Report on Writing Across the Curriculum --Pilot Program
(MADISSAR Grant Project)

Dr. Jinhao Wang, Dr. Karen Armitano, Virginia Norquest, Dr. Xin Zuo, Jose Perez, Michael Scales

I.   Summary of the Project

Writing-across-curriculum (WAC) approach became popular in the 1980s. It is based on two theoretical premises: (1) Each discipline has its own discourse conventions, so writing needs to be taught and supported within each specific discipline (Bartholomae, 1997/1985). (2) Writing promotes learning. Scholars believe writing promotes clear thinking, critical thinking, helping students learn to synthesize, analyze, and build connections among concepts (Berthoff, 1981; Elbow, 1994; Emig, 1977). Fulwiler (1990) believes writing challenges passive learning and routine training. Currently, most major universities have WAC programs housed either under the colleges' Writing Centers or English Departments. These programs support writing to learn in the following ways:

- Integrate writing in curricular requirements
- Implement writing through teaching practices
- Conducting faculty professional development in WAC
- Publishing literature on WAC
- Provide resources to support WAC online

At South Texas College, faculty members are generally concerned about students' writing ability. In an email survey conducted by the English Curriculum Alignment Taskforce in Spring 2007, faculty members' responses indicated students' need for improvement in the following areas:

- Active learning/Study skills
- Composing Skills
- Writing Experience
- Rhetorical Modes
- Language Skills
- Research Skills

Efforts are made by individual faculty members at STC to integrate writing within their disciplines. However, a systematic approach to WAC and institutionalized support for WAC are still lacking. To fill in this void, the Developmental English Department initiated a pilot WAC program, which involved carrying out the following activities:

I.   Working with faculty members from the History, Government, and Philosophy departments to select pilot classes and support students in pilot classes in using writing to learn the content materials, analyzing writing prompts, drafting, revising, and editing their writing assignments conducting group tutoring workshops and individual conferences;

II.   Gathering effective WAC teaching practices and publicizing them through online website;

III.   Conducting panel discussions and workshops for the college's faculty

professional development days.

All of these activities were implemented, and the results are as follows:

Goal 1. Pilot classes will have a better course pass rates ("A","B","C") than the control classes:
It appears that Control groups have a higher average course pass rate than Pilot groups' pass rate:
    Pilot Group-------66% (73/111)
    Control Group----75% (85/114)
But Chi-Square Test revealed no statistically significant difference
($\chi2 = 2.08, P = .149$) between these two groups' pass rates.

Goal 2. Pilot classes will have a better retention rates than the control classes:
Both groups have the same withdrawal rate (Grade "W"):
    Pilot Group--------11% (12/111)
    Control Group---- 11% (13/114)

Goal 3. Pilot classes will have a higher mean score on the writing assignments of the respective classes.

Because different content area instructors used different scoring system, and some of them didn't provide scores by individual students, it is hard to run statistical tests to compare the difference in mean scores, but by face value, pilot groups appeared to have higher writing mean scores:

Writing assignment mean scores:

Pilot Class A----80	Pilot Class B-----89
Control Class A-80	Control Class B—84
Pilot Class C-----55	Pilot Class D-----136.9
Control Class C—48	Control Class D—136.4

Goal 4. Gather best practices in WACUM:
Each WACUM participating Developmental English instructor gathered best practices from their matching content area instructor and put them in writing, which will be posted on the STC WACUM website.

Goal 5. Develop STC WACUM website:
This website is under construction—partially completed. The target date for completion is May 2009. See the link below:
http://www.southtexascollege.edu/develop/wacum.htm

Survey Results:

> On a scale of 1-4 with "4" indicating "Strongly Agree" and "3" indicating "Agree", all students (a total of 80 students) who responded to survey questions provided a score of "4" or "3" to the following statements (number in parenthesis indicates the mean score on that item):

A). The professor helped me understand my writing assignments better (3.75).
B). The professor helped me improve the organization of my writing assignments (3.77).
C). I learned from the professor about how to use reading materials in my writing (3.66).
D). I improved my sentence skills through the tutoring services (3.64).
E). The professor was friendly (**3.85**).
F). The professor was helpful (**3.84**).
G). I gained confidence in writing (3.62).
H). I learned useful writing strategies that will help me with my future writing assignments (3.68).
I). I would use the tutoring service again in the future as needed (**3.80**).

Survey results indicate that students were most appreciative of the professors' friendliness, found the tutoring helpful, and would use the tutoring service again.

II.   Impact on Student Success and Retention

Faculty tutoring did not seem to have significant impact on students' performance; however, there were extraneous variables:

    A. Instructors had a difficult time getting students to come to tutoring (only 80 out of 111 pilot group students came to tutoring)
    B. Instructors reported difference in day time students/evening students (future research needs to control this variable).
    C. Content area participating instructors teach writing to both pilot group and control group students, possibly evening out the tutoring effect.
    D. The tutoring was not open to all college students, and the data was only one-semester data—need longituditional data to show valid results.

III.   Recommendations

Given the fact that students who responded to the survey questions were very appreciative the faculty tutoring services, and content area faculty participants' oral feedback, we recommend that WACUM program be institutionalized. Specifically, we recommend the following:

1). STC WACUM program should be jointly run by English Department, Developmental English Department, and Center for Learning Excellence
2). Activities should be designed by the English Curriculum Alignment Taskforce

3). Activities should include
   A. Faculty tutoring
   B. WACUM workshops
   C. Online support
   D. Learning Community Classes
   E. First-year experience—Coordinated curriculum integrating writing projects on similar themes

4). Qualitative analysis of tutoring logs revealed that students were more concerned with their grammar and mechanics, making sense, and meeting instructors' requirements. Students were less aware of the issues related to staying on topic, using thesis statements, topic sentences, and using research information (how to embed research information in the text, how to cite sources).   Writing in specific disciplines should focus on the instruction of these areas.

5). Continue to monitor the impact of WACUM initiatives.

   IV.   Budget Spending Report

   All grant funding spent---0 balance.