

# WRITING

# ACROSS

# THE CURRICULUM

Volume III, Number 1

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WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM is published twice during the academic year by the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee of the Southern Technical Institute. Free subscriptions are available upon request to interested individuals or institutions.

WAC will consider for publication those essays, interviews, reviews, and conference reports which are concerned with the theory or practice of using writing skills as a learning technique in any educational discipline. It will also consider for publication any fictional or non-fictional materials written by either teachers or students which demonstrate the exemplary use of writing skills within any discipline of the curriculum.

Please send submission, including a brief biographical background, to the Editor. If references are used, please conform to the new documentation style of the Modern Language Association.

## SOUTHERN TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

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## EDITOR'S CORNER

By Robert C. Wess

This issue contains several of the various kinds of material we have published in the past: an article, several reports, a transcription, an interview. The report by Carol Barnum describes an interdepartmental project on the Southern Tech campus; Rex Recoulley reports on two Writing Across the Curriculum meetings held in Georgia during Spring Quarter, 1985. The transcript features the on-campus presentation of a local businessman, B. George Saloom, who spoke on the importance of communication skills in the business world.

The article by Joanne Kurfiss focuses on a fundamental question often asked about WAC programs: what do students really learn from writing? I am particularly happy

to publish this essay for several reasons. One, it is a response to an article previously published, thus establishing a genuine dialectic within the Newsletter. Two, the article contains some noteworthy sources to document its ideas, sources which might help to allay the fears of even the severest skeptic of Writing Across the Curriculum. Finally, this essay offers some practical suggestions for actively using writing in classrooms across the campus.

Readers will note that this issue contains twelve pages instead of eight. Thanks to *you*, the size of the Newsletter has been significantly increased. Space still exists in forthcoming issues, however, for *your* contribution. Whether it is a response to a previously published article, a conference report, etc., we would be happy to consider it for publication. And what about poems? Student pieces or projects? We have just begun to tap the resources available which support, argue, or demonstrate the existence of viable WAC methods, courses, or programs. Our readers would like to hear about your experience or research.

*Robert C. Wess, Chairman of Southern Technical Institute's Writing Across the Curriculum Committee, is in his third year as Editor of its Newsletter.*

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

Thank you for sending me a copy of the December 1984 issue of *Writing Across the Curriculum*. It is extremely well written and I would deeply appreciate being placed on your subscription list. This publication speaks well for you, your students, and your institution.

Larry G. McDougle, Ph.D.  
Associate Dean of Instruction  
University of Toledo Community  
and Technical College

Dear Editor:

Enclosed is a mailing list application for the *WAC* Newsletter. Three of our secondary teachers attended the CCCC Conference in Minneapolis. They came away convinced that much of what happens in colleges is adaptable to secondary schools. They also learned of several publications that will be helpful to our fledgling program. The *WAC* Newsletter is one of them. The article on the Cobb County Schools in the December 1984 issue has already given me some ideas as to how we should proceed. I look forward to more helpful articles.

Paul C. Bellin  
Secondary Language Arts  
Coordinator  
Weld County School District  
Greeley, Colorado

Dear Editor:

Your *WAC* Newsletter looks super! And I enjoyed the content, too. You had a nice variety, and all with substance. Please keep me on the mailing list.

Dixie Elise Hickman  
English Department  
The University of Southern  
Mississippi

Dear Editor:

The Dean of Academic Affairs brought your Newsletter to my attention. I am very impressed, and since we are currently organizing a WAC program, I'd like to be on your mailing list.

Ellen G. Friedman  
Coordinator of Writing  
Trenton State College

Dear Editor:

I have enjoyed reading your Newsletter, *WAC*, and I commend you for the fine job you are doing. Having edited two newsletters myself, I know what a challenge it is. But the rewards can be many, especially as people become aware of your program and your institution, and respond to the ideas you present.

Joanne Kurfiss  
Instructional Development  
Weber State College

Dear Editor:

Congratulations on a fine and worthwhile publication, the *Writing Across the Curriculum* Newsletter. I was most pleased to see your reference to the National Network in the May issue. Several network members have reported to me that they have received the Newsletter.

In the May issue, the article by Professor Whinton was especially interesting from a conceptual viewpoint, in that he tied writing across the curriculum theoretically to the concept of reinforcement of learning. One of the great benefits of writing across the curriculum, as both students and fellow faculty have told me, is that people come to see not only that writing is important in different fields and subjects, but that it is also useful and varied in its application.

I was also greatly gratified by the interview with Vice President Travis, who demonstrated the sort of commitment to writing across the curriculum that is indeed exemplary.

Finally, I also think it a good idea for the newsletter to publish skeptical articles, like that of Professor Stricklen, since such publications should be ones of critical inquiry. However, I would suggest that there is indeed a growing body of evidence, formal and informal, to support the idea that writing is an aid to thinking, this evidence building since the formal studies of James Britton and his colleagues began in the 1960's. Recent articles by and about mathematicians support these findings. Among those I would recommend are that by Eugene Norris and Minja Paik in my edited book, *Writing to Learn: Essays and Reflections on Writing Across the Curriculum* (Kendall/Hunt, 1983), and that by Barbara King in Bill Griffin's collection for Jossey-Bass, *Teaching Writing in All Disciplines* (1982).

Let me also add that I applaud Professor Stricklen's suggestion that the cross-curriculum impetus include other skills and arts besides writing. One result of the writing-across-the-curriculum movement has been that dialogue among disciplines has been opened, so that colleagues across departmental fences are given the opportunity to learn how their own teaching can be enriched by the methods and critical insights of one another. It is quite common in WAC workshops for humanities faculty to learn how to adapt methods of quantitative analysis to their classrooms, as mathematics and engineering faculty are learning how to adapt expressive writing to

theirs. The faculty are exhilarated by the exchange. They feel that they are better teachers and more well-rounded scholars as a result.

Again, congratulations on your publication. I look forward to the next issue.

Chris Thaiss, Director  
National Network of Writing  
Across the Curriculum  
Programs  
George Mason University

## DO STUDENTS REALLY LEARN FROM WRITING?



By Joanne Kurfiss

Professor Simon Stricklen, Jr., offering "A Note of Caution" in the May 1985 issue of *Writing Across the Curriculum*, is rightly concerned that a movement which is gaining so much ascendancy may ultimately prove to be simply another academic fad. He raises several provocative questions, probably the most important of which is whether students will benefit from all the writing they are now being urged to do. That question can be answered from empirical evidence, but before going into that, I would like to suggest that Professor Stricklen's own philosophy about using writing is closer to the basic tenets of this pedagogy than he may realize. In fact, his own conclusion puts it well: "We ought to assign writing where it fits naturally." *Writing Across the Curriculum* is a program intended not to "push" writing "artificially," but to broaden and deepen our conceptions of where writing "fits naturally."

Dr. Stricklen's first paragraph reveals an understandable misconception: that the objective of *Writing Across the Curriculum* is to require writing to be examined by the instructor. From this, his other concerns flow quite readily: writing must be the "paramount" skill, everyone will have to teach it and not everyone is qualified to do so, and it will take time away from course content. Let me suggest two alternative foundational propositions: (1) Writing can help students learn and think about content in any discipline, thus helping to achieve the goals of the instructor. (2) Writing used for learning does not require explicit *teaching* of writing--only *use* of writing as a pedagogical tool.

These assumptions lead to a model of *Writing Across the Curriculum* very different from the image evoked by Dr. Stricklen. This model highlights not writing for its own sake, but writing for the discipline's sake, i.e., writing for content mastery. One characteristic of writing used in this way is that most of it is *not* graded, and only some of it is even "examined" by the instructor. Take the case

of notes on reading. Research on reading has demonstrated that notetaking aids content recall more than underlining (Kulhavy, Dyer, and Silver). Encouraging students to take notes on their reading, just as they do on lecture, is an unobtrusive yet helpful *Writing Across the Curriculum* strategy. Showing them some "trick of the trade" for notetaking in your field may make their notes even more helpful.

Another writing-for-learning strategy is to assign short essays for various purposes. Essay writing can be used to help students learn from reading, and is more effective than notetaking (see below). Writing short essays can also be used to help students prepare for class discussions, and students are more likely to do them if the topic relates to material that will figure prominently on an exam. Assignments may also be structured to provide practice for essay exams, or to build a foundation for a position paper or other, longer writing assignments normally used in the course. Students can be encouraged, in class or out, to exchange their essays and respond to them before turning them in to you. Such exchanges, structured so that criteria are clear and emphasis is on ideas rather than grammar, give individual students an opportunity to see how others are making sense of the course content, and can stimulate clarifying discussions unobtainable through other means. To motivate the grade-conscious, you can award a check or a few points for turning in the essay. Do you have to read the essays? Not necessarily, though you may find it useful to look them over. When students see that they are writing for a clearly defined *purpose* related to their ultimate course grade, they are likely to complete the assignment even though it is not read or evaluated by the instructor.

However, as Dr. Stricklen suggests, many students see no value in completing assignments not specifically read and evaluated by the instructor. The "microtheme," a short, highly structured essay, can be graded fairly easily (Bean, Drenk and Lee; Kirkpatrick and Pittendrigh). Developed at Montana State University for use in large introductory physics courses, microthemes can support instruction in any discipline. Microthemes require students to figure out in writing a problem posed by the instructor. The problem is designed to assess students' ability to apply a fundamental concept or to use a particular cognitive skill, such as drawing conclusions from data. Students write their responses on a 5 x 8 index card. To facilitate grading, students summarize their answer in a single sentence at the top of the card. You can leaf through dozens of these cards in a very short time, jotting down comments on *your* note pad, not the students' cards, as you see common misconceptions emerging, or fresh solutions you would like to highlight in class. If someone offers a totally "off-the-wall" response, you can set the card aside for individual comment when you're done--often a short note will do. While you're not after mechanics or spelling here, there is a premium on clarity and brevity, challenging students to think clearly. If a response is incomprehensible, return the card with an appropriate message (e.g., "Get thee to the writing center" or "Please make your next microtheme readable"). Next day, you can discuss the responses as a whole, pointing out the misconceptions identified, and answering remaining questions. But won't some students "cheat"? If they copy each other's work, you'll probably notice it. But if they get together and talk through the solution, then write their own, where's the harm? You've increased their academic "time-on-task" far more than the time it costs you to read over their solution. And in general, more time-on-task means more learning.

Microthemes and short-essay study questions may not be appropriate in all courses, but neither do they begin to exhaust the options available to the teacher who wants to help students master content through writing. Some teachers use journals to help students clarify concepts by trying to express them in writing, or to explore controversial material, or to keep records of ideas for a major paper. Some teachers pause in the middle of a lecture to have students write down questions stimulated by the topic; these can be turned in or discussed right then. Additional suggestions can be found in a delightful booklet, "The Busy Professor's Travel Guide to Writing Across the Curriculum" (Barry, also in Griffin).

I hope Professor Stricklen will agree that such uses of writing are both natural and helpful, and that they focus on *content* rather than on the writing itself. Of course, as students write in a variety of settings, occasionally free of grade pressures, some of their anxiety about writing may dissipate, and their formal writing may also improve as they become accustomed to developing ideas on paper. Such improvements need not be the primary goal, although they might help counteract a self-perpetuating problem: student avoidance of courses requiring writing. Recent research suggests that students who are apprehensive about writing prefer classes in which they can just "read and take notes. Then you can just put back down on paper what they give you." (a college student quoted in Selfe, 57). How many of us have felt pressured to avoid writing assignments in the face of such attitudes on the part of our students? Selfe's research shows how these attitudes perpetuate themselves. She found that apprehensive writers have limited writing histories, i.e., they do little writing in high school outside their English classes. For such students apprehension fosters avoidance which limits opportunities for the practice needed to overcome the apprehension. Unfortunately, it turns out that *most* students have limited writing histories; Applebee found high school students' writing limited to a paragraph or less in all but about 3 per cent of their assignments. The apprehension that can result from such limited writing experiences may drastically limit students' learning options and ability to succeed both in school and beyond.

I hope also that my examples help answer the question, "Do students learn from writing?" But these illustrations can only be suggestive, and Dr. Stricklen has wisely challenged Writing Across the Curriculum enthusiasts to cite hard evidence that writing aids learning or thinking. While research on this question is still in its infancy, several recent studies suggest that writing is a valuable learning tool. For example, Kirkpatrick and Pittendrigh report that beginning physics students who wrote microthemes each week performed significantly better on hourly essay exams than students who had not had such practice. Responses were clearer and easier to grade, and there were fewer "wretched answers" (163). Furthermore, poor essays resulted from problems in understanding physics, not from deficient writing skills. And far from objecting to the extra work (20-60 minutes per essay), all but two students surveyed believed the amount of homework in the course was just right or too little. Most important, however, is that students perceived writing as a tool for mastering content: 38 out of 43 students surveyed believed that writing essays "has helped them understand the physics" (163).

Further support for a learning-from-writing hypothesis comes from two studies recently completed at Stanford. Langer (in press) and Newell (1984) had high school students read typical academic passages and then "study"

either by taking notes, answering study questions in writing, or writing short "thought-question" essays. In both cases, topic knowledge increased far more for students who wrote essays than for students in either of the other two conditions: they knew more, and they had a more integrated concept of the material if they wrote essays. Further, the thinking processes evoked by essay writing were more complex and varied. For example, Langer found dramatically higher levels of hypothesizing, and also more instances of evaluating information or ideas, more comments on how to get at meaning, and more examples of "finding evidence and validating previous interpretations." These are among the sophisticated thinking processes colleges claim to develop in their students. These studies suggest that through writing used as a tool for learning, the claim can become an actuality rather than a vague hope.

Writing instructors are not suggesting that professors in other disciplines do their job for them. Rather, they are asking us to support and extend their efforts, not because of some inherent value in writing, but for the sake of our own disciplines and students' success in them. Writing about a specific content area presents unique problems which writing teachers acknowledge they are not qualified to address--only the content specialist is intimately familiar with the genres, conventions and audiences peculiar to her field. If students don't practice discipline-specific writing in college, where will they learn it? What roles in the working world will allow them to simply "put back down on paper what they give you?" The workplace is risky enough without leaving students on their own to learn the essential skill of communicating in writing. It is ironic that college professors in a variety of disciplines now acknowledge that writing is more important to success in the workplace than to success in college (Bridgeman and Carlson). Perhaps it's time we evened things out.

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**Joanne Kurfiss is Director of Instructional Development at Weber State College in Utah. She holds a doctorate in developmental psychology from the University of Washington, and is currently on sabbatical doing research on intellectual development, writing, and collaborative learning at Montana State University.**

## INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY AND ENGLISH-- TEAM WORK ON THE SENIOR PROJECT

by Carol M. Barnum

Like many departments of Engineering Technology, the Industrial Engineering Technology (IET) Department at Southern Tech requires all students to take a course called Senior Project as their last course before graduation. The Senior Project in IET developed gradually into a course requiring a series of reports leading to a formal oral presentation made to an industry panel of potential employers. What better way to prepare students for their careers (just around the corner) than to combine the forces of the English and IET faculty to teach the skills required of the students in the course? The IET faculty decided to do just that, inviting the English department to team-teach the course with the IET department.

What has resulted is a rigorous course for IET students in which they must write a series of reports culminating in a feasibility study for producing a specified product at the lowest possible cost and highest possible profit. The English professor guides the class through the report preparation and matters of style and organization, as well as delivery techniques for oral presentation. The IET professor guides the students through the technical aspects of the project. The students must write to instructors who represent both the technical and non-technical readers, whom professionals must so often address simultaneously. Each instructor independently grades all assignments, averaging the grades together at the end of the quarter. The students write a proposal, followed by a "dry run" of their formal oral presentation to each faculty member before making it to the industry panel. Students also submit a formal report on the feasibility study.

Results from the team-teaching effort have shown that the industry-panels' evaluations of students' technical content remained unchanged, while their evaluation of students' presentation skills improved significantly. Thus, the team-teaching effort is working as hoped; students are getting better training within the context of their professions, and their efforts are improving.

If you are interested in team-teaching on your campus, you might use the following approach: offer your help to a technical instructor who requires written reports in his or her classes. You might begin with a guest lecture on report techniques or, as was true in my case, oral communication techniques. Once this relationship is established, you might suggest expanding it to allow for greater participation as a team-teaching effort. I was fortunate enough to be invited to participate by the IET faculty, but you don't have to wait for an invitation. Faculty in other subject areas will probably be very receptive to your offer of help.

*Carol Barnum is Associate Professor of English at Southern Technical Institute, where she teaches technical writing, business communication, and composition. She also works as a technical writing consultant to business and industry.*

## THE URGENCY AND AN OPPORTUNITY: IMPLEMENTING WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM, A LECTURE BY DR. RICHARD LANHAM

by Rex Recoulley

A fire-and-brimstone lecture on "Writing Across the Curriculum"? Four-lettered contempt for disciplines the cores of which are not writing? Writing Across the Curriculum as the agent of student socialization? A 1.6 billion dollar annual budget for composition -- on one campus? Well, the rough beast slouching toward Los Angeles to be born again has been met and identified as student inability to write coherently and correctly and to do so continuously. And Writing Across the Curriculum is the only visible and working defender of composition as an aspect of the humanities girded against this beast, according to Dr. Richard Lanham, a nationally recognized authority on composition and writing curriculum.

Dr. Lanham, Director of the UCLA Writing Program, addressed the University of Georgia faculty, members of the University System Committee on Writing Across the Curriculum, and guests at the University of Georgia, April 25, 1985. His extremely animated and pointed remarks, some theoretically barbed and some specifically barbed, included the following warnings, threats, and admonitions.

- A primary concern addressed by any WAC program is teacher burnout caused by the number of papers to be graded in a traditional writing program: less grading and fewer papers are goals.
- Computer Assisted Instruction is endorsed by WAC advocates as a matter of expediency necessitated by the problems of funding, EFT, and man-power. Software possibilities are, however, virtually unlimited, if not yet available.
- An English composition person advancing WAC in other departments must seek to make other instructors and students conscious of the language barriers of their disciplines and their tenets through writing; advancing WAC in other departments than English is not, however, an attempt to change, initially, the linguistic style or limits of the discipline.
- An avowed purpose of any WAC program is the linguistic socialization of the students.
- Statistical measurement or evaluation of pre-WAC and post-WAC programs is impossible because of the mutable character of the student body and the character of language usage as qualitative.
- The success of a WAC program depends on systemic design in the beginning; isolated departmental efforts are doomed; writing as the domain of the English Department alone is an historical accident and is an indictment of the Liberal Arts and Humanities curriculum itself.
- Writing not continued through the senior year is worthless; the efforts expended in Freshman Composition are wasted if not continued.
- Writing which does not arise from the heart of any discipline itself won't be useful in any long-lasting way.
- Writing about what is to be learned is a given if instruction is to yield any learning at all.
- "Revivalist" or "consciousness-raising" advocacy of a WAC program won't work; three possibilities exist: hire a specialist; guarantee release time for a person in English composition who will lecture, assign and grade

*Writing across the curriculum is NOT  
merely grammar across the curriculum.*

papers in other departments; or, a combination of the first two possibilities.

- WAC programs work best in small institutions which are less research-oriented and more instruction-oriented. The problem with larger institutions is funding; funding as a problem in smaller institutions is also real; thus, separate funding is imperative.
- Instructors in other departments cannot legitimately be asked to assign and grade more written work; hence the necessity of hiring new faculty or guaranteeing release time for a composition person working in a WAC program.
- Minority retention, in terms of language usage and writing, is the most serious problem which WAC programs can possibly address.

Appropriately enough, Yeats' rough beast of "The Second Coming" has many disguises; Dr. Lanham has, he believes, seen through one of them. As the Director of the Writing Program, a division of the Humanities at UCLA, and brandishing the sword of Writing Across the Curriculum, he is a man of passionate conviction, particularly aroused when confronted by professed supporters of the humanities who fail to see our verbal medium and its written expression as the civilizing agent of our planet. He would, through Writing Across the Curriculum or virtually any means that works, ensure the restoration of writing as the primary mode of critical thought and learning; and he would do so as a matter of the utmost universal, national, and individual security. I fully expected his lecture to end with "he who is not with me is against me": should he have concluded in such a fashion, he would, of course, have accurately assessed the situation.

## THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE ON ENGLISH AND WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: A BRIEF REPORT

by Rex Recoulley

The University System Academic Committee on English held its annual meeting April 16 and 17, 1985, at the Georgia Institute of Technology. The Committee, with its representatives from all institutions in the Georgia system, heartily endorsed Writing Across the Curriculum as a principle, as a theory in application, and as a means of unifying curricula on possibly the most fundamental basis. The Committee further suggested WAC expansion within institutions of the University system through an ad hoc cross-disciplinary Writing Across the Curriculum Committee at the state level.

The meeting was actually a teacher enrichment seminar focusing on curriculum development, in addition to the regular business proceedings of the Committee. Professor Tom Dasher of Valdosta State College was one of the several speakers and presented remarks on Writing Across the Curriculum, its principles, obstacles, and goals. For those who attended Professor Toby Fulwiller's workshop in February (an off-campus workshop held for Southern Tech faculty), much of what Professor Dasher commented upon was a confirmation of Writing Across the Curriculum's concerns; several possibly new points of interest emerged, however; and among them are the following.

Given the facts that composition courses, as perceived by most students, are irrelevant to other courses and that

student writing in other courses tends to be minimal and frequently lacking in the qualities assumed to have been acquired in composition courses, Dr. Dasher suggested that the first goal of Writing Across the Curriculum is to convince non-composition instructors that writing is a learning tool; he might have added that this goal should possibly also be addressed to composition teachers as well. His suggestion that writing be regarded as an aid to critical thinking was a second goal. Thus, writing, as a learning tool and aid to critical thought, becomes a mode and medium for the generation, organization, and refining or focusing of thought. I would suggest that implicit in this proposition is the idea that more writing begets better writing; also implicit is the suggestion that writing is a mode of growth, both intellectual and psychological.

Dr. Dasher also pointed out that Writing Across the Curriculum is nothing new. It merely appears to be, and risks the label of fad as a result, because of the virtually complete fragmentation of educational disciplines brought about by specialization or separation of departments. In effect, educationists have divided or separated areas of inquiry and failed to complete what should have been a cyclic process in two ways: they have failed to reintegrate the knowledge acquired into a holistic field or relationship of parts; and they have failed to perceive that the symbolic media for understanding and expressing that acquired knowledge have much in common, that is, written expression of one sort or another.

Dr. Dasher was quick to point out that Writing Across the Curriculum is an aid, not a panacea; he might have also added that Writing Across the Curriculum is a reminder to those who have forgotten--and a stimulus to those who approach writing as the domain solely of the English Department--that coherent written expression of thought is immediately and ultimately a major test, as well as an asset, of the educated individual.

*Rex Recoulley, Assistant Professor of English at Southern Technical Institute, is Director of Freshman Composition, a representative of the University System Academic Committee on English, and a WAC convert.*

## COMMUNICATION IN A TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

by B. George Saloom

The following material is an edited transcript of a talk given to 125 faculty members and students on Wednesday, May 15, 1985, in the Student Center on the Southern Tech campus. The presentation was the third in a series of talks sponsored by the Writing Across the Curriculum Committee so that students might hear first-hand about the importance of communication skills in the world of work.



There was a man travelling down the highway in a large station wagon and his backseat was just filled with penguins. There were penguins all over the place . . . hanging out of the sides, hanging out the back, even some on top of the car. He was finally stopped by a highway patrolman who mentioned that he should take those penguins to the zoo. This individual driving the car said

that sounded like a good idea.

About a week later, here comes that same station wagon tooling down the highway and lo and behold, there were penguins all over the place again. They were hanging out of the windows, hanging on top of the station wagon, just packed in the back; and, of course, he was stopped by the same policeman. The policeman said, "Hey, I thought I told you to take the penguins to the zoo?" The individual said, "Well, Officer, I did exactly that, and they enjoyed it so much that we all are now going to the beach!"

This little story about these penguins does represent the importance of good/effective communication. In the performance of our jobs, responsibilities, or whatever we are engaged in throughout the day, we are extremely dependent upon the effective use of our communication skills.

Today, I would like to discuss with you the topic of communication and why I feel it is important. I then would like to share with you some of my experiences concerning the communication skills of the college graduates I have hired. Finally, I will outline some steps that we (industry and the academic environment) can do to help you be successful when you graduate.

## WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication is the process by which information is exchanged through a common system of symbols or behaviors. It is the lifeblood and binding force of any organization. Without effective communication, an organization would have no unity, no direction, no synergism. We all have our individual goals, objectives, and ideals; but without effective communication, not only would it be difficult for us to accomplish our individual goals, but the corporation's goals and objectives could not be readily accomplished, either.

Take the example of five strong horses pulling a wagon. If there isn't communication and direction for the horses, the wagon would go nowhere; neither will a group of people working together to fulfill a common goal. Therefore, without effective communication, the organization itself would cease to exist.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

Organizations are growing and changing at an extremely rapid pace, especially those organizations involved in the technological explosion. I've taken a quote from Samuel Armacost (Chief Executive Officer of Bank of America, the largest bank in the United States) and modified it to read: "Technology will be the *salvation* of many companies but the *death* of many others." What will be the difference? The difference between the salvation and death of a company is how that technology will be communicated, and hence, utilized.

Communication skills are the necessary tools for keeping in step with industrial/technological changes as well as the day-to-day changes in the organization. As mentioned earlier, the exchange of ideas and information (hence, communication) is crucial in keeping the individuals of the organization moving in the same direction.

Not only are communication skills imperative to the organization as a whole, they are the foundation upon which individuals build their own careers. Beginning with the interview process, the individual must present his ideas in a clear and concise fashion, keeping in mind the person on the receiving end of the communication. The individual's goals, skills and needs must be effectively

communicated from the employee to the organization. An employee/employer relationship is a partnership; without clear and strong communications, there will not be an environment of sharing and working together toward common goals.

Which communication skills are important? *ALL OF THEM!* . . . listening, written, verbal, and visual.

Listening is a critical component in the communication process. Unfortunately, listening skills are not given the attention they deserve. How many times has someone asked you, "How are you doing?" and you've responded, "Not too well," and the response was, "Great!". It is important that one must listen and understand what others are saying so that he can make an intelligent and worthwhile contribution.

Written communication skills are also an integral part of an individual's ability to not only effectively function in an organization but also to establish one's career. These skills are utilized through the writing of status reports, memos, letters, resumes, and many other types of both formal and informal communication. It is important that an individual in an organization be able to put down his thoughts properly on paper, clearly and concisely, making sure to include all relevant material.

Verbal communication skills are also a crucial part of a successful career-oriented individual. These skills are utilized in individual and group circumstances such as presentations, meetings, informal updates, counseling sessions and performance appraisals.

Visual communication is an area often overlooked. Individuals must be conscious of how they express their thoughts, ideas, feelings and attitudes, especially within the political structure of the organization. They need to realize the importance of the ability to communicate the same thoughts and feelings in different ways at different times to different people. Visual communication, including dress, mannerisms, and body language, plays a large part in effective communication to the various levels in an organization.

## MY EXPERIENCE WITH RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATES

With respect to listening skills, many college graduates seem to be analyzing but not listening. They think in their own terms, not taking into account those of the speaker. Graduates need to concentrate on understanding the speaker. By providing feedback, the speaker and listener can be certain that there is real understanding. Too often we are so concerned with our own perceptions of a subject, and that our own thoughts are the only right ones, that we really don't consider the ideas of others. Although there may be an outside appearance of listening, inside we are clinging so tightly to our own ideas that any other information just bounces off. It is essential to understand the speaker's requirements in order to take actions to satisfy those requirements.

With respect to the written side of communication, recent college graduates tend to be wordy, but their extra words do nothing to enhance the topic. They stray from the central objective, seemingly to add more volume, which they perceive as adding more importance to their document. However, the opposite impression is created. Many executives do not have the time to wade through the extra words to find the essence of their communication. Even considering the excess words, written documents tend to be sketchy, similar to an outline. I have found that recent graduates need to take more time and mental effort to fully develop their ideas into con-

cepts. Their documents are comprised of randomly ordered statements with flow connectors, phrases and title explanations of the facts. More time needs to be taken in organizing the facts and recognizing their implications.

Above all, a writer needs to determine the purpose of the communication and keep this purpose in mind at all times. He then needs to gather and organize the facts, making sure that the information is accurate and complete. He needs to be concise. Brevity will save time and guarantee that the purpose of the communication does not get buried under all the words. In the fast-paced world of today, unless the communication is to the point, it won't receive the attention it may warrant. However, it is important that words not be omitted on the assumption that they will be understood.

The tendency to assume the reader will understand what is written between the lines points out another weakness in written skills of graduates; they do not tailor their document to the individual who will read it. The key in writing is to explain the subject in terms the reader will understand. The writer must try to view the subject through the eyes of the reader at all times. The tone and language also needs to reflect the style of the reader as much as that of the writer.

Another important consideration in effective written communication is the competence of the writer. Many recent graduates do not feel they have the background and experience to be competent writers. This is *not* the case! This perception, however, has an effect on their writing. Individuals must also learn to fit their individual writing style into the style of the organization and recognize that each organization has certain preferred methods/styles of communication.

Another quote from Samuel Armacost (CEO, Bank of America), I feel, summarizes what has been presented concerning written communication skills: "FORGET ABOUT THE BITS AND BYTES; TELL ME WHAT THIS THING CAN DO FUNCTIONALLY."

Turning to formal verbal communication, I have often experienced that recent graduates do not excel in giving presentations. In general, they seem to lack the self-confidence necessary to be comfortable when speaking in front of others. But they are very aware of how they are perceived by others, which helps them consciously improve their weak points. In this area, experience and practice are critical. Not only do effective presentations rely on a strong educational background, but these skills are also enhanced through the speaker's day-to-day experiences in making presentations.

To summarize, most current college curricula (especially those with Writing Across the Curriculum programs) do a good job of preparing students for their careers. Although additional training is required, the college curriculum provides the discipline and the opportunity to utilize, in a very limited environment, the skills required for effective communication. The communication skills students gain through the college curriculum will be the foundation for a successful career. It is the individual's responsibility to take these skills and perform accordingly to ensure that he or she will be able to hit the bull's eye of true communication.

#### THE FUTURE NEED

There are steps that need to be taken to ensure that the college curriculum continues to prepare students adequately for their role in the business environment. Most importantly, there should be open communication

between business and educational institutions. This type of communication that we are participating in today (the opportunity I have been given to address you) is a prime example of the type of interaction that is needed.

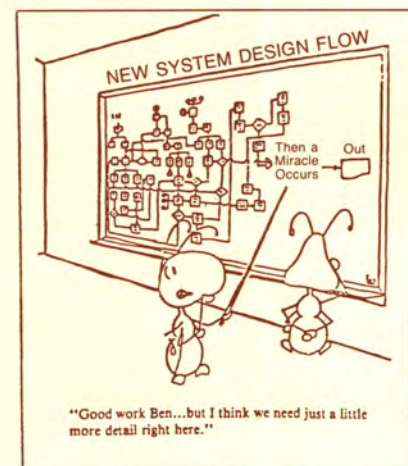
Through constant feedback, the educational institutions should direct their curricula toward the needs of the business community. There should be an emphasis on learning to exist in a business environment as well as learning the technical skills necessary to do a job. Students need to learn that there are different ways of getting the same thing accomplished in the business world; some methods will be more successful than others. They need to learn to deal with the political structure of an organization in a productive manner.

Group projects in the curriculum would enable students to test their ability of interacting and communicating with others. This is a vital part of the business world and needs to be stressed in the college environment as well. An ideal situation would be for college students to have some exposure to classes in organizational and behavioral skills. An emphasis on public speaking would also help the individual to gain experience in presenting ideas in an organized manner. The student needs to learn to take the time and mental effort necessary to fully develop his ideas. Listening skills should also be stressed.

The person-to-person and/or person-to-machine relationships are critical elements in the application of new technology. The success of these critical elements is dependent on strong and effective communication skills.

The key to success in business today and in the future is people and how they apply the new technology. Even though the curriculum prepares students with the basic skills, in order to be productive in the business environment, these skills need to be enhanced with practical experience. College provides an avenue for individuals to know themselves, their likes and dislikes, the direction they want to take in life, and their personal priorities. The individual needs to learn to effectively communicate these needs and desires in order to gain personal satisfaction as well as satisfying the organization's desires and requirements.

Communication skills are the basic tools the recent graduate uses to begin a career, to express goals, and to strive for future objectives. They are the foundation upon which the graduate will build his or her future. I believe an illustration will summarize the importance of communication and how we must take the mystery out of our relationships and interrelationships.





## CONCLUSION

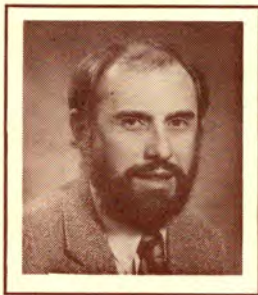
We are inventing the future by the choices we make today. As we make these choices, a large part of our success in the future will be determined by our relationship with the people we are associated with, as well as the organization with which we have aligned ourselves. One of the keys to these relationships can be summarized by one word: **COMMUNICATION**.

We must prepare ourselves in all phases of communication: written, verbal, listening and visual. We must also be willing to use our abilities and communication skills in *new and challenging ways*. We must be ready to explore new frontiers, take more risks, and go that extra mile not only in our communication but also in our personal endeavors. In other words:

IF YOU ALWAYS DO WHAT YOU'VE  
ALWAYS DONE,  
YOU'LL ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU'VE  
ALWAYS GOTTEN!

*B. George Saloom is Vice President and Manager of the Information Systems Department of First Atlanta Corporation. He also serves on the Board of Directors for the Atlanta Chapter of the Data Processing Management Association (DPMA). A member of the Society of Information Management, the American Institute of Banking and the Georgia Tech Executive Roundtable, Mr. Saloom graduated in June 1985 from the Graduate School of Banking at Louisiana State University.*

## AN INTERVIEW WITH TOBY FULWILER



*The following edited interview with Dr. Toby Fulwiler was conducted on Tuesday evening, February 19, 1985, at the Holiday Inn in Marietta, Georgia. Dr. Fulwiler directed a Writing Across the Curriculum workshop the following day for 27 Southern Tech faculty members.*

Toby Fulwiler, Director of Writing at the University of Vermont, is Co-Editor of *Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum*. He has also published various articles on writing in professional journals. At present he is at work on a book based on his eight years of experience conducting writing workshops.

by Robert C. Wess

**Q.** Writing Across the Curriculum has been developed on many campuses throughout the United States. In your view, which programs are among the best? How are these programs particularly adapted for the types of colleges they represent?

**R.** One kind of program emphasizes basic writing skills, including those at the University of Michigan, Texas, and Wisconsin at Stevens Point. These skills-based programs were influenced by Dan Fader who is at Michigan. Fader's argument was that if you wanted to improve the writing across the campus community, you should work on expository writing. He did not stress things like journals, expressive writing, the developmental possibilities, or writing's relationship to cognition. He believed that if you wanted to improve expository writing, you must work hard on individual drafts, editing, and revising. The program they set up at Michigan placed one upper-level writing course in each department. These were taught by graduate students in English and somebody else in that specific department. The point was to make sure there was a required upper-level writing course in every department at Michigan that all undergraduates would take. But in one sense it [the Fader model] did not address the key problem; that is, if you have a course in chemistry taught either by a chemistry professor or by a writing expert in the junior year, then the Chemistry Department could simply say, "Well, that's his course and he's handling it." Our argument at Michigan Tech was based on [James] Britton's ideas [*The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)*] that the real reason you want more people to do writing across the curriculum is that you really want them to learn better across the curriculum, to use their language skills across the curriculum. And from better learning will come improved writing.

So we felt the best way to do it was not to change the responsibility to one junior-level requirement course, but to say, "Look, if you have people writing in chemistry, business, and biology across the curriculum, they are going to be learning chemistry, business, and biology *better* across the curriculum." And every teacher takes some responsibility. Students cannot say that only such-and-such a teacher cares. We thought that requiring a junior-level course in the curriculum sort of defeats this other version which makes all teachers to some extent responsible for literacy.

The other part of your question was about the types of colleges these programs represent. It seems to me that the form of WAC depends on the size of the institution, the size of the student body, the number of faculty, the number of full-time faculty, part-time faculty, institutional support, whether they sought money or did not seek money, whether they believe the cognitive venture is the most important thing, whether the English Department is actively at the core of what is going on, and whether there is somebody across that campus who also cares and supports the English Department. Thus, the dimension, shape, and scope of these programs depend on how much central thinking someone is able to do.

**Q.** My second question has to do with your experience at Michigan Tech. What kind of program exists there, and what are some of the bench marks you have seen in its development?

**R.** When I arrived at Michigan Tech in 1976, the kind of stereotype about the Michigan Tech student was: well, they are pretty good mechanical engineers or electrical engineers, but they do not communicate so well. As a consequence, Michigan Tech engineers got those good, first-level jobs, but they did not get promoted to higher managers and decision makers. The thinking was partly

that they did not have good communication skills.

Some of this stereotype was true. It came back through enough recruiters, where people had been placed in a job, so that the president and vice president felt a need and asked us in the Humanities Department: could we do something to help make Michigan Tech undergraduates become better communicators when they graduate? If we could, they would give us money positions. Of course we said we could. Obviously, anyone in that position would say they could.

And so the way we started the program was out of a concern for communication skills. As soon as we got fifteen professors together talking about what was wrong with student writing, everybody would start talking about thesis, focus, support, argument, documentation, and serious questions about organization. Immediately we realized we were not talking about mechanical problems. The whole workshop was talking about conceptual problems and motivational problems, and once we started talking about those things, well, our program captured the interest of the whole campus community.

I would say the Michigan Tech program took off after the very first workshop because we all discovered that professors from all disciplines really cared about how the students thought. When I left Michigan Tech in 1983, we had done twelve workshops for some 200 faculty, and as I was leaving, they were planning their next workshop. The first workshops were two-day workshops done on a Monday and Tuesday during the school year. Later, we had funding from General Motors--\$235,000 over five years; then we went to four-day summer workshops off-campus, with two of us co-leading maybe fifteen to twenty teachers. They would be paid \$50 a day. When the outside funding finally ceased, the Institution funded our annual workshop. When the funding ran out, the Institution liked what it had seen happen. For one thing, it kept the Humanities Department alive and flourishing.

So what we did at Michigan Tech was a program based in the Humanities Department that reached throughout the university and ultimately gained us a small national reputation. Because Michigan Tech is a technical school, most engineering faculty who went to those workshops thought they were concerned primarily with editing skills and technical skills: writing very precise, concise articles, concern for punctuation, grammar, and spelling. Our experience was that the most interesting teachers in those groups quickly changed. They did not drop those concerns so much as they added to them the notion that there are many little things language can do besides express concise lab reports. They began to recognize the role of writing: generating lab reports, generating language for speculating about data, as well as collecting data. And so what we saw happening at a technical school was a broadening of our technical teachers' understanding of written language.

**Q.** Could you describe some of the characteristics you think a successful Writing Across the Curriculum program has?

**R.** First you have to have administrative support at some significant level. After a month [at the University of Vermont] I got it. They have agreed to pay for some release time for me to get the program off the ground and to support some off-campus workshops, which essentially means leading workshops--about 1200 bucks for a two-day workshop; about \$900 of that \$1200 is for food. We decided that if we can get that kind of institutional

support--providing good meals--people will feel well treated. You don't have too many carrots since you can't pay people extra who are already on salary. Be sure you have a nice setup like what you have here at the Holiday Inn.

The second thing is English Department support. You have got to have people in the department who think language is essential to the core of the curriculum. I don't know of any WAC programs that do not have that. The third thing I think you need is that core of concerned faculty outside of English, whom you would learn to draw on, people who care about teaching, about learning, and about students. Usually, they are what I describe as process-oriented people; they may or may not do a lot with writing, but they are probably very concerned with the process of learning.

If you can put those things together--language experts with some concerned cross-curriculum people, along with administrative support--you can launch a program. I think the next thing a program has got to have is something like a workshop. I think workshops work: I advocate the intense model, in which you try to get people together for a couple of days at an off-campus setting (you have to separate them from telephones and mailboxes and students and family and other things) because I think what happens is that writing, language, thinking--are some of the few things that cut across all disciplinary lines. Everyone cares about thinking and communicating. I think you need some kind of mechanism like a workshop to get those faculty talking together.

**Q.** What style of faculty leadership do you consider effective in promoting Writing Across the Curriculum programs?

**R.** I think that anyone who has ever done a successful program has to have a leader in the program, whether it be a Dan Fader, Elaine Maimon, or one of you. We all have a bit of the hustler in us, and at the same time we have concern and respect for teaching. And you need that kind of a person because some of the work you have to do to get a program off the ground involves fund raising and publicity. When I got to Vermont last spring, I tried to get on the agenda of different departments for an hour, a half an hour, or for whatever time they would give me. I would introduce myself, and then ask them questions. I would not go in there and tell them what I thought they should do.

For example, when I visited the Geography Department, there were about eight or nine people sitting around a table, some of them correcting papers and some of them writing. They figure: here comes this guy from the English Department who's going to tell us about spelling. And I knew that was the situation. I started (and I hate this)--I started asking them questions about what writing problems bothered them. Well, a few people said some interesting things, and I did not get just spelling and punctuation. The first thing was lack of organization, lack of well-developed arguments, and lack of support. They [the students] do not seem to have thought through what they are writing. But as soon as I began to get that, I got the other side, so I made a little list: all the different problems students have with their writing. I listed these on the blackboard to show how complicated the problem really was. This is routine; I repeat it in so many places.

By this time everyone is looking up. No more paper correcting! They are interested because they had been iden-

tifying problems that really troubled them, some of which you would call mechanical and some of which you would call conceptual. Others were rhetorical, having to do with audience; and still others were motivational. Why don't you look at that list? You have mechanical problems, conceptual problems, rhetorical and motivational problems. They're all different, and you as a teacher get all that stuff. They said, "Yeah, that's true." They had never thought of it that way.

I said, "Now which one is the toughy?" And they all said "conceptual." Conceptual problems had been bothering them the most: not saying that the mechanical [problems] were not important, but recognizing they were really bothered by the papers turned in which were not well thought out. And of course as soon as the faculty said that, as far as I was concerned, I had them. We could now talk about some solutions to those problems, some things that would help students think through problems better.

So, if a department would give me a half hour with them, and if I would be smart enough to shut up and ask questions about their concerns, I could usually generate a lot of interest that was not previously there. You can advertise a program like this, send a flyer to your departments, and say, "Well?" But you have got to connect up with their interest. They have got to see that student writing is also their business--because student thinking is.

**Robert C. Wess, in addition to serving as Editor of Writing Across the Curriculum, is also Co-Chair of Interface '86, a cross-curricular conference on the humanities and technology. The author of over thirty articles on literature and composition, he teaches both subjects at Southern Technical Institute.**

*Writing Across the Curriculum produces a graphic record of student ideas, questions/answers, and attitudes.*

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For further information, write to Robert Wess or Joan McCoy, Department of English and History, Southern Technical Institute, Marietta, Georgia 30060.