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Art As A Means To A Process

Carolina DeLuca — When I first met Carmen Marin I asked her, “Professor Marin, what would you like your students to learn from you and how can I help you attain such a goal?” To which Carmen replied, “I would like you to help me get my students to think through writing in a logical, clear, and individual manner. I would like to get them to think for themselves, once they have learned the facts. I would like my students to feel empowered, to develop their own voice, to understand that their thoughts, their intellects, are as valid and as important as anyone else’s. I want my students to feel good about themselves.”

Professor Marin’s ideal of the classroom as an arena which provided and allowed freedom of expression for all students, and her understanding of writing as a tool for learning through which one could access intellectual and social emancipation, was highly democratic. To her very diverse Spanish audience — mostly new to this country and its language— writing clearly, both logically and critically, as well as creatively and individually, meant entering and challenging a system which often dismissed and excluded them. For Carmen, a Renaissance woman with an eye for baroque detail, the Humanities were a fundamental and basic part of anyone’s education. Aesthetic experience reported and translated onto the written page allowed the work of art to become tangible to the student’s mind and relevant to the student’s life. Grappling with the artwork under scrutiny was no longer an abstract assignment to quickly rush through and hand in for a grade, but a meaningful experience.

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Low Stakes Writing: A Valuable Experience

Dorinda Tetens — Low stakes writing (usually non-graded writing) has often been misunderstood. There are many different benefits of and uses for low stakes writing. Primarily, low stakes writing is a way to get students to explore the content of the class without the confines of a grade that often inhibits the students’ full exploration of a subject. While most assignments are not graded, thus leading many students and faculty to think that the assignment may not be taken “seriously,” some type of incentive can be attached to the assignment to allow for exploration and make the students and professors feel that it will be taken seriously.

Some low stakes assignments might be designed so that the professor can gauge the students’ frame of mind in order to address students’ needs in the class that may not be detected otherwise. For example, an

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Writing in the Public Speaking Classroom

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purpose are vital to any oral presentation. Otherwise, audience attention will dissipate and the message won’t be received. Professor Miranda and I used writing assignments to help our students become active listeners and engaging speakers. A few weeks into the semester the students were scheduled to workshop their speeches in front of small groups of their peers in preparation for delivering them to the entire class. The instructor and I created a system where audition members were asked to submit “feedback cards” to each speaker. These index cards contained a brief written summary of what the listener had heard, provided suggestions about what he’d like to hear more about (or less about), and offered tips on voice and presentation.

Professor Miranda and I emphasized that delivery was only one part of an effective speech. Just like Yeats’ dancer and the dance, form and content cannot be separated; they are part of the same performance. Many of the students were nervous about giving their presentations, and in talking to

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through which the students could relate, grow and discover. Art, to Carmen and I, was not a means to an end, but a road which led to a process. Learning, writing, learning to write and writing to learn, to us were and are processes; they should never feel stale nor final. Our best opportunity to include all of our beliefs on writing about art as a learning process came about in an assignment in which students were asked to go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and answer a number of low stakes questions about art. Some of the questions follow:

PARTE TERCERA: Pintura Europea. (25 puntos)
*Segundo piso, al subir de la escalera central; lado sur-oeste. En esta galería, “The Gallery of European Paintings,” va a buscar tres cuadros:

Bronzino, Portrait of a Young Man (Retrato de un Joven)
Rembrandt, Self Portrait

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Writing Assignments Times Three

Ese Burlingame — The key to a successful writing assignment, be it assigned in the classroom as a short Writing To Learn (WTL) exercise or outside of the classroom as homework, is that it teaches important content in a specific subject area. Look to class goals and exam questions to give you ideas for writing assignments that really teach your students the things you want them to know.

Gerontology WTL Assignment
Take the next 5-10 minutes to write down the symptoms and therapies/cures for the two types of senility we have discussed in class. Then, write down some of the ways that someone can effectively communicate with a confused person.

This writing assignment came out of a misunderstanding about two different types of senility that many students answered incorrectly on their Gerontology midterm. To get them to think about the definitions more clearly, and to get them to understand a possible real world application of this knowledge, I created this assignment for Professor Diane Penner to give students the

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Virtual WAC in Freshman Orientation

Adrian Wisnicki — In the spring of 2002 I collaborated with Professor Alfonso Siverls on his Freshman Orientation course. The course we worked on was a hybrid online course, meaning that although Professor Siverls occasionally met with his students in the classroom, most of the class activities occurred online. Among these activities was a discussion board to which a new question was posted every week. When I began working with Professor Siverls he was very excited about using Blackboard, as he had only recently incorporated it into his

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Writing Formulas

Crystal Benedicks — This semester I am working with Professor Deery in the Chemistry Department and Professor Menil in the Mathematics Department to develop more writing-related exercises and exams. Writing is not a traditional part of math and science education, but there is certainly great potential for expanded learning and conversation when writing enters any classroom.

So far, my work this semester in the Chemistry Department has involved collaborating with Professor Deery to create essay questions for exams that will invite students to explore their critical thinking processes. The ideal essay question

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Anonymous assignment might allow the students to fully express their knowledge without fear of being penalized for not understanding something. The professor can address the major concerns of the class without singling out a student. Thus the student is further informed and the professor addresses any misconceptions in the class.

Still another type of low stakes assignment might be used so that the professor and the students can see the students’ progress from the beginning of a class to the end of a class or the beginning of a program (if there is a required class for the program) to the end of the program. Obviously, for this type of assignment, the students will most likely have to attach their names to the assignments.

This last type of low stakes assignment was created for a Radiological Technology class and the program. One version is being used for the first time in Professor Ruiz’s Professional Practice Issues (PPI) class and another is being considered for the department to use within its long-standing two-year plan for their students. After working with Professor Ruiz and her first year and second year students and learning about the Department’s goals and student concerns, I had a brainstorm for a low stakes assignment (Continued on page 6)

Writing Assignments Times Three

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ECE WTL Assignment
How do lessons based upon holidays such as Halloween and Thanksgiving teach children about history?

I created this third and final writing assignment with Professor John Randall for his Computer Literacy class. In his class, homework is given in the form of short essays that are designed to spark classroom discussion. This assignment is longer than the other two writing assignments and requires students to think more in depth about subjects introduced in the textbook and in the lab.

Computer Literacy
Homework Assignment: Organic and Artificial Memory
Write about the similarities and differences between human (Continued on page 6)

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classroom. He and I decided to collaborate on the discussion board segment because we felt that it was an excellent forum for low-stakes questions. Professor Siverls was especially concerned with developing his students' critical thinking, and I am very fond of taking school activities beyond the classroom, so together he and I devised questions that incorporated both of these aspects while also incorporating elements from the weekly classroom topic and reading materials. Two of these questions follow: Giving to the Poor

If you live in New York, sooner or later you will be accosted by someone begging on the street. A lot of us probably have a ready response: we might ignore the (Continued on page 6)
Writing in the Public Speaking Classroom

(Continued from page 2) began its WAC program in the fall of 1982. Classes that have utilized WAC pedagogy range from Anthropology to Business to Physics. Their greatest successes have come from direct faculty involvement in encouraging the importance of writing to students; from positive faculty support through good attitudes about WAC manifested in teaching WAC-informed courses; and from having writing courses “skillfully integrated” into each student’s major. — Ese Burlingame


Beginning early in the semester and continuing throughout it as the genres of the speeches got progressively more complex and demanding, we aided the students in using writing to figure out what they wanted to speak about and the most lucid way to speak about it effectively. We encouraged them to write out detailed plans for Introductions that stated the talk’s purpose and thesis, Bodies that provided statistics and informed analysis, and Conclusions that offered synthesis and recommendations. Mapping out what they were going to say — using writing to help speaking — increased their confidence. Several students found that the more writing they did during the preparation stages, the less they needed to lean on papers and notes when it actually came time to step to the podium. As their confidence

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(Continued from page 2) would ask students to describe in writing some of the underlying concepts involved in the chemistry topics at hand. Students in one of Professor Deery’s chemistry classes are also keeping a thinkbook -- a personal log of their notes and reading that they will be able to use for test preparation. While the thinkbook is ungraded, it does provide a space for students to work through complex concepts in their own language and a way for Professor Deery to gauge what students do and do not understand. The thinkbook is a versatile form; some students use it to reorganize their class notes and reading notes, others use it to express their anxieties and successes in approaching

chemistry as a field of study, and others use it to draw connections between classroom chemistry and everyday aspects of their lives.

Meanwhile, students in one of Professor Menil's algebra classes are working on short, in-class writing assignments that ask them to reflect on both the content and structure of the day’s lesson. For example,

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Low Stakes Writing. A Valuable Experience

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writing assignment that would fit one of her classes and the department’s plan for the students. I had heard time and again, from concerned faculty and veteran students, that the students did not fully understand “what they were getting into” when they entered the Radiological Technology program. It was only in hindsight that the students understood the goals for the program. There was often a sense that “if they only knew, things would be different.”

Based on this information, I created an assignment that would allow the students to see their own progress and, over time, these assignments could then be used within a booklet for new students so that the advice could come from their peers rather than from the faculty. These voices of “experience” may have a different impact than the voices of experienced authority.

The assignment has two parts that span a two-year period. The first part will be given to the students either on the first day of class in their first semester of the program or at the end of the first semester in the program. This could easily work for Rad Tech since they keep a file containing everything a student ever writes throughout the two years of the program. The first assignment will ask the students what they think they need to be successful in the program. These responses are then saved in their folders. The second part of the

Writing Assignments Times Three

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memory and computer memory using examples from the textbook and your own experience. Begin your response by telling me how human memory works. Next, tell me how computer memory works. Then tell me how human and computer memory are the same. Finally, tell me how human and computer memory are different.

All three of these

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evidence? Is this response well organized? Are their any points that confuse me? After you’ve done this, look at the writer’s conclusion. Are you convinced? Is the argument well supported?

Use your notes to develop and organize your answer (about 2-3 paragraphs) to some or all of the above questions. You might also consider taking your notes by hand, writing out your response and only then typing it up to submit it.

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assignment will be given to the students in their last semester of the program. It will ask them to review their first letters and then write a new letter to themselves as if they were prospective students. In this assignment, they will be asked to share what they have learned throughout the program. Would they change anything? Was anything they did particularly helpful to their success? What advice would each student give to him or her self in hindsight?

Sharing this assignment with Professor Ruiz triggered her thoughts about including the following two low stakes writing assignments in her PPI class. The first assignment was given to her students on the first day of class this semester. They had 10 minutes to answer the following question: “What does it mean to you to be a professional Radiologic Technologist?” The second assignment will be given to them on the last day of class. It asks: “Looking at your earlier

As can be seen, sometimes these questions were self-contained, and sometimes the topic of one question would carry over into the succeeding week’s question. In addition, as answers to the questions were not sent directly to Professor Siverls, but instead “posted” to the discussion board, we were able to create a new kind of low-stakes and discussion environment in which students not only received feedback from us, but were also able to see, consider and respond to another’s answers. In the end, Professor Siverls and I found these questions to be an effective way of engaging his students and, as a result, he and I are again working together this semester to refine these questions and to develop new ones.

Writing Formulas

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students have been asked to write out the steps they would use to solve specific types of questions, thus emphasizing the thought process involved in problem solving. More abstract questions have asked students to explain why certain approaches to solving problems don’t yield satisfactory results, and some structure-oriented questions have asked students to evaluate the effectiveness of a lesson. These writing assignments are done on notecards during the last few minutes of class and the notecards are then collected and read later, allowing Professor Menil to decide what

concepts students understand thoroughly and what pedagogical strategies work best for students. Giving the students an opportunity to write at the end of class also helps them cement new knowledge and explore new ways of expressing mathematical ideas.
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