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## Reports: A Course to Blog About

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Like Fairfield, the University of Detroit Mercy (UDM), has also revised its writing program, improved its writing center, and adopted new learning outcomes in the soon to be implemented core curriculum which focus on the development of ethos, language as civic action, and other enduring rhetorical competences. At Loyola University Maryland (LUM), the writing department enacts the centrality of writing and rhetoric by bringing together the core writing course, a writing major and minor, writing-across-the-curriculum support (including a Loyola writing handbook with contributions from every department), and the writing center into an integrated ensemble of initiatives. Their writing center extends the ideal of *social justice* into the larger Baltimore community through its high school peer tutoring program.

As we confer across campuses, our mutual commitment to *eloquentia perfecta* bears a transformational capacity. *Accompanying* each other in the Jesuit sense, with humility—not appropriating each other's projects, but being in dialogue with each other as we choose how to proceed, cultivates our sense of self-awareness and criticism, and has opened avenues of possibility that have enhanced our individual work. Our ongoing collaborative work will continue to focus on Jesuit rhetorical practice for discernment and action in service of the common good, grounded in best practices in contemporary composition and rhetoric. And when we grow frustrated by the pace and complex negotiations of group writing and the long trail of drafts, emails, and conversations, we remind ourselves that the first great Jesuit educational document, the Ratio of 1599, was the result of countless iterations, reports, revisions. We have to laugh and ask, Why should it be any different now?

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*University of Detroit Mercy; Lisa Zimmerelli is an assistant professor and writing center director at Loyola University Maryland; Cynthia Gannett is an associate professor of English, director of core writing, and CAE coordinator of writing across the community at Fairfield University; and John Kerrigan is an associate professor of English and chair of the humanities division at Rockhurst University.*

## **A Course to Blog About**

**Laura Davies and Erin Mullally**

A few weeks ago, Laura stumbled upon a blog one of her writing students kept. To her surprise, the student cared enough about what they had talked and wrote about to post her essays about critical writing and Ignatian spirituality on her very non-academic blog. In one post, she wrote: 'Though I am not even halfway through the semester, I feel like this course has already helped me to grow a lot and come to terms with who I am ...'

We believe that this student found her critical writing course meaningful because of the nature of the course. For fall 2011, we designed a pilot first-year writing course at Le Moyne College that enacted Ignatian pedagogy: teaching writing through a holistic pedagogical framework that emphasized 1) care of the individual student, 2) individual reflection and self-evaluation, and 3) a concern for the ethical ramifications of rhetorical acts.

We had five sections of freshman composition, approximately one hundred students. We wanted students to approach writing through Ignatian pedagogy. We also wanted them to see who the man behind the curtain was, naming for them the processes we were following, so they could contemplate our classroom practices and writ-

ing prompts as arguments themselves. The assignments and classroom activities were all selected to stage teaching as a rhetorical activity.

The course was organized around a progression of three questions: What is Jesuit higher education for? What does it mean to be a college writer today? What does it mean to get a college education in the 21st century?

First, the students explored the 450-year history of the Jesuit order and read about Ignatian spirituality, the worldview of Ignatius of Loyola, and scholarship about the Catholic intellectual tradition (including selections by John Paul II, John Henry Newman, Adolfo Nicolás, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, James Martin, Monica Hellwig and Kevin Clarke). These works gave the course a foundation upon which to explore contemporary merits of liberal arts education and the pros and cons of campus life in authors including Mark Edmundson, Louis Menand, Mary Eberstadt and Donna Frietas. The specific shared vocabulary alone allowed for nuanced conversation as the students noted the frequent use of these same terms throughout their campus.

Then students read scholarship in composition and rhetoric (selections by Gerald Graff, Lester Faigley, Mike Rose, Rebecca Moore Howard, Donald Murray and Walter Ong), challenging them to find connections between Ignatian pedagogy and the theories that inform our understanding about inquiry, rhetoric and digital technology, the writing process, collaborative writing with sources, and academic argument as conversation.

Although we found the course engaging, we noticed some limitations. We designed the course with the traditional first-year, first-semester college student in mind. Many of our students fit this category, but not all. The older, non-traditional students found the course meaningful, but in different ways than we expected. One, an Army

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veteran wounded in Iraq, wrote about how he saw his life intersecting with the story of Ignatius. Other students, returning to college, added to our discussions of the worth and cost of a college education today.

Additionally, although we used the same major assignments and many of the same readings, our courses were not identical. It's important that the course remain flexible so that it can adapt to teachers' individual expertise. We developed a shared vocabulary and a core set of texts, while retaining the autonomy to tailor the courses to our own interests. Finally, our pilot project was supported through an institutional grant, which gave us the resources to do extensive curricular development the previous summer.

In one assessment, students were asked to define academic writing, a question previously asked on the first day which most could not answer clearly. Now, however, all gave answers that included terms like "argumentative," "support," "back up your claims," "include opposing viewpoints," "prove a point." Additionally, when asked to reflect on what they have learned about themselves as writers, the overwhelming response mimics this one student's response: "I've learned that my writing needs work."

We were delighted by the overwhelmingly positive response because we had feared that students would reject any prolonged engagement with Ignatian ideals in a required course. During an in-class reflection early in the semester, Erin's students considered the links between that day's reading and the college mission statement. Their responses noted how both the statement and the author's argument on the nature of Jesuit ideology affirm the necessity of individual freedom of conscience and the importance of living a full life. As one student, skeptical of the "Catholic" element of the Le Moyne mission, notes: "It is comforting to know that the Jesuits and Le Moyne

College give me the freedom to do what I feel is my own path and that they will be supportive of that." Another student notes that "As a Jesuit Institution Le Moyne has specific goals set out for its students including education of the mind and body, a dualism at the heart of the Jesuit tradition, critical reasoning and eloquence, skills necessary for students to go into the world, and a dedication to service and learning, which lies at the center of Jesuit spirituality."

These two responses—one surprised by the nature of Jesuit educational ideals that do not conform to negative assumptions of Catholicism and one that sees positive links between academic and non-academic goals—are typical. Erin felt that these students understood the implications behind why one should attend a Jesuit college. All private colleges must demonstrate to their students why their particular institution is worth attending; even early on, these students seemed receptive to the distinctive nature of the college they had chosen.

*Laura Davies and Erin Mullally teach in the English department at Le Moyne University.*

## ROUND-UP

### *What's New in Writing across the Curriculum at Jesuit Institutions Today?*

**John C. Bean**

"So, while **John Carroll (JCU)** does not have an official Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) program, we do a number of WAC-type things," says Tom Pace, the director of writing at **JCU**. Like John Carroll, most Jesuit colleges and universities do a lot of WAC-type things. What's new are cross-disciplinary

commitments to *eloquentia perfecta* that help students understand the power of writing to promote deep learning, civic engagement, and discernment of beliefs and values.

**"WAC-type things":** Three quick examples include **Gonzaga University's** pilot initiative in reading across the curriculum; the day long workshop that Tom Pace and colleagues at John Carroll conduct for faculty teaching writing-intensive courses; or **Rockhurst University's** discussions of *eloquentia perfecta* across the curriculum.

A different "WAC-type thing" is the writing fellows program by Paula Mathieu at **Boston College**. Unlike a drop-in writing center, a writing fellows program pairs trained graduate-student fellows with an interested faculty member on a specific course. The fellows work with the professor and consult throughout the semester with students during draft stages of assignments.

Also, at least two Jesuit universities have WAC websites providing support information for both students and faculty. **The Marquette website** includes a "department-by-department" reference guide as well as writing tips for students. **Loyola Maryland** has also produced a writing handbook available on-line.

**WAC via core initiatives:** **Fordham University's** *eloquentia perfecta* seminars, taught by faculty across the curriculum, were featured in a recent article in *America* ("How to Build a Better Student" May 16, 2011). Students must take four EP seminars during their undergraduate years. **St. Joseph's University** also requires a writing-intensive course during each of four years. **Seattle University's** new four-year vertical core requires writing in every core course and specifies that particular courses must require a written or oral assignment.

**WID (writing in the disciplines) initiatives:** In **Seattle University's** writing-in-the-majors program, each