Welcome to the 2022 edition of our WAC newsletter, From the Writing Desk. We are delighted to be joined this semester by Prof. Sean Gerrity, Assistant Professor in the English Department and former Hostos Writing Fellow, who is collaborating with us this year as a WAC Associate.

Though our writing desks have evolved into screens and Zoom meetings, our Writing Fellows have been working extensively with Hostos faculty to bring writing into our classrooms in new and innovative ways.

In this issue, our Fellows discuss their research on anti-racist pedagogy and how it can be incorporated to create both inclusivity and hope. Fellows also share insights gleaned from collaborating with faculty on the benefits of using informal writing in the classroom, on the role WAC practices can play in a French course, on using a less prescriptive approach to grammar, and on the ways in which writing can be integrated into multimodal teaching practices. All this work reflects our efforts to be aware of the classroom atmospheres we create so that students feel comfortable and supported.

Our Writing Fellows have done much this year to expand the implementation of WAC pedagogy and practice at Hostos. We are grateful to our team of Fellows: Nic Rios, Maggie Fife, Casandra Murray, Pamela Franciotti, and Shweta Deshpande, and we wish them well in their future endeavors.
As a philosopher myself, I was excited to work with Professor Frank Chirico on creating a Writing Intensive syllabus for PHI 101: Critical Thinking and Reasoning. Philosophy has a reputation for being overly abstract and impractical—however, it need not be. Formal logic, informal logic, and critical thinking/reasoning are the foundations of philosophy.

Introductory philosophy courses teach students how to identify fallacies, formulate sound and valid arguments, and effectively critique invalid and unsound arguments. Despite the fact that critical thinking is relevant to all areas of social life and education, sometimes course material is focused heavily on the form of arguments without showing students how these skills are useful in the real world.

Professor Chirico has a lot of teaching experience, and was excited to craft Writing Intensive assignments that connected to the lived experiences of students, while simultaneously encouraging their comfort with writing. With these goals in mind, we focused on informal, low stakes writing assignments. As Peter Elbow (1997) points out, low stakes writing (writing for thinking that is not graded critically, or at all) helps students insert themselves into the subject matter of a course (p. 7). By allowing students to write about technical subject matter in their own style and lingo, without worrying about a formal grade, students are invited to directly express what they think about a topic without being tempted to parrot the text. When this element of low-stakes assignments is paired with a prompt that specifically requires students to relate the topic to their lived experience, it is a recipe for increased student engagement.

As most instructors are now aware, increased engagement is always a goal when teaching an online class. For his online section of PHI 101, Professor Chirico used the discussion board feature of Blackboard to assign frequent low stakes writing assignments. At the bottom of this page is an example of one of Professor Chirico’s double-entry journal assignments. A double-entry journal includes two columns: one where students highlight a passage, quote, or definition from the text, and a second column where they comment on, relate to, or analyze the quote or definition.

Informal Writing Assignment #3
(Fallacies)

One skill in critical thinking is being able to recognize fallacies and persuaders. Read Chapter 10 in Vaughn on some of the common fallacies. In this assignment, define what a fallacy is. Then, write a double journal entry selecting ten fallacies/persuaders. In one column, write the fallacy/persuader and provide a brief definition. In the other column, write a sentence or two describing where you have seen or heard the fallacy/persuader. If you cannot identify a fallacy or persuader in your experience, think of some setting where it might be used.
As a linguist, I was particularly excited when I was assigned a project on developing activities for Supplemental Instruction (SI) tutors to use with students attending English co-requisite classes at Hostos Community College. I collaborated with Professor Ann Genzale on the development of three main activities: one focused on English grammar, one focused on reading, and one that addressed the writing process. For the English grammar activity, we decided to target fragments (e.g., while Monica is cleaning) and created a handout that SI tutors could use with students to help identify them. We included an activity that tutors could use, either in synchronous or asynchronous mode, to help students revise their writing.

One of the main barriers I had to overcome was to avoid the overuse of grammatical terms, such as transitive and verb argument.

---

**Talkin' Bout A Revolution: Can We Be Less Prescriptive in the Way We Teach Grammar?**

**Pamela Franciotti**

Professor Chirico reports that he has received good feedback from students on the assignment this semester, and that most relate the logical fallacy to their work and home lives. Below is a real example from a student in his PHI 101 Spring 2022 course:

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Slippery Slope: It arises when the arguer claims that a chain of causal events will necessarily occur and will lead to undesirable consequences.</td>
<td>1. I have heard this fallacy when I speak with my relatives, they want me to do something I do not want to do. For example: “You should go to church because if you do not do so, you will forget about God. If you forget about God, you will lose your purpose in life. If you lose your purpose, you might become a criminal. Then you will die and not go to heaven.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

since it turned out that my first draft of the handout was perceived as being too technical.

These and many other questions came to mind while working on this project that particularly relates to the current and historic work that several scholars are conducting to ensure an anti-racist pedagogy in the classroom (e.g., Kishimoto, 2018, among others). According to Kishimoto (2018), “it is about how one teaches, even in courses where race is not the subject matter” (p. 540). It can also be seen in professors’ “discipline, research, and departmental, university, and community work.” (p. 540).

The type of course material the professor selects and the degree to which topics are emphasized are foundational components for an anti-racist approach to teaching (Kishimoto, 2018). When considering the student-teacher dynamic, this includes the way professors engage in discourse and respond to student writing.

Professor Genzale and I kept these aforementioned concepts in mind while working on our second draft. Firstly, we addressed the issue of how grammar is taught. To this end, we created distinct sections for both SI tutors and students. The former was a resource for tutors to adapt and use in class, and provided a more detailed description of the several types of fragments incorporating grammatical terms. The latter included a less technical introduction to fragments. In this introduction, we avoided the use of adjectives, such as ungrammatical or incorrect, and gave an explanation of fragments purely based on the concepts of subject-predicate-object. We included tips on how to identify instances when one of the three is required and missing,
This year, I worked with another Writing Fellow, Casandra Murray, on creating an edition of The WAC Reader centering on anti-racist pedagogy. This reader focused on tangible practices any professor could work on, regardless of discipline or familiarity with anti-racist teaching. As an adult learner of English who first attended to the prescriptive aspects of grammar, I ultimately transitioned to focus on its descriptive properties as I embraced more of a linguist’s perspective. To speak in Chomskyan terms, these are properties that all humans are endowed with, which can be defined as competence (i.e., “the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language,” Chomsky 1965, p. 4). Students should be encouraged to trust more their linguistic intuitions than their prescriptive knowledge of the language on whether the meaning they want to convey is understandable. In other words, we might want to teach students to think about themselves more as linguists while they write, and to rely more on their linguistic competence (such as fundamental principles that apply to all languages) than on strictly language-specific prescriptive rules that often do not even reflect the way people actually speak and write. This is a change that does not happen overnight. Rome wasn’t built in a day, and a collective reflection on the topic could be the start of a revolution.


I keep coming back to a puzzle I am still trying to solve: maintaining hope while teaching about oppression.
students that there is no solution. This can leave our students feeling hopeless and cynical about the future.

One way to address this is to assign more reading that focuses on activism, collaboration, and resilience throughout the course rather than in the final weeks of class (as I have been guilty of doing). I want to suggest a complementary approach, informed by the WAC principle of using frequent writing to foster student learning.

I believe that our writing assignments, whether formal or informal, highlight the parts of our courses that we think are the most important. They are the parts that students will spend the most time with. We can promote a sense of agency in our students by focusing more assignments on solutions, resilience, and strengths. I have a few ideas for how to do this, both formally and informally:

- Have one or more students present each week about an activist group that is working to solve the problems discussed that week. Alternatively, they could present important legal battles that successfully fought for justice, social policies that have improved people’s lives, or any other topic you can think of. Students presenting could hand in a short write-up before the presentation. After, students in the audience can free-write about the takeaways from the presentation.

- Create learning activities centered around addressing the social problems you’re teaching about. For example, in a week on gender-based violence in my Sociology of Gender class, my students imagine the recommendations they would give to a domestic violence shelter for better supporting undocumented women, backing up their recommendations using the assigned reading. End these activities with informal writing prompts that help students see how what they are learning can help their communities.

- Ask students to write a letter to the editor in which they respond to a newspaper or magazine article that depicts either a deficit-based or asset-based view of a marginalized group. Depending on the view, the student could use evidence to either challenge this view or express agreement with the view.

What we tell students to focus on in their writing signals to them what is worth knowing. To be sure, if we only focus on the success and the strength of marginalized groups, we run the risk of romanticizing and individualizing complex, structural problems. Hope is only helpful when it flows through the truth. But if we can help our students to see both problem and solution, both oppression and resistance, both suffering and resilience, then I think our classes can become more liberating, just, and hopeful spaces.

(Link: https://tinyurl.com/WACReader2)
As a first-timer about to step into her role as a WAC fellow, I had had numerous conversations with some of my colleagues who were either current or former WAC fellows, and hearing about their experiences, I could gather that I would be exploring unchartered territory. I did not have the first clue of what exactly WAC work entailed, which made it somewhat hard to anticipate the nature of the work or my contribution to the program.

This spring, I had the opportunity to collaborate with Professor Nicole Wallenbrock to help her create assignments for her French 101 course. In our meeting to discuss this project, Professor Wallenbrock explained that although the textbook they used in class was well-designed, none of the units touched upon the cultural aspects of French-speaking countries other than France. As a graduate researcher in Francophone studies myself, I realize the importance of exposing students of French to the Francophone world, especially as scholarship in this discipline continues to grow.

Based on my experience of working on this project, I realized that combining both grammar and vocabulary in entry-level assignments within the framework of second language acquisition is not that simple. While authentic sources serve as an excellent means through which to introduce foreign language learners to real-life sites (where that language is spoken) as well as their sociocultural elements, their linguistic and stylistic complexity can often be intimidating and demotivating to students. It is precisely in such cases, however, that WAC principles of how to design writing assignments and how to respond to student writing come into play.

My primary task for this project was to create assignments on “vacation” vocabulary (including weather, climate, and geographical features) which students would be able to apply in their reading, writing, listening and speaking activities, while at the same time learning about and exploring Francophone countries outside Europe as fun and vibrant vacation destinations. I relied mainly on authentic sources such as vacation travelogues, websites, magazine articles, tourism brochures and video clips to design different activities. For instance, I found a travel article on the Akagera National Park in Rwanda, and formulated questions based on it, keeping in mind the objective that students need not...
Variety is the Spice of Writing: WAC Pedagogy and Multimodal Projects
Casandra Murray

As a Writing Fellow at Hostos this year, I have had the opportunity to pursue a variety of projects that allowed me to work with faculty, students, and my peers to enhance distinct skills from tutoring, lesson planning, and assignment design to writing, researching, interviewing, and event planning. I have assisted faculty in creating formal and informal writing assignments to supplement student learning within both regular and Writing Intensive courses. I have hosted a writing workshop for students in a Bronx Beautiful course, met with them one-on-one, and provided feedback directly on their writing. I have collaborated with Professor Sean Gerrity and Nic Rios to facilitate our May WAC Workshop on A Pedagogy of Kindness led by Dr. Cate Denial. As part of this workshop, we will be bringing in the other significant activity I have contributed to this year: The WAC Reader centered on anti-racist pedagogy. I have gained a multitude of experiences through my fellowship because of the diverse approaches the WAC program takes to engaging with the Hostos community, but also because the coordinators of the program have thoughtfully applied good multimodal pedagogy to the way they structure our fellowship assignments.

As the saying goes, “Variety is the spice of life.” And as it turns out, variety also spices up our learning experiences. As a writing student, fellow, and teacher, I have discovered the value of bringing a multimodal approach into my courses
through multigenre writing assignments. I often remind my own students that my writing courses exist as a small piece within a worldwide web of writing and that we are all constantly experiencing language in its many forms of expression. What better way to tap into human linguistic ingenuity than to assign multigenre projects? I have sometimes had to fight against strict structural norms centered solely on academic research papers in order to make this a reality in my own classes, but the learning outcomes for my students have been worth it. As writing instructors Heidi Wall Burns and Michael MacBride argue, “Every time we ask students to transfer [their] knowledge or skills to another format, genre, or context, we’re asking [them] to express learning in a new way. Engagement and learning meet in multigenre writing because in order to embed research into authentic genres, writers can’t just ‘stack facts’ like [we’ve] seen in so many traditional research papers. Rather, they must engage in the nuances of genre to embody it. It’s a necessary transfer” (pg. x).

Opportunities to explore different modes, styles, voices, and genres of expression not only lead students to develop a connection to a voice of their own and to grow confidence in their writing, but also deepens their learning.

Engaging in different genres also opens space for diverse voices and languages, many of which are embedded in our students’ cultural realities beyond the classroom. As Kim Brian Lovejoy, Steve Fox, and Katherine V. Wills point out, “Indeed, the social context of the classroom—the linguistic identities of our students and the space in which these various identities can express themselves and flourish—is key to understanding who our students are and how we can help them develop their abilities” (280). By encouraging students to pursue writing projects that can be found in the public, we welcome their home languages into the structures of academia. We can even make direct connections to the power relations embedded in language, to how languages shift over time, and to how we all code-switch to communicate in different venues. Jamila Lyiscott has a great spoken word performance you can share directly with students to raise discussions of our complex language identities. In more than one case this year, WAC fellows have helped Hostos faculty design community interview assignments that give students a chance to ex-
explore language realities beyond the classroom, and utilize their analytical skills to build these interviews into writing of their own. In these cases, students are asked to complete a multigenre project that begins with generating interview questions and transcriptions and leads into creative narratives and academic research papers.

A commitment to multigenre writing assignments is a commitment to fostering our students’ creativity. A course that gives students chances to pursue various writing modes will require them to be both playful and intellectually rigorous in their language explorations. What I love about multigenre writing is that it can lead to potpourri-style projects that show students how they can use multiple means to inform and engage with an audience. We might even provide students with the opportunity to choose their own genres for a certain assignment, which is a creative endeavor itself. This option does require one-on-one or small group guidance not only during the revision process but also in the early stages of designing the project. Therefore, it is essential to build time into the course syllabus for this individual attention, but I have, happily, found that multigenre work also makes the assessment process far more engaging for me as the instructor.

You might ask students to combine multiple genres into one assignment, decide to include generically unique assignments throughout the semester, or both depending on your objectives for the course. Overall, the assignment possibilities are wide-ranging and can be adopted in courses ranging from English and the Humanities to Science and Economics. And just because an assignment isn’t officially a research paper, it does not mean that you cannot incorporate a research component. I usually require research at some point in every course.

Some genre options you might consider combining in your courses to supplement or replace the standard research paper are:

- **Creative genres** such as poetry; short stories; flash fiction; short films; screenplays; song lyrics; spoken word; children’s books; plays; games; political cartoons; comic strips; graphic stories; dialogues; and collages.
- **Informal genres** such as tweets; memes; emails; journal entries; recipes; social media profiles; blog posts; bibliographies; and lists.
- **Ethnographic genres** such as interviews; biographies; memoirs; archival work; literacy/cultural/immigrant narratives; and found object stories.
- **Political genres** such as letters;
As a former Writing Fellow at Hostos from 2014 to 2016 when I was a PhD student at the CUNY Graduate Center, I was thrilled when Profs. Fabrizio and Hirsch asked me to come on this semester as a WAC Associate with the program. Now, as a faculty member, I’ve had the opportunity to collaborate closely with this year’s tightly-knit cohort of Fellows on a variety of projects like organizing this year’s WAC seminar on *A Pedagogy of Kindness*, led by Dr. Cate Denial. I have immensely enjoyed the chance to mentor Fellows based on my own previous experiences and to help them get the most out of their fellowship year as they move toward completion of their studies and onto the challenging job market. Having the chance to assist in interviewing potential new Fellows has allowed me a behind-the-scenes into how Profs. Fabrizio and Hirsch carefully build new teams of Fellows to carry out the program’s robust mission. As a faculty member and someone enmeshed in the college community, I’ve gotten to see and really understand how important WI courses are across the various departments and units. From the “other side of the table,” so to speak, I look forward to the chance to

---

**From Fellow to Faculty: A WAC Homecoming**

**Dr. Sean Gerrity**


assist the WAC program in an assessment project that will track the development of WI syllabi over the years. Just as my own teaching evolved, and I hope, improved, thanks to my WAC training and experiences, I think it will do the same once again after all my time spent reviewing excellent faculty syllabi and writing assignments. Ultimately, I feel really lucky to be able to be back with WAC in a capacity where I can use my Fellow experience to contribute in new and unique ways to the program’s always ongoing development and improvement.

Dr. Linda Hirsch
LHirsch@hostos.cuny.edu
(718) 518-6760

Dr. Andrea Fabrizio
AFabrizio@hostos.cuny.edu
(718) 518-6697

Dr. Sean Gerrity
Sgerrity@hostos.cuny.edu
(718) 664-2509

Visit the Hostos WAC website at: https://commons.hostos.cuny.edu/wac/

WAC Newsletter Editors: Shweta Deshpande and Maggie Fife, with valuable inputs from the WAC team.