Provost’s Learning Innovations Grant for Faculty
Request for Full Proposal
2007-2008

Please hand-deliver your completed grant proposal (4 pages, plus attachments),
the original plus 12 copies, to:
Susan DeWoody, 1530 Wallace (5)
by 4:30 p.m.
No hand written proposals will be accepted.
Notification of awards will be made by Friday, April 13, 2007.

Project Title:

Principle to Principled Practice: Faculty Seminar for Writing-to-Learn

Applicant(s): Institute Writing Committee

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>Dept.</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa M. Hermsen</td>
<td>475-4553</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dept.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Department of English</td>
<td>COLA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Director, Institute Writing Committee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Support Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bruce Ian Meader</td>
<td>CIAS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Steve Zilora</td>
<td>GCCIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Kristine Mook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>English Language Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
<td>COE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Moran</td>
<td>CAST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Linda Rubel</td>
<td>NTID</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nancy Valentage</td>
<td>COS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Request for Full Proposal Requirements

Title and summary of proposed project:
Principle to Principled Practice: Faculty Development in WAC
A coherent Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) model will include deliberate approaches to both “writing-to-learn” and “learning-to-write” strategies. Faculty need support to develop writing assignments that are low-stakes and that are designed to help students learn the course material. Experts in WAC research emphasize that students who write about the ideas presented in course materials will be more engaged with the ideas and will be better able to demonstrate authority over course material. In particular, faculty need support to develop writing assignments with higher stakes, in that they are designed to help students learn material and communicate their knowledge in disciplinary-appropriate ways. Presently, faculty at RIT tend to perceive the role of the humanities as integral to the teaching of writing. However, unless faculty across the Institute understand their own roles to be instrumental, as well, writing will be perceived and treated as an ancillary activity, incidental to the professional practices of all other disciplines.

The Institute Writing Committee has had many opportunities to listen to faculty who are committed to writing across the curriculum (WAC) but are nevertheless uncertain about their own roles in designing writing assignments, talking to students about what constitutes “good” writing, and evaluating writing or assigning grades. Even faculty who are convinced that WAC is a necessary strategy if our students are to graduate with adequate communication competencies express a lack of confidence and a concern about their roles as “nonexperts” when it comes to the teaching of writing. The essential question raised by faculty who care about integrating writing into courses across the curriculum: Is it really possible to teach a writing-intensive course without compromising essential content and without becoming completely overwhelmed by the workload? Faculty at RIT, who believe that writing enhances learning and who believe writing should be required in courses across the curriculum, have legitimate questions and reservations about using writing in their own classrooms.

The Institute Writing Committee proposes a faculty development seminar that will offer tips, resources, and strategies for faculty who are willing to experiment with integrating writing into their courses. The key is “experiment.” This proposed seminar does not promise quick fixes—rather it engages faculty in reflective practices. The faculty development seminar proposed here is designed to give participants an opportunity to try new approaches to “writing-to-learn” activities, while collaborating with other faculty to identify problems, frustrations, conundrums, and successes. The goal of this seminar is to encourage faculty to take seriously the challenge to support WAC, beyond its philosophical or abstract concepts, to generate solutions to perceived problems, engage in productive discussions, and invent new courses of action. The proposal recognizes that in the “lifelong pursuit of good teaching,” a conviction for WAC in principle is not enough—without sustained support for faculty development, conviction and principle will be abandoned.

In summary, the Institute Writing Committee proposes a faculty seminar, in which 6 faculty from across the Institute work over several collaborative meetings (four or five) to enhance an existing course, and receive a modest stipend ($1,000) at the end of the experience, after which they submit a written report and give a presentation at a campus-wide writing workshop.

Targeted learners or population
The proposed Faculty Development Seminar will identify 6 faculty, representative of Colleges across the Institute, teaching at least one course in which writing is introduced as content. These courses will enroll 30+ students. In addition, if the seminar is successful, these faculty will continue to teach courses, using
new “writing-to-learn” innovations, and thus affect more and more students. Too, this group of faculty will serve as teaching resources, finding opportunities to encourage colleagues across the Institute to teach with writing. This pilot is intended as a starter program with the potential to reach a great number of faculty, and thus a greater number of students at RIT.

In an overtly broad stroke, the targeted learners for this proposal might be identified as students across RIT, all of whom need writing experience beyond their first ten weeks, outside of their humanities core, and within their majors. These targeted learners will be students in classes from across the curriculum in which faculty teach as if writing were connected to learning, and as if learning to write were a central concern, integral to the course content.

Anticipated impact on teaching and/or learning.
Research, experience, and resources for WAC all point to the same conclusions: writing assignments engage students as more active learners, more thoughtful readers, and generally more productive students. When students are asked to formulate their thinking into words on a page, they use language to reconsider uncertainties and speculations, formulate intellectual connections or propositions, and reveal accumulated knowledge, as well as the need for further learning. Well-designed writing assignments can be one way for students to express their confusions and misunderstandings, reveal to themselves and to us missed opportunities for new insights or ideas. Beyond testing, writing can give a sense of what is happening in our students’ learning experiences.

Using writing in classrooms across the curriculum is the only way for students to improve their writing. While responsibility for writing instruction has fallen to the first-year writing course, this course cannot prepare students for advanced writing proficiency or for writing in the work place. Research leaves little doubt that students best learn the specialized conventions and standards for writing in their profession within the context of courses in their majors. As students are introduced to the literature specific to their own fields, they take on a sense of expertise necessary to communicating as a specialist.

How will your project impact student success (i.e., retention)?
Faculty who have had success in incorporating writing-to-learn activities in their classrooms report greater student success, as students become more active and engaged in the class. Rather than using writing as a way to report information to an instructor, writing-to-learn activities are designed so that students share ideas, collaborate on drafts, and work with peers to review writing. Information-driven classrooms quickly become participatory. Students who are engaged in their learning are certainly more likely to succeed. And students who are given multiple avenues for testing their knowledge, receive frequent feedback, and learn to demonstrate authority in their writing will feel more confident as learners. RIT could substantially impact student success, even improve student retention (more engaged students tend to be more satisfied students, as well) if we took seriously the goal of WAC: every teacher in every course would provide at least some systematic experience in and support for writing. This proposal is one step toward reaching that goal.

How you will measure the impact, how you will report your findings, and what you will share about your project in a faculty forum?
Participants in the faculty seminar will submit a written report, including a description of changes made to incorporate writing into their course(s), a review with details about assignment design, and a final assessment of the experimental writing-to-learn approach (including perceived or documented student responses, the complexities of incorporation, and plans anticipated for future courses). Reports will be made available at the Institute Writing Committee website. Faculty participants will plan a presentation,
an honest summary of their experiences with writing in their curriculum: problems faced, lingering
questions, and opportunities for additional reflection. The presentation will be an appropriate addition to
next year’s Writing Workshop (the Institute Writing Committee sponsors a workshop every year, whether
a separate event or as part of a campus-wide event like FITL).

Present a rationale for your project, as it ties to the intent of the grant, including:
On December 7 and 8, Professor Chris Anson visited RIT by invitation of the Institute Writing
Committee for the purpose of meeting with individuals and groups about the role of writing at RIT.¹ In
his words: “I came away from RIT impressed by the strong commitments to written literacy among the
faculty and academic staff I met and by the enthusiasm expressed for experimenting with new ideas and
support strategies for writing across the curriculum.” Certainly, RIT already provides a number of venues
in which faculty can learn strategies for incorporating writing into their courses more fully and
effectively. Nevertheless, as Professor Anson emphasized, the challenges of broader implementation
remain: to create broader change in the culture of the institution, more regular and sustained opportunities
for faculty development should be made available. Specifically, Professor Anson recommended a multi-
faceted approach to faculty development, including an approach for long-term development experiences
that would offer sustained support for faculty who were willing to incorporate writing into their courses.

Rather than encourage individual faculty to write their own proposals for FEAD grants, when course re-
design for incorporating writing as a learning activity fits into their plans of work, the Institute Writing
Committee recommends that this faculty seminar be institutionalized as a programmatic part of a growing
WAC model. Ideally, one outcome of faculty experience with this seminar might be that its participants
pursue FEAD grants for the purpose of building a repertoire of strategies in a sustained commitment to
incorporating writing into new and existing courses. The Committee feels the seminar should be
identified as one aspect in a systematic approach to a multi-faceted, but highly coordinated WAC model
for RIT. If the seminar is successful, this faculty development opportunity should become a part of the
“business as usual” the Institute. It is the hope of the Committee that a more formal, expanded WAC
program could be built with the kind of grass-roots efforts this proposed seminar fashions.

The Institute Writing Committee is proposing that RIT offer a long(er)-term, more intensive experience
for faculty development in WAC. The faculty seminar will provide an opportunity for 6 faculty members
to work over several meetings (approximately four or five) throughout the year to enhance an existing
course, after which they will submit a written report of their changes and give a formal presentation at a
writing workshop. This faculty seminar could be an important step in developing a strong support system
for a more integrated WAC program. The seminar will be designed to engage faculty in sustained WAC
approaches: developing effective low- and high-stakes writing, responding to student writing faster and
fairer, and interacting with students as disciplinary coaches who bring their own expertise to writing.
Faculty will work together throughout the year, sharing ideas as well as frustrations, successes and
problems. They will also have the immediate support of a writing specialist, who will serve as a
soundboard and consultant, prompting reflection and offering advice.

For students to be successful communicators when they graduate, they must write regularly in courses
both in general education and in the major, receiving some instruction and feedback by discipline-based
experts. It is not unusual for faculty to look upon the prospect of incorporating writing as an “add-on,”
additional content to already burdensome course coverage. By engaging faculty with the complexities of
WAC while providing sustained support, we hope to build a group of committed faculty, willing to reflect
and adjust to challenges, rather than looking for quick fixes and then abandoning the model. These are the

¹ Professor Chris Anson is currently Immediate Past President of the Council of Writing Program Administrators
and a member of its Consultant-Evaluator Service panel.
faculty who talk to colleagues, spread conviction, and become resources themselves for others who are looking for support.

Faculty in all subject areas are prepared to coach students to write in their fields of study. Faculty selected for this seminar will be those who have some conviction that writing can and should be taught in courses outside of the English Department, but who may be struggling to incorporate writing into their own courses. The Institute Writing Committee will serve as advisors for the faculty seminar. Every member of the Committee has engaged with the problems of writing in the curriculum at RIT (as demonstrated in their comprehensive 2002 Report of the State of Writing), and reflected about their own roles in WAC at RIT. The Director of Institute Writing will facilitate the seminar, and serve in a direct role of support, as a consultant to faculty participants. The Director, Assistant Professor Lisa Hermsen, has a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Professional Communication, experience in writing program administration, and in writing across the disciplines. Hermsen has provided faculty development for writing instruction in various workshops, consulted with individual faculty, and taught writing courses at RIT for five years.

The Institute writing Committee is located in the College of Liberal Arts. Please see the attached letter of support from Interim Dean Glenn Kist.

**Provide a timetable of the development of the project.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May/June ‘07</th>
<th>Announcement of seminar details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recruitment and selection of faculty participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July ‘07</td>
<td>First meeting Director of Institute Writing w/ each participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Consult to re-design courses with low- and high-stakes writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September–‘08</td>
<td>First meeting of the seminar group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August–May</td>
<td>Ongoing consultations with Institute Writing Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January ‘08</td>
<td>Second meeting of the seminar group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March ‘08</td>
<td>Third meeting of the seminar group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May ‘08</td>
<td>Plan for public presentation by the seminar group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June ‘08</td>
<td>Final meeting w/ seminar reports due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>