

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: MORE ISSUES AND MODELS

Speaker: Penny Dugan, Stockton State College, New Jersey

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Penny Dugan discussed the model of Writing Across the Curriculum at Stockton State College, which has evolved over nine years, she said, to shape the working lives of the faculty and the learning lives of the students.

The student population at Stockton has changed very little over the last nine years, with the maintenance of a 3,800 full-time enrollment or 4,300 actual students. However, administrative turnover has resulted in organizational changes, and whereas some of the administrators have been supportive of Writing Across the Curriculum, others have been indifferent. There has also been faculty turnover: About 10 percent of a faculty of 163 leave for one reason or another every year, so that each year there are 10 to 20 new teachers who have to learn how to teach writing across the curriculum. In spite of all this, Writing Across the Curriculum has persisted and prevailed.

Since its founding in 1971, Stockton has had an interdisciplinary focus, allowing permeable programs to be housed in divisions. Faculty members have a program of primary affiliation and additional membership in any degree program of which they are knowledgeable and in which they would like to teach. Also, General Studies is a separate curriculum with no crosslisting of courses. Each faculty member, except those in professional studies, is contractually obligated to teach two General Studies courses a year. These are individually designed, interdisciplinary courses in the general arts and humanities, social sciences, or mathematical and natural sciences. Students take thirty-two credit hours or one-quarter of their total coursework in General Studies. Faculty members are hired for their ability to stretch beyond disciplinary boundaries. Finally, the founding philosophy of the college was that academic skills were to be taught contextually in General Studies courses. No writing courses are offered, other than a creative writing seminar. There is no English Department; rather, there is a program which teaches literature and language, but not writing.

In 1975, a college-wide Task Force on Basic Academic Skills was convened and it recommended that incoming freshmen be tested in reading, writing, and quantitative reasoning, and that those students in need of instruction

in these areas be placed in courses. Dugan was one of two faculty members hired to train faculty from academic disciplines to teach developmental writing and critical thinking. In 1976, they developed BAS 101 College Writing, the first writing course, and the first required course of any kind, offered at Stockton. Over half of the fifteen sections of BAS 101 were taught by faculty members from such program as Chemistry, Environmental Science, Business Law, and Economics who had gone through three weeks of summer workshops on how to teach writing to unskilled incoming freshmen. Students were given full college credit for this course, and faculty taught it in place of the General Studies obligation. In 1976, faculty was also trained in holistic scoring so that it could read and evaluate the more than 1,000 placement essays. Thus, faculty was involved in the writing process from the beginning: teaching and testing writing were college-wide academic activities. Participating in reading placement essays gave faculty a sense of their own expertise, a sense that they could achieve consensus, a sense that they knew what good writing was.

In 1981, a Faculty Writing Task Force met and proposed a comprehensive writing program. It was built on the foundations of cross-college faculty participation in the BAS and WAC programs and expanded to cover students throughout the four years of college. To mobilize more intensive faculty involvement once the comprehensive writing program was passed, two-week faculty writing institutes were conducted in the summers of 1982, 1983, and 1984. The faculty participants were paid \$500 for their participation and met for eight hours a day. The forty-five faculty members who went through the training period now form a guiding nucleus that can be depended upon to help train other faculty.

According to Dugan, since 1978 all incoming freshmen have been required to take the New Jersey College Basic

Skills Placement Test. It is a four-hour test, consisting of several parts: tests of computational skills, tests of algebraic skills, reading comprehension, sentence sense, and a twenty-minute essay test. The state requires all public institutions to administer the test as part of their data collection, but it does not require Stockton to use the results. The faculty uses the essay portion of the test for placement purposes, though it has expressed some dissatisfaction: Twenty minutes is not considered enough time, the annual topic is often found stunning in its dullness, and the turnaround time that elapses between the test and the receipt of scores is felt to be too long.

The New Jersey Department of Higher Education also mandates pre- and post-testing in developmental writing classes. Some New Jersey State and County schools use the New Jersey essay as the post-test, but Stockton does not. At Stockton, students are given the topics in advance to figure out which topic they would prefer, to organize their thoughts, to gather evidence, and to talk to others. They cannot bring notes or drafts with them when they write the essay. They have one hour to write. All essays are read together at the end of the semester. The identifying information is masked so that the readers do not know who the student is or whether they are reading a pre-test or a post-test. The third test is the Junior Writing Test. Faculty felt that one more opportunity was needed to evaluate the level of competence at the junior level. Students who qualify for the test are required to take it. They then take writing courses during the junior and senior years. In this way, writing is continued throughout the four years at Stockton. A packet of materials distributed to those attending the session--a brochure describing the Stockton Writing Program, a lengthy document entitled "Writing at Stockton," and a statistical study called "Performance on the Fall 1985 Junior Writing Test"--are available by mail from Dugan.■