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8I. Faculty Roles in WAC: Leaders, Learners, Collaborators

**Interdisciplinary Faculty Collaboration: Promoting Uniform Assessment**

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**Introduction**

[Slide—**Title page**]

Good morning. I am Kitty Burroughs—a Senior Lecturer in GSW (General Studies Writing) at Bowling Green State University—and I have taught full time at BGSU for over 17 years.

[Slide—**Emerging WAC at BGSU**]

Let me begin by stating that BGSU does not have a formalized Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program. However, there are academic initiatives that suggest emerging WAC at this institution.

In February, 2012, BGSU Faculty Senate began an overall discussion of how to improve General Education at the University. One of the items that faculty and staff most highly prioritized was to design and implement some form of Writing Across the Curriculum that

- “require students to take writing-intensive courses after GSW 1120” (the required first year composition course)—meaning requiring students to take writing-intensive course in the major
- “require more writing in all general education courses, not just in English classes”

- and that “all faculty who teach writing should be familiar with the language used to teach writing in GSW courses; faculty development and support are important aspects of this approach”

As stated in the proposal to Faculty Senate that launched the process of general education discussions, “A specific goal is to develop broad faculty support for the proposals through a healthy cooperative process among all constituencies.”

From this proposal to the Faculty Senate, in Spring 2013, Dr. Craig Zirbel, coordinator of discussions of general education, formed the Writing Group, of which I became a member. The goal of the Writing Group was to open the conversation about how to improve undergraduate student writing by establishing a common understanding of writing and the challenges faculty face.

Currently, students learn the basics of academic writing in their first year at BGSU, but helping them build upon those skills and impressing upon them the importance of writing in the working world will definitely take a coordinated effort at all levels.

Concurrent with the emerging discussion on WAC, I became involved in BGSU’s newly created Office of Assessment to revise two rubrics—(1) the Written Communication Rubric and (2) the Information Literacy Rubric—both developed by AAC&U (the Association of American Colleges and Universities). These rubrics had been developed as part of the AAC&U VALUE initiative—Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education between 2007-2009. My efforts were more focused within the Written Communication Group, and I will discuss the social nature of this assessment calibration process that has involved an ongoing dialogue among administration,

faculty across disciplines, and students—to develop, refine, and approve this layered assessment approach.

### **Process: Promoting Uniform Assessment**

This is how the process began. Dr. Julie Matuga, the newly appointed Director of Assessment at BGSU, approached Dr. Cheryl Hoy, the Acting Director of GSW, and her assistant, about being involved in an initiative with faculty from across disciplines to evaluate and revise the two original AAC&U rubrics. The Office of Assessment charged two committees (one for each rubric) with the task of revising and connecting these two original AAC&U rubrics to the BGSU's learning outcomes. The goals are to produce a layered assessment process and a full integration of the rubrics into Canvas, the BGSU's Learner Management System.

The committee for the Written Communication had three members from GSW, consisting of Dr. Hoy, her assistant, and myself, who has regularly taught all three courses in our composition sequence. Our group also included Dr. Tim Murnen, a professor from the College of Education and Human Development. The second group, the committee for the Information Literacy, had five members—consisting of the Associate Dean of University Libraries; a seasoned GSW instructor who has regularly taught all three courses in our composition sequence; two Resource Librarians, one of which serves as the First-Year Experience Coordinator; and a professor in the School of Human Movement, Sports, and Leisure Studies, under the College of Education and Human Development.

All of the members for both committees have consistently emphasized writing-intensive projects/assignments in their courses. Most of us in the two committees are also interdisciplinary faculty and are in—related fields—from GSW (BGSU's first-year writing program), from the College

of Education and Human Development, and from the Library Teaching and Learning Department. We collaborated across the disciplines but still have some common experience in the field. All parties were very interested in revising and developing these rubrics for usability across the disciplines.

[Slide—**Process: Promoting Uniform Assessment**]

Our first meeting was a large group meeting with Dr. Matuga who facilitated the discussion. Dr. Matuga gave us clear goals and guidelines, but allowed the two committees (Written Communication and Information Literacy) to determine the process by which they would evaluate the current rubrics and eventually revise and engage in calibration processes for the project. After that first meeting, the two committees decided to meet separately in our small group to review and evaluate their rubrics and begin to make initial revisions to them. Both committees then agreed to meet as a large group later in the process to review each other's revisions and to engage in calibration.

[Slide—**Figure 1: The Original AAC&U Rubric**]

At this point, it might be helpful for you to view the first two figures that you have in hand. You want to See **Figure 1** and then compare to **Figure 2: BGSU's Original Version of the Written Communication Rubric**.

So in the Written Communications group, which I was in, we began meeting to review the language and criteria assigned to each learning outcome as well as to determine if we wanted to add a category or level to BGSU's rubric. We saw inconsistencies in the following: not all learning outcomes had descriptions. For example, the learning outcomes in the first column such

as the top one labeled “context of and purpose for writing” and the second one labeled “content development” can mean different things to different audiences. And in the same first column, you can see the last two outcomes that have no descriptions. Our committee wanted to provide a brief description that would be applicable and accessible across disciplines, so that was one of our first tasks. Just as important, the committee looked for parallelism in the descriptions for each criterion at each level. These two tasks require deliberate language use that must be clear to different audiences.

Finally, we looked to see that the descriptions appropriately met the level based on our experience with first year writing and with Dr. Tim Murnen’s experience with junior and senior level writing. Here, we began asking ourselves questions about:

- (a) what we expected of incoming students (in undeveloped/Benchmark 1-2);
- (b) what we expected of them as they completed GSW 1120 (in level 2); and
- (c) what we expected of them as they progressed in their coursework through junior

level classes and senior capstone classes.

Based on these discussions, we began the process of revising the rubric. The result of our revision is in Figure 3.

[Slide—**Figure 3: Revised BGSU’s Written Communication Rubric**]

This project also required the committee to get permission from students to use their writing in this assessment project. After our initial revisions, we worked to apply the rubric to student samples from my GSW 1100, 1110, 1120, and essays from Dr. Murnen’s Language Arts class. This served a dual purpose: (1) to help us determine how well our revised rubric worked to

evaluate essays, and (2) to help us calibrate our assessment. First, each of us evaluated the essays individually using the revised rubric over a couple week span to determine if the descriptions allowed for clear placement into each level for each criterion. Then, we met within our small group to discuss our evaluations.

The revised rubric (See Figure 3) proved to be an effective tool to evaluate the samples. For almost every essay, we assessed students at the same level for each criterion. The levels also seemed appropriate to the course. For example, most of our GSW 1120 students placed into level 2, which requires “appropriate use of credible, relevant, synthesized source material,” while most of our 1100/1110 students place into level 1, which shows a basic use of relevant source material to support ideas. Dr. Murnen’s students generally placed into Level 3, as his was a junior level education class.

**[Slide—Process: Promoting Uniform Assessment]**

As you can see on the slide, the small group review of rubric, revision of it, and calibration took place for the Written Communication group. At the same time the Written Communication group worked on the rubric, the Information Literacy group worked on their rubric. Once we were comfortable with our rubrics, the two groups coordinated a meeting as a large group. Prior to our large group meeting, we emailed each other our revised rubrics and additional student samples, which included Kinesiology essays and essays from Information Literacy courses. We used each other’s rubrics to assess the student writing and made notes of our suggestions and questions on the rubric. We then met as large group to discuss the assessment tools and to calibrate our assessment. This part of the process was especially important because we were able

to gather input from faculty across disciplines on how well the rubrics reflected skills at each level and how well the rubric allowed them to measure skill level for each criterion.

Based on our conversation, we made the final few changes to our Written Communications rubric and worked to condense the Information Literary rubric. We have submitted our rubrics to Dr. Matuga, the Director of Assessment, and we are currently waiting on approval by SAAC, Student Achievement Assessment Committee.

[Slide—**BGSU's Goal**]

### **Important Implications**

Overall, this initiative which took the entire spring semester of 2013 required the collaboration of faculty across the disciplines. This was an important process that has important implications for layered assessment, and for opening up the dialogue between students and faculty, for faculty across disciplines, and between administration and faculty about what we expect our students to gain and demonstrate at different stages of their academic career.

### **Student Involvement**

In terms of student involvement, these rubrics can show a continuum from freshmen writing through senior capstone writing. We have found that if students do not continue practicing and repeating the academic writing skills they learn in their first-year writing courses, they struggle with more complex writing tasks in junior and senior capstone courses. Students would be able to access the rubrics in Canvas in order to know what is expected at each level for each area. Rubrics provide clear criterion that are aligned with learning outcomes for the area and a description of

expectations at each level, beginning with underdeveloped and benchmark (levels 0-1), which correspond with entry into the university and ending level 4, Senior Capstone. Students should be able to see their progress at each stage of their academic experience, and will be able to see where they have met the expectations for Senior Capstone and where they still need work in a particular area. It is our hope that as students graduate, they will have been assessed in most areas and will have an understanding of their developed strengths and remaining limitations.

### Faculty Involvement

For faculty members, these rubrics may also allow for them to more efficiently (a) assess writing projects, (b) provide a common vocabulary or language to discuss student writing and expectations, and (c) get data results from Canvas. Faculty would be able to access rubrics in Canvas as pre and post assessment tools. Working with students, faculty may discuss the learning outcomes in these rubrics with students at the beginning of the semester and may use these as “learning objectives” for their activities, assignments, assessments, and so forth. For instance, this will allow for both students and faculty to see the connection between assignments in class, course objectives/outcomes, and university objectives/outcomes. In the end, faculty will have the opportunity to complete the appropriate rubrics for each student at the end of the semester. These rubrics will likely be in addition to other end-of-term assessment, but the rubrics will give students an idea of which level their work falls in a particular area.

### Program Involvement

This initiative (a) will allow for valid program assessment; (b) will require calibration in the form of review and dialogue to determine how to score students work using the rubrics; (c) will open up dialogue about the ways in which curriculum is aligned with learning outcomes; and (d)



will show faculty students' growth in pre and post rubrics and if there are any gaps in a particular area/criterion. Each program may need to revisit assignments/teaching methods to address gaps. Canvas will generate data based on course, criterion, pre/post.

### College/University Involvement

Each college will allow for broad data collection. It will standardize reporting, will allow for dialogue across the disciplines about how we assess writing, critical thinking, information literacy, etc. It will require some discussion of WAC, some possible pilots and training, especially in applying the rubrics and in calibration. It may encourage WAC, or at least writing-intensive assignments in other fields, as the rubrics are already generated.

BGSU's goal in revising these rubrics is to make them user-friendly and consistent with BGSU's learning outcomes for various assessment practices. Ultimately, the University's goal is to develop rubrics that could be integrated into Canvas, the university's learner management system as a multi-layered assessment tool that could be used by students, faculty, and the university at large. It is also consistent with BGSU's goal to improve student writing and to support changes to the general undergraduate requirements. It could also involve a clearer institutional understanding of the importance of collectively working on student writing, with appropriate training and support to do so.

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