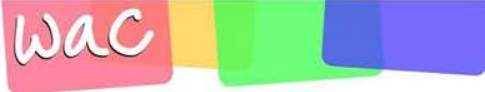


Undisciplined Knowledge?: Writing and General Education



Writing Across the Curriculum @ OSU
June 23rd, 2016



2014 WAC survey of 2367 instructors

Second-level Writing Course, designated 2367

Required of all undergraduate students

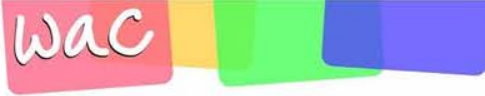
~ 50 courses in 29 departments and programs

Surveyed instructors who had taught a second-level writing class between Autumn 2013 and Autumn 2014 (261 in survey pool)

Asked questions about training for and oversight of teaching

Asked about comfort teaching English language learners and the kinds of support they got to teach ELL students, and the kinds of support they offered to ELL students

Collected course documents: syllabus and up to three assignments



How our sample documents reflect common challenges for GE writing

Challenge 1--little alignment between GE outcomes and course contexts:

Tension between general motives for writing and particular motives for writing in a specific discipline (Yañez and Russell 2009).

Level Two (2367)

1. Through critical analysis, discussion, and writing, students demonstrate the ability to read carefully and express ideas effectively.
2. Students apply written, oral, and visual communication skills and conventions of academic discourse to the challenges of a specific discipline.
3. Students access and use information critically and analytically.

In our course documents, GE Outcomes often:

Are cut and pasted with no explicit relation to course themes or content

Use outdated GE language (not outcomes oriented, use even vaguer language)

From Challenges to Principles of Alignment

Aligned syllabii

Reframe GE outcomes in relation to course goals

Landscape Architecture

Writing and Communication GE objectives:

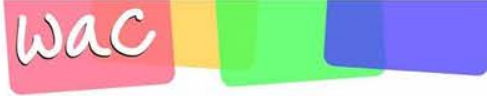
Students apply written, oral, and visual communication skills and conventions of academic discourse to the challenges of Landscape Architecture. Students write and engage with visual communication within a broad range of formats that are typical with contemporary design discourse...

Aligned assignments

Align activities with reframed GE outcomes

Animal Science

Throughout the course, students are provided a broad and critical overview of theories and methods of social scientific inquiry as they apply to the study of human-animal relationships, with an emphasis on developing and communicating practical solutions to challenging social issues. In the final weeks of the course, students are encouraged to formulate their own, well-informed, views about how animals should be maintained within future human societies and to articulate these views via written and oral venues.



How our sample documents reflect common challenges for GE writing

Challenge 2--"reverse" mutt genres: Written genres often have vague or contradictory purposes and audiences ("Mutt Genres," Wardle 2009)

Written genres in our course documents

Often were referred to in generalized terms ("Term Paper," "Essay 1," "Analysis")

Often lack an explicitly articulated audience and purpose for writing (Cf. Meltzer 2014)

Often defined by formal characteristics rather than rhetorical function ("3-5 pages, 12 point font, double spaced, APA style...")



From Challenges to Principles of Genre

Genres with context

Effective instructors
introduce genre as serving
an audience and context

Genres with purpose

Generic form serves some
Concrete action mirroring or even
engaging contexts outside
classroom

Communication 2367:

Audience Survey Paper: Knowing your audience is essential to effective persuasive communication. ***This assignment will help you measure audience attitudes*** about your problem and recommended solution. This assignment has four components...

Town Hall Meeting Speech:

Your speech should persuade the audience to volunteer at or donate to the nonprofit organization you have chosen.

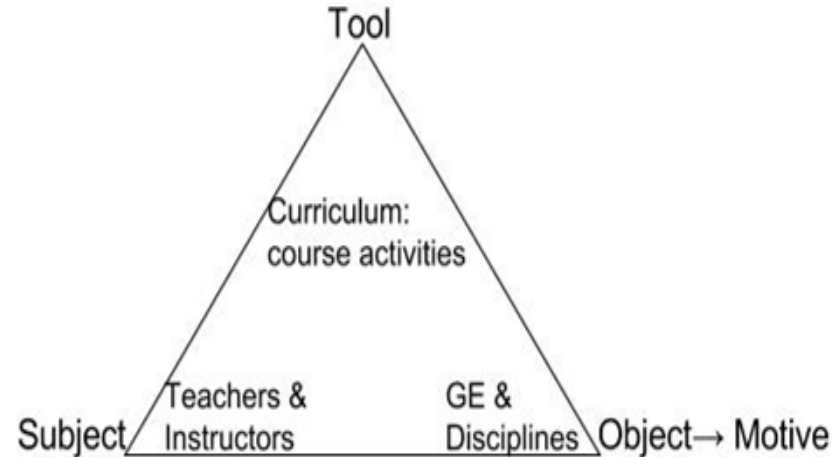


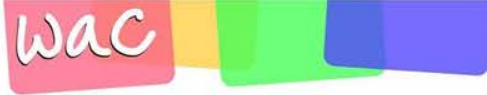
How our sample documents reflect common challenges for GE writing

Challenge 3--lack of transferability:

What is transfer? Detterman: “the degree to which a behavior will be repeated in a new situation”

“As individuals move from context to context, they receive cues, both explicit and implicit, that suggest knowledge associated with a prior context may prove useful in the new context” (Nowacek, p. 12)





How our sample documents reflect common challenges for GE writing

Challenge 3--lack of transferability:

Scaffolding usually offers little in the way of a framework to give students an opportunity to practice generalizable concepts in multiple specific contexts and reflect on learning (Beaufort 2007; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak 2014).

“too often, teachers assume that transfer will simply happen” (Nowacek, p. 15)
Instead, we (aka teachers) must teach for transfer.

General knowledge versus local knowledge





From Challenges to Principles of Transfer:

While many courses provided some scaffolding for writing tasks, few consistently provided:

Scaffolded practice

Scaffolded practice in multiple contexts and genres

Scaffolded coherence


A coherent controlling purpose for the scaffolding of writing projects


Assignments with reflection

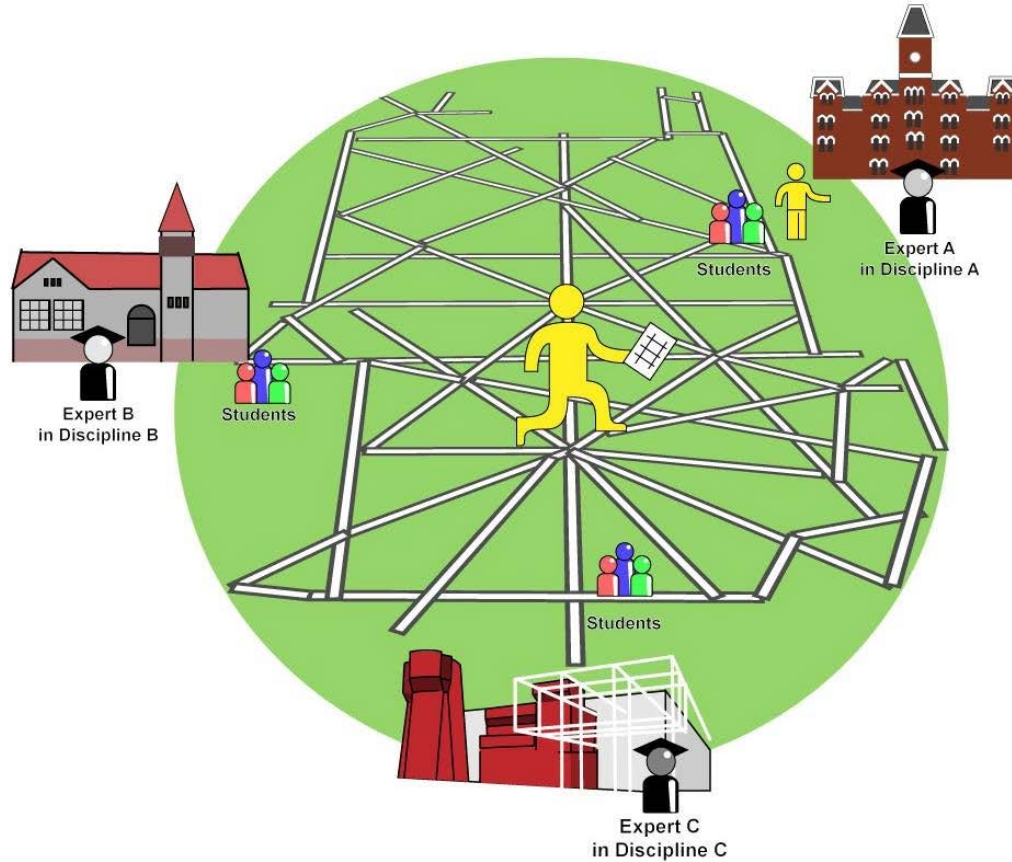
Opportunities to reflect on process and on learning



Two Needs for Guidance:

1. Experts who never leave their domains 

2. Students who do not make connections 





Psychology 2367.01 - Social Psychology

The study of how individuals perceive, influence, and relate to others.





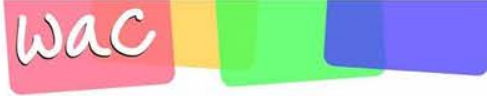
Challenge 1: Alignment

Multiple requirements

Instructor excitement about
content

Student perceptions





Challenge 1: Alignment

Our Strategies:

Increase focus on writing

Connections to content

Integrate goals

Mapping curriculum, map assignments to goals

Fight turnover





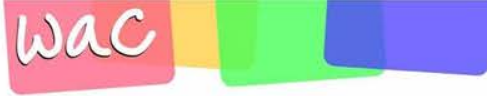
Challenge 2: “Fuzzy Genre”

What kind of assignment benefits students?

Traditionally “take home essays”

Audience, goal, disciplinary conventions





Challenge 2: “Fuzzy Genre”



Our Strategies:

Prioritize what we value most
in writing

More meaningful connections
between writing and content

Learn more about assignments
in other courses





Challenge 3: Transfer

Students feel “blindsided”

Instructors don't understand what is unique or challenging about disciplinary conventions

Where does this course fit into students' experience?





Challenge 3: Transfer

Our Strategies:

Ask instructors to be more explicit about transfer

Invite connections with prerequisite courses

Encourage more cross-disciplinary exchange

Assess!





Where do we go from here?

1. How do general education writing courses across the curriculum grapple with the “content of writing” problem FYW faces?
1. How do we promote a more comprehensive alignment between writing instruction (not just practice/process) and disciplinary content to promote transfer?
1. What kinds of institutional alliances can we make to promote this kind of alignment?
1. What (more) kinds of research can we do to dig more deeply into curricular alignment and student transfer of learning between general education and writing across the curriculum?

