

## Doing Our Homework

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Secondary teachers seldom get the opportunity to spend blocks of time researching, publishing or working on projects with individual students during the school day. They seldom get to do more than carry a heavy load of classes and/or preparations. When they do get such opportunities to get away from extra duties such as hall or cafeteria duty, study hall or library supervision, they are sometimes too exhausted to focus on much more than working with faculty in other disciplines on their writing projects. This semester I am working with four independent study students as part of my WAC work and loving every minute of the time I get to spend reading and responding to their work or enjoying good academic dialogue. Those who teach on the college level know how intellectually and personally stimulating such work can be. They also know how much work is involved in these independent study projects that reproduce what Plato and Aristotle describe as the best way to learn. Just as two individuals on a log, they seriously explore ideas on an equal footing, and the resulting exchanges uncover deeper understanding as both construct knowledge.

This new semester, I am reminded of the seasonal changes that metaphorically parallel our intellectual seasons at school, too. Taking on new projects, such as independent study classes, require a tremendous amount of time and effort on our part because the project is breaking new ground for students and also forcing us to research their specific field to keep abreast of their studies. In the same way, we also have a chance now to propose new courses for the next academic year, and that requires that we do our homework, consult with professional contacts at other institutions, share research, write and revise course proposals. Here's another opportunity to put joy back into what we do and how we do it. Maybe we even consider team teaching a course with a colleague in another academic field or hosting a regional conference/workshop with people at nearby institutions. In a similar way to the independent study courses, we as teachers are practicing what we preach to our students. Just as we want to enable them to explore their intellectual passions, we need to do the same. But it takes a commitment for the good of our own emotional and intellectual sanity. Our joy in teaching involves interaction with students and teachers, texts and research.

Finally, many of my peers are writing grant proposals to persuade local, regional or national benefactors that their summer renewal grant or project deserves funding because it will benefit more students and faculty. They are also writing philosophical statements in their application packets for new jobs at other institutions. These projects also take time and homework; however, the risk taking

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### *Across the Disciplines*

*A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2005.2.1.02>

wac.colostate.edu/atd

ISSN 554-8244

*Across the Disciplines* is an open-access, peer-review scholarly journal published on the WAC Clearinghouse and supported by [Colorado State University](#) and [Georgia Southern University](#). Articles are published under a [Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license](#) (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs) ISSN 1554-8244. Copyright © 1997-2017 The WAC Clearinghouse and/or the site's authors, developers, and contributors. Some material is used with permission.

involved keeps the adrenalin flowing. I just spoke with a friend who changed jobs as he turned fifty, and he said, "I feel so much younger and happier with this new challenge. It's scary."

Spring is the time of rebirth; we have the opportunity to rejuvenate ourselves through an investigation of new ideas, a renewed interest in something we were once passionate about, or a collaboration that we never risked trying before. By spending time visiting the past, researching new ideas, and participating in intellectually stimulating dialogues, we are taking on new challenges. In other words, we must make time to do our "homework." We must be prepared to meet the challenges that we have created for ourselves, realizing that whether we succeed or fail, we will learn from, grow with, and reflect upon the experience. Give it a try.

\* NEH Summer Seminars and Institutes are a valuable opportunity for all secondary teachers at <http://www.neh.gov/projects/si-school.html>. The deadline for applicants is March 1, 2005.