Greetings from the WRAC Coordinators
by Drs. Linda Hirsch & Andrea Fabrizio

Welcome to the Spring 2014 edition of From the Writing Desk, the newsletter of the Hostos WAC/RAC Initiative. We are pleased to share with you the articles in this year's publication that reflect the projects, initiatives, and insights of the 2013-14 cohort of Writing Fellows. In this year's edition, you will find articles on the transformative power of WAC/RAC pedagogy, the Fellow/Faculty collaboration, linked classes, and our revised WAC website. We hope that you will find these articles not only informative, but also inspiring, as you consider the ways in which you can draw on WAC/RAC pedagogy and practice to enhance your classes and provide our students with more meaningful and engaging opportunities for reading and writing.

As the articles demonstrate, the Faculty/Fellow collaboration creates new opportunities for professional growth and pedagogical change. While there is no one collaborative model, successful relationships are ones in which faculty and fellow respect each other's expertise and join together in a spirit of freely exchanging and generating ideas. Both partners may assume the roles of teacher and learner at different times and to varying degrees as they work together to transform the definition and role of writing and reading throughout the curriculum.

We would like to thank our team of WAC Fellows, Jeremy Greenfield, Pablo Guerra, Dave Houpt, Dave Monaghan, Preeti Sampat, and Rebecca Traynor for their outstanding commitment and contributions to the Hostos WAC/RAC Initiative this year. They are all coming to the end of their one year Writing Fellowship, and we hope you will join us in wishing them much success in their future endeavors. They have been indispensable to the success of WAC at Hostos. (Cont. pg. 2)
In the fall, we will be welcoming a new group of Fellows. By mid-September they will be available to work with you on developing a Writing Intensive (WI) course, revising/revisiting an existing WI, building reading/writing assignments into your non-WI course, running mini-workshops for your students, or certifying you to teach an existing WI.

Please contact us if you would like to collaborate with WAC in any way. We encourage you to visit our website: http://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/wac/ where you can find a variety of support materials for yourself and your students.

Wishing all a wonderful summer,
Linda Hirsch and Andrea Fabrizio, WRAC Coordinators lhirsch@hostos.cuny.edu; afabrizio@hostos.cuny.edu

This is Your Classroom on WAC
by Rebecca Traynor

A couple of years ago, I noticed an education news story about the “flipped classroom.” The flipped classroom re-imagines class time as a workshop where students are to apply their knowledge and test their skills while the faculty member coaches. In flipped classrooms, students are not allowed to remain passive as lectures simply wash over them; rather, students must solve a variety of homework-like in-class activities aimed at remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing and evaluating the day’s material. On learning of the flipped classroom, I remember thinking, “That’s neat. I should try to incorporate more student activity in my own teaching.” But then the semester progressed and I, busy juggling demands as both teacher and student, forgot all about my excitement at trying elements of this pedagogical strategy.

Enter fall 2013, when I began serving as a Writing Fellow (WF) for the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Initiative at Hostos. WAC emphasizes learning through writing; it emphasizes active reading of and thinking about the course material. During my time as a WF, this focus on writing as a cognitive tool caught my attention by echoing the idea of engagement as key to the flipped classroom.

Writing-to-learn is typically informal and is to the writer what sketching is to the painter: a safe space dedicated to trial-and-error on which one can later build. Informal writing provides students the chance to think on paper, grapple with new concepts, and make connections between academic material and everyday life without fear of being punished for faulty grammar or haphazard structure. Informal writing can be assigned as take-home or, as with the flipped classroom, in class. Examples of in-class informal writing tasks include briefly summarizing the previous night’s reading at the beginning of class; breaking into groups during class to tackle a prompt; applying academic content to one’s personal experience; and jotting down questions that remain at the end of class.

Much like the flipped classroom, these and other informal writing assignments are aimed at promoting deeper understanding of and engagement with the course material. Informal writing, then, fulfills key elements of the flipped classroom by encouraging active learning through hands-on practice and application and by discouraging passive classroom behavior. Given this, I am excited to design and experiment with informal writing assignments. I am excited to see how informal writing helps student learning and enlivens the classroom experience. And I am excited to see how informal writing supports my teaching. So watch out future students: Prepare to learn through writing; prepare for your classroom to be on WAC! For more on informal writing, go to http://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/wac/instructors/

World Wide WAC
by David Houpt

For better or worse, more and more of higher education is being done online. Students at Hostos have a wide variety of choices when registering and can take Writing Intensive (WI) courses from the comfort of their own home. Additionally, courses that are taught in the physical classroom are increasingly reliant on the internet. It is, therefore, vital that the Writing Across the Curriculum program have online resources to meet the needs of the digital community. I have spent much of my time this year focused on two different projects related to the online WAC resources. First, I have worked to improve the online certification process for professors (Cont. pg. 3)
Interested in teaching a WI class online and/or who are unable to regularly meet with a Writing Fellow. Previous Writing Fellows had created a Blackboard class for online certification but it was in need of editing and some of the links were not working. While fixing these issues, I also monitored the progress of professors currently enrolled in the course and reconfigured the site in such a way that users can better interact with each other. Hopefully future professors will use the course as an opportunity to engage in a discussion about the principles of WAC and share ideas and insights.

In addition to the work on the online certification course, I have tried to improve the Hostos WAC website. The goal has been to develop a site that serves as a general introduction to WAC at Hostos and as a resource for both students and faculty. Students will now be able to go to the website to read about what to expect from a Writing Intensive course as well as learn about different styles of academic writing and proper citation. Professors interested in developing a WI syllabus will find the WI check-list, examples of approved WI syllabi from different departments, a variety of resources for using writing in the classroom, and suggestions on how to more effectively (and efficiently) respond to student writing. Last, but certainly not least, the website also has short bios on the WAC coordinators and the current Writing Fellows as well as a list of past Writing Fellows. Please visit the site and contact us with any questions!

http://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/wac

Linked Courses at Hostos: The Return of a Good Idea by David Monaghan

Most college courses are worlds unto themselves. Students move from course to course in a highly individualized manner, and in each class the instructor, the students, and the subject matter are different. What goes on in class is highly compartmentalized. Professors know in the abstract that students are taking multiple courses, but may consider what occurs in those other courses to be none of their concern. This is simply how college works, right?

Increasingly, instructors, researchers and administrators in higher education are coming to believe otherwise. Advocates of linked classes and learning communities argue that students benefit when courses are more integrated with each other. Forging connections between courses allows for a richer social and academic experience, and helps students to understand the connections between spheres of knowledge and skills that are typically kept separate.

What are linked classes and learning communities? Most basic to the idea of both is sharing students: two classes are said to be linked if the same students are enrolled in both. Learning communities are, in their basic form, simply what happens when three or four courses (rather than two) are linked together.

Courses may be linked together with varying degrees of intensity. The loosest form of 'link' is formed simply by co-enrollment. But this is not all a link need be. In linked courses, instructors could be in communication, sharing information about what each other is doing in class and how the various students are performing. This next level of integration helps instructors to identify students who are falling through the cracks and to intervene more effectively to help them get back on track. It can also help instructors to coordinate with each other so as to not overburden students with too many assignments at once.

Finally, there is a deeper, richer level of linking which occurs when two or more courses work together in terms of subject matter and pedagogical technique. When done right, this can make for a more thoroughly immersive learning experience, in which different classes feed off of and complement each other. Students are able to see the relationships between fields as disparate as math, writing, sociology, and biology. The courses work together to pursue common learning goals and to enhance skills in the students. When done well, a true community of learning can be attained.

Research has found that these integrative practices result in improved outcomes for students. In a 2004 study published in Research in Higher Education of more than 350 colleges, Chun-Mei Zhao and George Kuh concluded that "participating in learning communities is uniformly and positively linked with student academic performance, engagement in educationally fruitful activities (such as academic integration, active and collaborative learning, and interaction with faculty members), gains associated with college attendance, and overall satisfaction with the college experience." A randomized control trial at Kingsborough Community College by the policy evaluation firm MDRC showed that learning community participants had achieved higher grades and higher pass rates than control group students, and that participants were more likely to have completed remedial English requirements in their first semester.

Both learning communities and linked classes are alive and well on some CUNY campuses. Hostos had a strong linked courses program back in the 1990s, and the Office of Academic Affairs is moving to revive this practice. (Cont. pg. 4)
This spring I have had the privilege to help out on a course-link that connected a Sociology course with an ESL course. The same students are in both courses, and are able to share experiences in the two classes with each other. More importantly, the instructors, Professors Sarah Hoiland and Gail August, are in constant communication, working to bring their courses into closer collaboration, and are busy developing ways to have the subject matter of the two courses feed off each other. The instructors both report the link having an impact on how their classes are working, and note positive impacts on student engagement.

"It is really important for teachers to learn new things, and the LINK is great for this," reports Gail August, who is teaching the ESL course. "The opportunity to understand another discipline and another teacher's classroom strategies contributes to our growth and enjoyment as instructors."

Linked classes and learning communities are a welcome addition here at Hostos, especially for students in developmental courses and English Language Learners. They may even make sense for required courses in major programs, though certainly that would be more challenging to implement. But linking some courses holds great promise for enriching the learning experience here at Hostos, and perhaps for helping to retain some students who might otherwise not keep coming back.

**WAC = With Access to Creativity**

*by Pablo Guerra*

I recently attended an international congress on Spanish sociolinguistics, and a major discussion that I had the privilege to be exposed to on several occasions was the tension between textbook authors and textbook users, the latter being more numerous and more critical than the former. It is very hard to teach and it is very easy to criticize. I have learned this fact very well in my experience with Writing Across the Curriculum. Since the first day and the first project I was involved with, I have tried to think and practice education from the perspective of a textbook author.

What do I mean by that? I mean that conceiving and preparing tools to aid thinking, such as developing an informal assignment that helps a student scaffold a complex idea, or thinking of the big picture when planning study guides or an entire syllabus, is way more complicated than not doing any of this and complaining that students just do not have a clue. To put it in a Romantic nature analogy, it is harder to plant and grow a tree than chop it down.

My journey to discover this pedagogical dictum in WAC does not have a particular starting point, but for the sake of clarity, I will say that everything happened at the same time, and it grew every week like a snowball: from our weekly meeting with our two experienced advisors Professor Linda Hirsch and Professor Andrea Fabrizio, who strive to emphasize that a good idea does not necessarily have to be complicated, if it is well explained; to the workshops I conducted with the Honors class, where I had to reflect on my own writing process in order to explain how to write an abstract, a statement of purpose, an introduction or a title. I continued to learn from my collaboration with Professor Orlando Hernández, with whom I prepared study guides for his courses on the erudite 19th century Puerto Rican educator, philosopher, and independence advocate Eugenio Maria de Hostos, after whom our Community College is named and was amazed by the writings by Hostos himself, especially his essays on Blacks, on the scientific education of women, or on the Native Americans. Hostos was, above all, an educator. He conceived learning as a long process where nature and civil society correlated, as the way to freedom and self-realization. (Cont. pg. 5)
Lean on Bean!
by Preeti Sampat

I started off as a WAC fellow with a fair amount of skepticism in my ability to help faculty develop well thought-out syllabi that put pedagogy at the center of the classroom experience. Sure, we all enjoy teaching for the chance “to motivate students to become critical thinkers,” but when do we become experts at it? And how did I get to be an expert by just landing a WAC Fellowship? As I helped my first faculty assignment, Professor Sakeena Beaulieu, develop her Fundamentals of Public Administration syllabus, I began to see the value of thinking through the course and planning assignments in ways accessible to students. Of course, it helped that the Professor Beaulieu was an adjunct and had to go through the process to get her certification so had added incentive.

Nevertheless, the manner in which her syllabus evolved from practically scratch to a really stellar WAC syllabus with clear and focused assignments, with scaffolding, practice, revision and feedback made me think there was something to be said for the whole WAC shebang. To her credit, she really internalized the principles and reflected them in a wonderfully thoughtful teaching statement as well. Needless to say, what happens in the classroom, and whether the faculty will be pedagogically motivated through the semester, is beyond Fellow purview. But it is really great to see a good syllabus! And I realized, with a bit of dismay for my previous syllabi, that our syllabi reflect the kind of teachers we are, but since teaching is an ongoing learning process, they also reflect the kind of teachers we want to be. The care we put into our syllabi, can only enhance the learning process for students and teachers alike.

In similar vein, I felt a bit at sea at first conducting writing pedagogy workshops for tutors at the Writing
A Successful Partnership
by Jeremey Greenfield

Over the past few months I have had the great fortune to work with two professors in the Department of Language and Cognition here at Hostos Community College. On Thursdays from 3:30 to 4:30 or 5:00 I facilitated a semi-weekly Writing Intensive Certification Course; I played teacher while Professors Gail August and Patricia Frenz-Belkin each played pupil. There are any number of reasons why this endeavor should have failed. Professors August and Frenz-Belkin are both experienced professionals; they know a lot more about their discipline and their students than I ever will. They were already familiar with a number of the strategies I was "introducing" them to. Why should they have set time aside to learn anything from me, a lowly grad student? The certification process might have failed, but it did not.

Because there will surely be arrangements such as this in the future (students at Hostos need to take two Writing Intensive courses before graduating and only instructors who have been certified can teach such courses), I have put together a list of three factors that I believe played an important role in the success of our partnership. Perhaps what follows will be of relevance to Hostos instructors and Writing Fellows in the future.

1. Foundation
The course I designed for Professors August and Frenz-Belkin drew heavily on an online writing certification course developed by previous Writing Fellows. I didn't have to invent a writing intensive course de novo. I suppose this benefitted me more than my partners, but by drawing on an existing course I was less likely to leave out critical information and more likely to include core tenets of Writing Across the Curriculum.

2. Personalization
While I began with an existing course I didn't stop there. I strayed from the course on multiple occasions, deleting and adding readings and assignments as I saw fit. For example, one week I selected a linguistics study by Dr. Ofelia Garcia, a scholar both women know and respect. In addition to reading the article, I asked Professors Frenz-Belkin and August to complete writing assignments that they would have their students do in the future. They did so and we had a great time talking about the article and the ways in which writing about texts can spark dialogue and debate.

3. Relationship
I first met Professor Frenz-Belkin while working on a separate project several months earlier. We met weekly, discussing learning strategies, language acquisition, and literature. We got along well. When the opportunity to design a spring mini-course for Professor Frenz-Belkin and one of her colleagues presented itself, I gladly volunteered. In February I met Professor August and before I knew it we had developed an easy-going, collegial rapport. Over the months that followed the three of us spent many hours talking about writing, pedagogy and life in the academy.

Undoubtedly there were other factors that contributed to the success of our partnership such as Professor August and Professor Frenz-Belkin's engagement in the material. And yet, as I reflect on this semester, and my broader experience at Hostos, it occurs to me that these factors—drawing on the knowledge of those who came before, meeting the individual needs of students, and building strong relationships—have been paramount.
WAC Workshop - The State of the Art

Thursday, May 29th

Dr. Anne Ellen Geller

The Intersection of What Students Find Meaningful and What Faculty Value: Using Writing Across the Curriculum and in the Disciplines

Join Anne Geller, director of the St. John's WAC Program for an interactive workshop on using writing to support and encourage students' learning. The workshop will begin with a brief discussion of The Meaningful Writing Project (www.meaningfulwritingproject.net), a research study of the project's more than 700 college seniors named the most meaningful writing of their undergraduate years. These include writing in all disciplines including the liberal arts and STEM fields. Working with the implications of this study, the faculty in this workshop will use hands-on activities, talk and writing to reflect on and revise writing assignments for their own courses.

9:30-3:30

C596F (located in HALC)

Please RSVP

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From the Writing Desk
Newsletter © 2014 WAC at Hostos Community College
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