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## OU faculty promote writing across curriculums

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Educators from nearly all disciplines agree that to become engaged learners and citizens it's paramount that students practice and develop their writing skills. The question is: what's the best way to incorporate writing across university curriculums?

Oakland University faculty and staff met April 6 to discuss these issues in a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) seminar. WAC is an ongoing initiative of OU's **Department of Rhetoric, Communication and Journalism**, in collaboration with the **Department of English** and OU administration, to promote students' growth as writers, communicators, researchers and active participants in a democratic society. The event also was sponsored by the **Office of the Provost**, dean of the **College of Arts and Sciences**, and vice provost for undergraduate education. Program events included a WAC workshop and lecture by Kathleen Blake Yancey, director of the Pearce Center for Professional Communication at Clemson University.

"Writing clearly does not belong solely to the English and Rhetoric departments, it belongs across the college," said Mary Papazian, professor of English and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. "We share an interest in forming partnerships with the other schools and colleges. We want to think creatively with one another to reach a common goal."

"Writing across the curriculum is the responsibility of all faculty, and our new general education requirements reflect this in its structure."

In addition to faculty from OU's Rhetoric and English departments, other participants were from Art and Art History, Women's Studies, Modern Languages and Literatures, Chemistry, and other departments. Faculty from Davenport University also participated.

In her lecture, Yancey spoke of the development of WAC programs since their inception more than 25 years ago, offered Cornell and Clemson University's programs as models, and stressed the benefits gained by partnering with local, regional, national and international organizations involved in related initiatives. She also touched on the increasing relationship of WAC and technology.

"WAC programs that are outstanding usually have one or more very distinctive features. They tend to schedule events or have routine offerings that create a kind of consistent rhythm or idea," Yancey said. "The Clemson model features interlocking activities such as a poetry jam, which was highly successful, and yearlong projects such as poetry across the curriculum, which uses poetry as a means of learning across curriculums. The model is based on the belief that if students learn to communicate well, they will succeed."

In the workshop session, a number of ideas for incorporating and expanding WAC at OU were discussed. Among the ideas and initiatives under consideration are:

- Working on developing a variety of new writing-intensive courses to support the general education requirements.
- Developing a rhetoric major and minor.
- Having OU students act as writing tutors for credit in classes across the curriculum.
- Expanding the use of writing and technology.

In addition, the Rhetoric Department has introduced two new categories – the sciences and social sciences – in OU's **Writing Excellence Awards** to encourage students from across campus to submit entries, which can include lab reports, case studies, grant proposals, political analyses and others.

Associate Professor of Rhetoric Barbara Hamilton, who is currently teaching a course on peer tutoring theories and pedagogies, said students often have a misperception of the role writing plays in all careers.

“It’s a misunderstanding among students that writing isn’t important to a field like engineering,” Hamilton said. “In fact, writing is important in every field. An engineer has to write proposals. Nurses have to write case studies and other documents for insurance companies. It’s also a fundamental form of communication in e-mails and memos. All of these types of writing also are a presentation of the self. And, people need to know how to effectively communicate and present themselves.

“Students should talk to their professors in their majors about the writing involved in their particular field. I think most departments are working to instill the importance of good writing in their students.”

For more information on Writing Across the Curriculum initiatives and the Writing Excellence Awards, visit OU’s **Rhetoric Program** Web site.

#### **SUMMARY**

Oakland University faculty and staff met April 6 to discuss ways to help students develop their writing skills in all areas of study in a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) seminar. WAC is an ongoing university initiative to promote students’ growth as writers, communicators, researchers and active participants in a democratic society.

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