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# Reports: Round-Up: What's New in Writing across the Curriculum at Jesuit Institutions Today?

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# Reports

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

major identifies a capstone project that requires “expert insider prose” in the discipline. Disciplinary faculty, using the process of backward design, develop instructional modules and assignment sequences needed earlier in the major to prepare students for capstone work. (For a bibliography of peer-reviewed articles on Seattle University’s use of assessment to sustain WAC, email jbean@seattleu.edu)

**Reflection across the Curriculum:** Whereas “reflection” in writing instruction has typically focused on metacognition, Jesuit universities are increasingly using reflection in the Ignatian tradition of discernment, asking students to wrestle with questions about meaning and value. **Fairfield’s** new core has a pathway entitled “Rhetoric and Reflection.” Seattle University’s new Core also requires reflection in a number of courses, including social justice.

*John C. Bean is professor of English at Seattle University.*

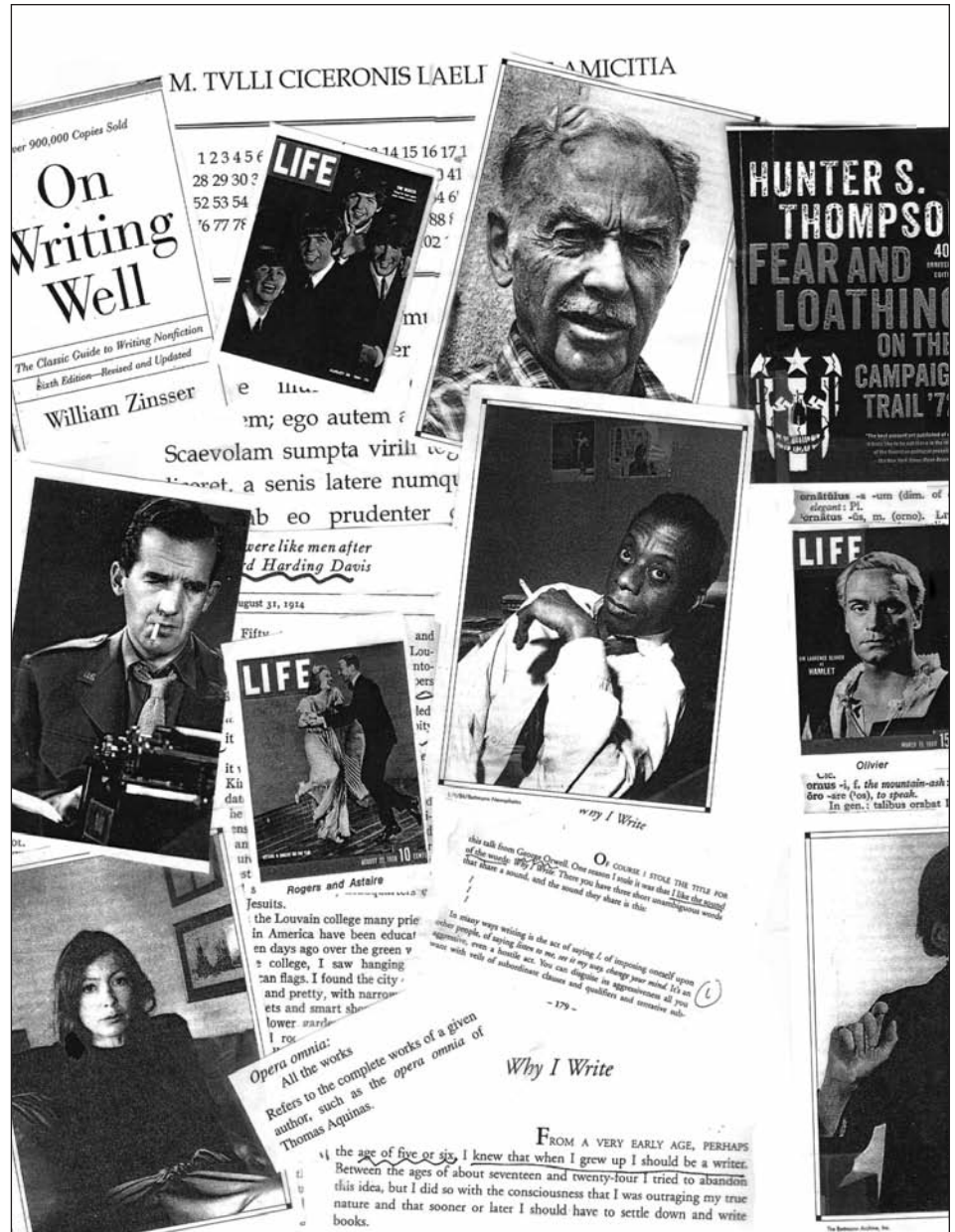
## Writing-Across-the Curriculum and the Promise of Something More

### Joseph Janangelo

Writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) courses represent a nexus of what is new and renewed for students at Jesuit colleges and universities. Three recent developments illustrate this combination.

1. *Students compose digital texts across the curriculum.*

For years, students and teachers have used web sites and databases to further their research. Contemporary WAC instructors are moving from simply using existing online texts to helping students create new ones in contemporary professional genres. Students receive mentored practice in



composing texts designed for online presentation and circulation. These projects prepare students for careers designing company web sites, maintaining their social media presence, and creating online databases and reports. This helps students create texts of encapsulated eloquence with a few well-chosen words and a menu that is clear and inviting. Instructors also help students incorporate visuals (e.g. still and moving images) and sounds (e.g. music).

2. *Students write in scholarly and professional genres.*

Genres include lab reports, case studies, brochures, and teaching portfolios.

3. *Undergraduates publish their research.*

Numerous journals sponsor undergraduate research. For example *Young Scholars in Writing* publishes work in rhetorical theory and practice. The concept of audience is writ large when undergraduates write for hundreds of readers.

### More and More

The more students write and revise their work in carefully mentored WAC courses, the more attentive, rigorous, and capable they become as readers and writers. Learning to write well is a life-long project. First-year composition courses lay a strong foundation.

*Joseph Janangelo teaches English at Loyola University Chicago.*