

INTRODUCTION

The movement to implement writing across the curriculum has been around long enough to begin to draw conclusions. The roots of the movement are several and strong. Departments in all disciplines have learned that even their traditional students will not develop, without considerable practice, the writing proficiency befitting liberal arts graduates, entry-level engineers, or graduate students in the professions. Moreover, colleges with writing proficiency criteria for graduation have learned that students who entered college under-prepared will not retain as seniors even the basic skills gained in their English composition courses if these skills are not frequently exercised throughout the college years. Departments on many campuses have begun to see that the national decline in verbal skills on achievement tests has not been met locally by redoubled efforts to bring students up to former levels of proficiency, but by a gradual erosion of the quantities of writing assigned in their courses and a decline in the standards used to evaluate that writing as a measure of the student's grasp of the material. Most important, perhaps, to long term interest in extending writing beyond the composition sequence is the growing theoretical and experimental support for the view that writing about a subject enhances and deepens the mastery of it, a view strongly confirmed by the intuition of every writer who has put pen to page to find out what he knows, to discover his areas of ignorance.

This collection of papers presents examples of only some of the attempts to implement programs of writing across the curriculum. Some programs have encouraged faculty members outside composition programs to require more writing in their courses and tried to maximize the effectiveness of the instruction in writing that might go on. These programs have taken the form of training workshops and seminars, attended voluntarily or for pay. Other programs have attempted to co-ordinate the efforts of writing instructors and subject matter instructors through such strategies as paired courses, collaboratively taught block programs,

collaboratively designed courses, writing workshops coordinated with courses, and writing tutors working either in writing labs or with specific professors.

On some campuses, these attempts to improve the quality and quantity of writing instruction have been accompanied by broader curricular reforms. At some institutions this reform consists of a few new composition or subject matter courses containing substantial amounts of writing, with suitable adjustments in class size, course content, and credit. At other institutions the commitment is greater: every course is to be used as a background for teaching writing; or, alternatively, each department must establish standards for proficiency in the kinds of writing suitable to the discipline, require the kinds of writing that build and measure that proficiency, and certify each of its majors as proficient before graduation. Departmental responsibility has produced departmental strategies: set numbers of papers of set lengths and types in introductory and upper division courses, even the reinstatement of the senior paper.

There are, additionally, lessons of successful course and writing assignment design. Better writing and more learning seem to result when longer assignments like term papers are broken into stages on a definite timetable; when students write several short papers rather than a single longer one; when several short assignments have been designed to lead to a longer, conceptually more complex one; when assignments are carefully worded and elaborately detailed; when students have the opportunity to clarify their initial understanding of the assignment and get feedback on their first drafts. Finally, the writing done must accommodate not only the discipline but specific course objectives. While most courses will emphasize expository prose of various types, students in an art history course exploring the creative impulse as it manifests itself in different media may be asked to write poetry.

The most important lesson of the movement to reinstate writing across the curriculum may be the lesson of vigilance—shocked recognition of the fact that institutions of all types and circumstances have drifted little by little away from a central truth and proven, necessary methods. Careful writing and close reading foster literate modes of thinking, modes of thinking that emphasize high levels of logic, explicitness, clarity, and tact. If these are qualities of mind of continuing value to our civilization, our students must do the sustained, rigorous reading and writing by which they are developed.