation in their families to attend college. 60% are enrolled part time, 36% are minorities, 17% are single parents, and almost half receive financial aid of some kind. Faculty members must keep these and other challenges in mind as they develop their course materials. WID principles such as introducing students to the language and discourse specific to each discipline; reinforcing the importance of writing and critical thinking skills in all disciplines; using low-stakes writing assignments; and developing collaborative learning assignments, including those that incorporate peer review, can help. All of these methods help students develop into active learners who understand the benefits of writing as process and are more engaged with the course material.

Since community college students are often first time college goers with little or no "college knowledge," WID can introduce them to the rigors of academic discourse, both within their specific discipline and within academia as a whole. Eleanor Kutz (2004) describes this movement from "outsiderness" to "insiderness" as an important one for students hoping to succeed in college. Achieving "insider" status can also relieve anxiety and lack of confidence, two common barriers to student success. Study habits, note-taking, and time management skills have often not been integrated into their lives and many lack a culture of learning that is necessary for college success. By teaching writing as process, WID helps initiate students into the world of college discourse gradually rather than expecting them to produce a perfectly thought-out, perfectly crafted piece of writing all at once. Students are then free to discover what they want to write as they learn, rather than writing what they already know.

Doing so benefits students because, as Kutz (2004) writes, they "need to have a sense of what the terrain they are attempting to traverse is like, why it has the shape it does (in relationship to the goals of the discipline and the purposes of sequenced courses within its typical course of study), and how those pursuing knowledge within the discipline write and think about their work" (p. 79). WID-designed assignments offer a sense of this terrain for community college students, many of whom have not had access to the larger goals of an academic discipline before. WID reinforces the notion that "writing is both a process of doing critical thinking and a product communicating the results of critical thinking" (Bean, 2001, p. 3). Effective oral and written communication skills are incredibly important to success in all academic fields, as well as in any workplace. Writing can also help students learn what they think rather than merely being a representation of what they already know. Creating writing assignments in all disciplines allows students to recognize the value of clear writing and its connection to their future success, whether at a four-year college or in the professional world.

WID uses low-stakes writing and writing-to-learn assignments in particular to encourage students to see writing as a process, allowing them to practice and improve their thinking and writing skills. Peter Elbow (1997) defines low-stakes writing as "frequent informal assignments designed to get students to reflect on what they are learning from discussions, readings, lectures, and their own thinking—assignments that count for credit but that individually, don't bear *heavily* on the final course grade" (p. 128). Using minimal grading for these frequent writings allows us to "ask students to write far more than if we had to grade everything carefully. We get to ask them to think actively about far *more* of the course material. They have to answer the questions, get their thoughts in writing—yet they don't have to worry so much about whether they are writing in the way that the teacher likes or saying what the teacher agrees with" (p. 128). To allay the fear that students do not take these assignments seriously, a point or percentage value can be attached to the writings as a whole. For example, I assign 10 informal writings over the course of a semester. Each is worth 10 points and together they are worth 20% of the final grade. The fact that each writing is worth just 10 points maintains the benefits of doing low-stakes work, while the awareness that these writings will contribute to their GPAs encourages students to put real effort into their responses. In addition, when developed thoughtfully, multiple low-stakes writing assignments can be revised and edited to create the basis for a high-stakes essay later on in the semester, making the process more valuable for students, something they recognize early on.

Collaborative work is key to this process as it allows students to build a sense of community as they generate ideas, test theories, and draw conclusions about the course material on their own. These are important steps to facilitating student-centered learning and generating independent thinkers in the classroom. They also enable faculty members to pair weaker students with those who are more proficient, allowing them to learn from one another. According to Bean (2001), these activities can "transform students from passive to active learners, deepening their understanding of subject matter while helping them learn the thinking processes of the discipline" (p. xi). This transformation is especially dramatic for educationally underprepared students. Peer review is an important element of collaborative work, helping to strengthen student commitment to the work being done in class as it moves them towards "insider" status. Finally, clear grading

rubrics that are shared with students demystify the grading process and can serve as maps to a course's terrain, providing an overview of where students are and where they need to be as thinkers and writers.

Benefits for Faculty

We can see the many ways in which WID can benefit community college students, but it can benefit faculty members, as well. By promoting the use of regular writing-to-learn exercises, WID can help faculty members determine where each student is in his/her thinking and how effectively he/she expresses that thinking at various points during the semester. Allowing students to produce their writing with assistance over time—while making adjustments at each stage—improves the quality of student work. This can make grading easier and less time-consuming. As we know, time is an especially precious resource for community college faculty members, both full- and part-time. The Modern Language Association (2006) Committee on Community Colleges reports that

the teaching load at a two-year college is generally heavier than at a four-year institution. Fifteen units a semester is common, which translates into about...five English courses a semester. Class sizes may also be larger than average. According to the 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty, faculty members at public community colleges spend an average of 18.1 hours a week teaching and have 431 contact hours (the number of hours teaching multiplied by the total number of students enrolled in courses) a week, as opposed to an average of only 8.1 hours teaching and 287 contact hours a week for faculty members at public doctoral institutions. (Cataldi, Bradburn, & Fahimi, p. 31)

Those on the tenure track must teach heavy course loads, contend with large class sizes, perform required college service, and produce their own writing in an effort to present and publish their work. For adjuncts, the constraints can be even greater as they lack job security, employment benefits, even office space and equipment, and must often juggle numerous teaching assignments at various institutions to make financial ends meet.

The good news is that the same WID principles that support student success—use of low-stakes writing exercises; developing collaborative learning assignments, including peer review; sharing transparent rubrics; and writing clear assignment prompts—can also support faculty members in their efforts by helping to create active, student-centered classrooms, reaching students with different preparation levels, preventing plagiarism, and making it possible for the faculty member to spend more time meeting with students and preparing for class. It can also assist us as we struggle with our own writing.

Since many low-stakes assignments can receive just a check mark, time spent grading is often reduced dramatically. Elbow (1997) reminds us "Faculty members often don't make any comments at all on this writing. Thus the most obvious advantage of minimal grading is simplicity. It's much less onerous to read lots of student writing when the grade is quick and easy to give and we don't have to comment" (p. 128). This allows us to provide students with important feedback without causing an undue burden on the faculty member's time. It can also ensure that faculty members provide more useful feedback on student writing while lessening the burden of having to read and grade everything each student writes. In fact, Bean (2001) suggests that for those who already incorporate some sort of writing in their courses, following WID principles, "might reduce the total time they spend on student writing while simultaneously making that time more rewarding for themselves and more productive for their students" (p. 10), a welcome respite for any overworked faculty member facing a tall stack of papers.

Collaborative learning can benefit faculty by creating a richer learning environment, helping to develop a sense of community within the classroom, and reminding students that they are responsible for their own education. When faculty members guide them as they work independently in small groups, students can be

more engaged and committed to their work. This can also help discourage plagiarism, which is often the result of desperation in the face of a looming deadline or confusion as to what an assignment requires.

Creating and sharing clear writing prompts and transparent rubrics allows for better communication between students and faculty and creates guidelines that can make grading simpler. This encourages faculty members to articulate their learning goals and expectations for each assignment, making it easier for students to meet those goals and produce better work. It also makes it easier for faculty members to determine whether or not the goals of each assignment have been met. Our comments on student writing become more targeted, allowing us to do as Fulwiler (2002) recommends: "Comment critically on one item at a time" and "Be specific when you comment on a problem" (p. 355-356). Faculty feedback not only takes less time to produce, its positive effect is heightened. Producing clear directions and specific goals makes it easier for students to do the work themselves, as does requiring that students submit all stages of a high-stakes assignment.

An added bonus for faculty members is that WID concepts are "about posing problems, generating and exploring ideas, focusing and organizing, giving and receiving peer reviews of drafts, and revising for readers—[concepts that] can be applied to one's own scholarly and professional writing as well as to the writing of students" (Bean, 2001, p. xiv). This can be useful as we research, draft, and revise our own writing. Of course the process of WID training is itself enormously helpful to faculty members, in part because it uses its own principles.

Participants produce low- and high-stakes writing, practice critical thinking skills, work collaboratively with colleagues, follow clear guidelines, and have plenty of room to redraft and revise what we produce. This provides the theoretical background for WID as it allows us to experience the benefits of these theories in action. It also offers an opportunity to work with faculty members from various disciplines as we develop course materials. These materials are developed during one semester, with feedback and support offered by the group. We then implement and assess those materials over the course of the following semester, allowing room for adjustments as we go.

Graffiti Research Assignment

As a WID participant in 2008-2009, I developed and revised a writing process for a research essay on graffiti, a topic chosen for its inherent relevance to the lives of my students. As Rochylin Vargas, a highly motivated former student of mine, admits, "Let's face it, there are a few parts of *The Writing Process* that will make you want to pull your hair out...Why not make it interesting by choosing a topic that can teach you something that goes beyond the classroom?" (personal communication, February 26, 2010). I was aided by feedback provided by my WID small group leader, Dr. James Wilson, the two Writing Fellows assigned to my group, and my fellow participants. In an effort to utilize the WID principles described above, I assigned both low- and high-stakes assignments, breaking the essay writing process down into the six stages detailed below. I encouraged students to adhere to the process by requiring that they complete each of the six stages in order to receive a passing grade on the essay. As Bean (2001) writes, "Many of our students, unless we establish a classroom environment that alters their behavior, write their papers too quickly and submit to us what are essentially first drafts. When students do their writing the night before a paper is due, they insulate themselves from the intellectual struggle of revision where the true craft of writing is learned" (p. xiii). For even the most adept students, taking the time to think through their research topic, choose and analyze their sources, and find the most effective way to express their point of view will naturally produce stronger essays and the higher grades students so often seek.

Stage One of my essay process, an in-class informal writing that asks students how they feel about graffiti and why, encourages them to articulate their thoughts on the topic in writing before doing any research. Strong feelings are immediately expressed. Graffiti is defined alternatively as an important form of expression and creativity for socio-economically disadvantaged youths, a way to publicize and promote

gang activity, a dirty nuisance, and a tourist attraction. This writing and the discussion it produces raise many of the key issues I want students to address in their research on the topic. Students who hate graffiti and what it represents are confronted with the possibility that it may have unconsidered benefits. At the same time, those who appreciate it as an art form or perhaps have even participated in graffiti making in their own neighborhoods, must acknowledge the negative impact it can have on communities. The critical thinking process has begun.

The fact that this writing is not graded (it is not even collected, students read their ideas aloud to generate discussion), allows opinions to be expressed and dissected in a low-stakes situation, eliminating the anxiety over grammar and sentence structure that many students say inhibits their ability to write. It also gives them room to change their minds, to realize that just because something is written down it is not necessarily set in stone. As Bean (2001) writes, "Exploratory writing records the actual process of critical thinking while simultaneously driving it forward. Perhaps more than any other instructional tool, exploratory writing transforms the way students study for a course because it can make active critical thinking part of each day's homework" (p. 6). Assignments like this one can therefore help create more active, better-prepared students even as they practice their writing. While some students resist changing their minds at first, they soon realize that critical thinkers must acknowledge different perspectives and that changing one's mind based on new or newly considered evidence signifies development in thinking rather than a failure in thinking. Ms. Vargas, for example, began the semester convinced that graffiti is illegal, ugly, and just plain wrong. By the end of our research and discussions, she was able to accept that graffiti can have artistic value and she produced a nuanced analysis of a work of graffiti as a representation of creation and identity (see the film, *Making Your Mark: Creating A Staged Assignment*, to hear her describe this transformation in her own words). As a result of this process, students begin to feel more like academic "insiders".

Another example of such an assignment is a handout I give students before our class field trip to 5Pointz, a legal graffiti art space in Queens, New York. I ask students to record their impressions of the space in writing with three low-stakes prompts: 1) What is your initial reaction upon entering the site? 2) Find a work of graffiti that you especially like/dislike and describe it in detail. 3) Spend ten minutes freewriting about your chosen work of graffiti. Klara Kang, a former student in this class, recorded feeling "repulsed by graffiti because...it represented hatred and racial discrimination due to the nature of graffiti in the Czech Republic," where she grew up. Upon reflection, however, she wrote that she "was especially intrigued by our trip to 5Pointz, which truly opened my eyes and broadened my perspective on graffiti. I found the free-write we were asked to do on the spot most helpful because it captured my first impression that would otherwise have been distorted if I had had time to ponder the topic longer" (personal communication, January 29, 2010). Through this low-stakes assignment, Kang and her fellow students realize the importance of recording and reviewing their initial thoughts. They also learn that fieldwork—such as this site visit—is a legitimate form of research.

After distributing several other resources related to the topic, Stage Two of the assignment asks students to choose a focus for their formal essays. Having already discussed and debated the issues, many students find choosing a topic—often the most difficult part of any essay assignment—to be fairly straightforward. Of course, some are confused by the discussion, as their pre-set notions of graffiti have been tested, but this is exactly what I hope to achieve in terms of heightening their critical thinking skills. Examining graffiti from so many angles helps those students who are unsure of where their feelings come from articulate them in a clearer way. Even if others continue to disagree, each student comes to understand his/her stance and is able to defend it from detractors using logic and research.

Stage Three asks students to review the work done for Stages One and Two and create an outline for their research essays. Since we have already done a significant amount of research as a class, students feel prepared to draft a working thesis statement and cite at least three main points that support that thesis. Once again, I stress the idea of writing as process, reminding students that their thesis statements may change or develop as they continue to do research. Having some direction is enormously helpful, however, especially

for a topic as broad as graffiti. Students who want to focus on graffiti's relationship to hip hop culture, for example, are able to hone in on sources such as Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop, Won't Stop* or the film *Style Wars*. Those more interested in the cost of graffiti to New York City taxpayers can pore through former New York City Mayor Ed Koch's papers housed in the LaGuardia and Wagner Archives to learn about the rampant subway graffiti in the 1970s and 80s. Still others can focus on the commercial success achieved by graffiti artists from Keith Haring to ESPO to Shepard Fairey.

Students are now ready for Stage Four: doing research to support their working thesis statements. All English 101 classes at LaGuardia attend a library orientation to introduce and review research methods. I provide the librarian with a copy of the research assignment so that the lesson can be tailored to our topic. Students are able to search graffiti-related resources as a class before being asked to replicate that search on their own. I have also developed a worksheet that asks students to track and record their research process. This must be handed in and, like all informal writings, is given either a check (if complete and submitted on time) or a zero (if incomplete or excessively late), allowing me to quickly gauge how successful student research efforts are and identify any students who may be struggling or falling behind schedule. I can then meet with those students and review how to find and evaluate appropriate sources early in the process.

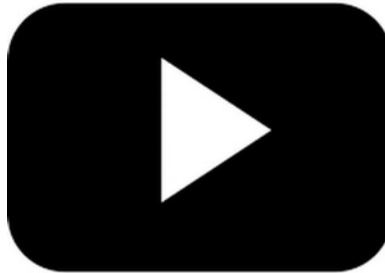
Having done all this, Stage Five asks students to write a first draft and prepare an oral presentation for the class. At this point of the semester, the class has already worked together in various small groups, establishing a sense of a community that makes this stage more manageable for those who are anxious about speaking in public. Merely using the words "first draft" can alleviate some of the stress students attach to writing what for many is their first college-level essay. This is clearly labeled a "first" effort, not something that must be done perfectly. The word "draft" assures them that they can and should plan to make changes, that there's still time to improve their work after receiving feedback from their fellow classmates and from me. Each student presents his/her working thesis statement to the class, previews the research sources found, and explains how those sources help support the thesis statement. This last part I find to be key when pushing students to find not just any sources, but relevant and appropriate sources. As students share their work, members of the class can ask for clarifications, encouraging the development of more articulate goals for the essay.

Collaborative learning principles are introduced early in the semester through small group exercises and large group discussions. Vargas recalls, "At least once a week we would partner up with the person sitting next to us or in a group of 3, 4 or 5 and learn from one another. I can't stress how efficient it was for [Dr. Pacht] to give her part as a professor and then let us go on our own and with each other and socialize and learn from each other's mistakes and accomplishments" (personal communication, February 26, 2010). These benefits are reinforced at this stage as I create peer review workshop groups in which each student reads his/her first draft aloud and receives feedback. The act of reading aloud often assists students in identifying flaws in logic or expression in their work and while many resist this at first—out of shyness or feelings of insecurity linked to their "outsider" status—sharing their writing and hearing that of their peers can be invaluable in helping them revise their essays. Each essay is workshoped twice—once as a first draft and again after revision. Before we begin, I provide guidelines delineating the rules for both readers and listeners, and some questions for them to discuss. These guidelines are especially helpful when encouraging students who may be reluctant to assume a position of expertise regarding another student's writing. I remind them that they are not looking for grammar or other structural errors, except to point out if a particular sentence is confusing or unclear. Instead they are asked to provide an informed opinion as a member of the class. By asking students to assume an advisory role in the development of the essays written by their fellow students, I hope to encourage them to see themselves as academic "insiders" who understand the discourse of the discipline as they learn to recognize the elements of successful writing.

In addition to peer review, first drafts receive written feedback from me, using a four level scale (Superior, Good, Fair, Fail) that comments on six criteria (Main Idea, Organization and Coherence, Analysis and Development, Voice, Purpose, and Audience, Incorporation of Sources, and Conventions of Standard

Written English) based on a rubric developed by members of LaGuardia's English department. This use of minimal grading for a relatively high-stakes first draft is supported by Elbow's (1997) contention that "we can make minimal grades more meaningful than conventional grades if we can tell students what they are actually weak, satisfactory, or excellent at" (p. 135). Of course, "To do so, we need...workable criteria that are easy to apply" so that "papers can be graded quickly and with no head-scratching—and in the case of large classes can even be perfunctorily checked" (p. 135). These criteria are written on the assignment handout and are discussed at length to ensure that students understand how their work will be judged. I also provide short, directed feedback on each category and on the essay as a whole. To again cite Elbow (1997), "When we spell out our criteria in public...we are making grades carry more information or meaning than they usually do, even if we give nothing but a minimal grade. All too often, grading criteria are left tacit and mysterious" (p. 136). In this case I find minimal grading to be not only less time-consuming, but, when paired with a transparent grading rubric, more informative and helpful to the students.

Stage Six asks students to revise and edit their first drafts and turn them into polished final drafts. While no draft is ever truly final, I encourage students to incorporate what they have learned during the peer review process and from my feedback to add necessary discussion, delete irrelevant sections, clarify their thesis statements, express their ideas more effectively, use their research more convincingly (by adding more sources if necessary), and proofread their work diligently so that mechanical errors do not interfere with the essay's clarity. All of the stages of this assignment were designed in an effort to enhance active student learning through the use of WID principles such as teaching writing as process, assigning low- and high-stakes writing, developing collaborative learning assignments, and facilitating peer review.



Making Your Mark

(For a high quality stream, visit <http://gallery.me.com/elfherbie#100088>.)

The Making of Making Your Mark

As mentioned, this assignment was developed and revised over several months with my WID small group. As I road tested it the following semester and reported back on the positive responses of my students, Writing Fellows Karen Gregory and Thomas Meacham approached me about filming the staged essay writing process, both in and out of the classroom. Their goal was to create a film that would

focus on the process of writing a research paper that not only addressed the stages necessary for completion, but also the students' thoughts and feelings about writing a 'high stakes' assignment. The film needed to be a helpful resource for faculty who are becoming WID certified and are actively revising their 'high' and 'low stakes' assignments as they create a writing-intensive course. Yet, the film also had to be visually interesting and informative for a potential student audience (and a very specific audience, inner city students attending an ethnically diverse community college). (Meacham, personal communication, February 2, 2010)

The film, called *Making Your Mark: Creating A Staged Assignment*, is meant to satisfy multiple purposes for multiple audiences, including current and prospective students, faculty members both within and outside of LaGuardia, staff members, and administrators. Another goal of the film project is to demonstrate how WID principles can be translated from the page and moved into the classroom. The filmmakers captured many of these ideas at work, including "student-centered strategies that not only encouraged students to voice their opinions through writing, but also challenged them to work with their peers to generate consensus building" (Meacham, personal communication, February 2, 2010). Seeing these and other strategies demonstrated and hearing from the students who participated in these activities can be enormously useful for faculty members unsure about how to apply these concepts in their own classes.

When first proposed, I worried that the film would take up too much class time, distracting students from the required course goals. I was concerned that a camera would change the dynamic of the class, chipping away at the communal comfort zone I work so hard to create. I was also selfishly protective of my own time, aware that with many other responsibilities at the college I could not afford to spread myself too thin. These same concerns can easily discourage community college faculty from attempting to incorporate WID concepts into their pedagogy. Though I was apprehensive, I immediately recognized the pedagogical potential of recording and reflecting on such a process. Gregory and Meacham eventually filmed a series of one-on-one interviews with a number of students in two of my English 101 classes, taped class workshops and discussions on the topic, and joined us on several field trips. What followed was a yearlong journey that, while difficult at times, ultimately led to an incredibly rich and engaging pedagogical experience.

Though they conceived of the project, the Writing Fellows also had reservations about the film. As Meacham admits,

I was initially concerned that having the video camera in the classroom would be disruptive to the class and perhaps increase student anxieties about the writing process. However, I found that the students seemed to be more engaged (and surprisingly nonplussed) when I recorded, and were able to effectively articulate (in personal interviews and in-class discussions) the challenges they faced and the kinds of solutions they discovered. After filming the project, I realized just how important it is to allow our students the time to reflect on the process of writing and for us as teachers to understand this process. (personal communication, February 2, 2010)

This notion of reflection is key to both the film project and to the concepts at the heart of WID programs. The principles defined by WID encourage reflection as a means of enhancing student learning. Making the film encouraged them to reflect on both the writing process and on what they were writing about. This is often particularly difficult for community college students, who lack the time and/or tools needed to reflect fully on their work. Making the film also provided a space for me to participate in the act of reflection along with my students. I found this process to be incredibly valuable, especially as I continue to refine and adapt the graffiti assignment in each subsequent semester. Because graffiti is an ever-changing part of our lives and our communities, there are always new angles that can be brought into the classroom. I have also adapted my use of workshop groups to further advance the goals of peer review. At first, I created these groups randomly, with group members changing each time the class met. I have since created groups based on students' abilities, mixing strong writers together with those whose skills are weaker. I have also created groups that are consistent throughout an entire semester, so that students can get to know each other and develop a greater sense of trust, and have recently experimented with steady workshop groups that change for each research essay assignment.

There are other challenges inherent to making this sort of film at a community college. As Gregory notes, "I wish that the video could have focused more specifically on what the students were writing and how they were translating their thoughts and feelings into words...students are really good at talking about their

experiences, but I wish we could have seen their actual writing process" (personal communication, February 4, 2010). Capturing more of the actual writing would have meant spending more time with students outside of the classroom, something that both students and the filmmakers would have found difficult. "If we had done this, the film might be of more interest to students, who could see and relate other students' writing processes" (Gregory, personal communication, February 4, 2010). As it stands, *Making Your Mark* is currently being used as a teaching and learning tool geared towards faculty members hoping to adopt and adapt WID principles into their classrooms.

Time was also a concern, not just for my students and me, but for the filmmakers, as well. Gregory recalls that when making a film, "you need much more footage than you can use and the final product is a result of hours of editing. It's a time consuming process that you're not sure is even working, until you get close to the end and can see some manifestation of your original ideas," adding, "Making things quickly, learning as you go, and often failing to see the vision manifest (or realizing the limits of your technical skill) is frustrating, but overall it was a rewarding process" (personal communication, February 4, 2010). This frustration echoes that of a student tackling a high-stakes writing assignment for the first time. It can also occur when we implement WID principles. Faculty members often don't know how students will respond to an assignment until student work is submitted. This is one reason why a staged process can be so helpful—if we see that our goals have not been communicated to students, we can adjust accordingly before the final draft is due.

Despite these concerns, the film project is a success, in large part because of the trusting, mutually respectful relationship established between the Fellows, the students, and me. I feel incredibly fortunate to have worked with Fellows who are not only talented, but also generous with their time, attentive to my needs, and scrupulous about making my students feel comfortable. When asked about making the film Kang noted, "Though I was nervous about being interviewed, that barrier was broken as soon as I met Thomas and Karen, who made the whole process seem like a friendly chit-chat" (personal communication, January 29, 2010). This low-stakes approach to the interview process is key to allowing students to express their thoughts freely, without fear of not having the "right" answer. Bean (2001) notes the importance of creating "a supportive, open classroom that values the worth and dignity of students" (p. 8). This was clearly achieved during the filmmaking process and it is an atmosphere I try to create in all of my classes. We used other WID concepts while making the film as well including brainstorming ideas, drafting our thoughts, and taping and re-taping the voiceovers, always remembering that any high-stakes assignment is best done in stages. Since its completion, the film has been screened for members of LaGuardia's English department faculty, participants of the yearlong WID seminar, and librarians looking to enhance their own support offerings for students working on research essays. It has also been shown at a City University of New York-wide conference on Writing Across the Curriculum as a demonstration of WID principles in action and an example of how Writing Fellows and faculty members can work together to enhance student success.

Conclusion

There are many obstacles inherent to teaching and learning at the community college, but WID and its ideals can help create integrated student learning and improve writing skills across the curriculum. In a two-year WID assessment completed in 2006, it was determined that "In the first year, 63% of the students writing scores improved after taking a writing intensive class compared to 39% improving without taking a writing intensive class. In the second year, the comparable numbers were 67% and 47% respectively" (Arkin, Tiger, Wilson, 2006). In this context, "writing intensive classes" refers to those taught by faculty who have gone through the WID program. This data indicates that WID intervention created a statistically significant improvement in student writing at LaGuardia. While time and other constraints may make us reluctant to rethink our pedagogy, WID offers the specific benefits for students and faculty noted above but also the reward of "watching students come to class better prepared, more vested in and motivated by the problems or questions the course investigates, more apt to study rigorously, and more likely to submit high-quality

work" (Bean, 2001, p. xiv). It can be especially useful to community college students and faculty members since, as Vargas notes, this work can help equalize the diverse members of the class:

Aside from the age and ethnicity differences there was also a very apparent range of levels in the students' ability to grasp certain concepts, which after a week or two I felt disappeared as Dr. Pacht and her various ways of tackling and approaching topics and writing methods effectively united the group into a team that not only moved forward individually but also together. (personal communication, February 26, 2010)

The benefits for students and faculty members alike make the effort to incorporate WID principles into our pedagogy well worthwhile, especially since making these changes need not occur at once. As Bean (2001) suggests, "It is possible to make changes in a course gradually, trying a few new activities at a time, looking for strategies and approaches that fit your discipline and subject matter, that work for your students, and that accord with your own personality and teaching philosophy" (p. 12). This exploratory approach makes it easier for faculty members to incorporate these ideas into their pedagogy without changing it fundamentally. As some ideas are applied and found to be successful, faculty members may choose to include more of them over time. As we tell our students, there must also be room for reflection and revision. I change my staged research assignment every semester as each new group of students teaches me something I didn't know before. Despite these adjustments, the principles used to create the assignment continue to shine through.

WID practices can not only help students learn the course material and strengthen their writing skills, it can help them overcome lack of preparation, provide them with critical thinking skills, encourage active learning, discourage plagiarism, and welcome them as "insiders" in the world of academic discourse. Faculty members are rewarded with better-prepared and more motivated students, streamlined grading processes, strategies for providing more effective feedback on student writing, and a model for producing our own writing. Writing in the Disciplines can be of particular benefit to community college students and faculty members as it creates a richer learning environment and a greater sense of community in the classroom.

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