



the WORD

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Writing Across the Curriculum at York College

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WAC Presents Strategies for Scaffolding at CETL



Top photo: Writing Fellow Laurel Harris explains the conceptual task of "Evaluation" to CETL attendees as Writing Fellow Coordinator Jonathan Hall looks on. Bottom (left to right): Fellows Janice Capuana, Naaborle Sackeyfio, Laurel Harris, and Maria Biskup, and Fellows Coordinator Jonathan Hall co-present strategies for scaffolding. Photographs by Miguel Bernard.

Writing Across the Curriculum Panel Takes Scaffolding to a New Level at CETL

On December 3rd, WAC returned to the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning to present on "scaffolding" assignments. While most faculty who have taught WI courses are familiar with the pedagogical approach of scaffolding--structuring assignments sequentially to build up to a longer formal product--many may not be aware of the importance of scaffolding assignments conceptually. This was the focus of the December 3rd event. WAC Fellows Maria Biskup and Lau-

rel Harris explained the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, a rhetorical device useful for identifying the conceptual tasks students are asked to perform as they complete various course assignments. Developed in 1956, Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy gives name to six levels of intellectual behavior students engage in during the learning process. Proceeding sequentially, from least complex to most complex, these intellectual behaviors are: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation. Additionally, Bloom's Taxonomy identifies a series of verbs which correspond to each

level of the conceptual pyramid. For instance, assignments that require students to "Evaluate" might make use of terms such as "appraise; compare and contrast; conclude; criticize; critique; decide; defend; interpret; judge; justify; reframe; and support." Following the introduction of Bloom's Taxonomy, Writing Fellows Naaborle Sackeyfio and Janice Capuana led an interactive workshop in which faculty were asked to identify the different intellectual behaviors sample writing assignments required students to perform. Faculty were invited to discuss their own assignments in (cont'd on page 2)

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NSSE SHOWS CUNY

ENGAGED IN BEST

WRITING PRACTICES

On December 4th, at a CUNY-wide Writing Across the Curriculum event at Hostos Community College, Robert Gonyea, associate director of the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University and the coordinating research analyst for the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), discussed the positive correlation between best practices in writing instruction and NSSE's deep learning and gains scales. Dr. Gonyea also presented data from NSSE's Writing Supplement, a student survey on experiences with writing in college, for all of CUNY's four-year schools. This data suggests that students at CUNY campuses are highly engaged with best practices in writing instruction in comparison to the survey's national average. Dr. Gonyea's talk was moderated by Michael Cripps, WAC Program Coordinator, College-Wide Writing Program Coordinator, and Associate Professor of English at York College.



DEVELOPING RUBRICS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

Oglensky and Davidson Publish Research on Writing Clinical Records

Professors Bonnie Oglensky, Social Work, and Emily Davidson, Physician Assistant Program, recently published scholarship on professional record-writing in their respective disciplines. Their article, "Teaching and Learning Through Clinical Report-writing Genres," which appeared in the November 9, 2009 issue of *The International Journal of Learning*, is a product of research Oglensky and Davidson conducted with support from Title III grants administered through York College's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning. As Oglensky and Davidson explain in their article, "professional record-writing does not receive much attention in higher education despite its centrality in the everyday life of work." Their research projects, though conceived independently, both sought to address the shared pedagogical concern of "deficient clinical writing skills among professional program students." Oglensky's and Davidson's approaches were driven by the conceptual assumption "that we learn best when knowledge is presented in the specific contexts in which it may be applied and make sense." To that end, both Oglensky and Davidson sought to create opportunities for students to not only engage in the kinds of writing common in their respective professional fields, but to do so in contexts that reflected real-world workplace experiences.

Oglensky's project was the creation of the co-curricular workshop "Writing in the

Field," which gives senior-level social work students the opportunity to "write a 'Psychological Assessment Report' based on a simulated social work case on the Internet." The psychological assessment report is the "most universal and comprehensive record that practitioners are expected to write." It was thus the logical focus for the WIF workshop, and an appropriate complement for the senior-level practicum course in which students engage in social work in community settings. Professor Oglensky collaborated with WAC Writing Fellow Jennifer Worth to create the WIF workshop and develop measures for student mastery of the genre of the psychological assessment report.

Davidson's project focused on creating opportunities for professional writing within the Physical Diagnosis Lab, "in which first-year PA students learn to perform a medical history and physical exam." For physician assistants, the patient medical history is the most comprehensive and relied upon written document produced in the field. As "70-80% of medical diagnoses can be made primarily based on the history," it is particularly important that students in the PA program develop the skills necessary to successfully write a patient medical history.

Oglensky and Davidson turned to the development of rubrics as a pedagogical tool to help guide students toward mastery of the writing of their respective fields.

They noted that the rubrics "served three project-defining purposes." Developing the rubrics initially required both instructors to think critically about the clinical records themselves, to discover what kinds of skills effectively writing these records required students to demonstrate. The rubrics then "became a focal point for organizing the processes of teaching and learning record-writing." The third use of the rubrics was what both professors had initially conceived of as their primary function--student assessment.

As Oglensky and Davidson began to share their research with one another, they discovered a great deal of common ground in the rubrics they had developed. Both the psychological assessment report and the patient medical history share a "similarity in the types of skills identified" students needed to demonstrate through writing, though differences in conventions exist between the fields.

Oglensky and Davidson also used rubrics as a sort of pedagogical mirror to measure the success of their projects. "Incorporating comparisons of rubric scores into action research designs, each author was able to track student progress in report-writing over time." Their initial analysis suggests that both projects have positively affected the quality of students' clinical record writing. Just as importantly, the projects suggested students became more confident in their professional writing skills.

UPCOMING WAC PRESENTATIONS:

March 3rd

"Writing at York College/CUNY: Achievements and Challenges." Presented by Michael Cripps, English, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

March 11th

"Calibrated Peer Review." Conducted by Anne Simon, Biology, Gerard McNeil, Department Chair, Biology, and Michael Cripps, English, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

April 15th

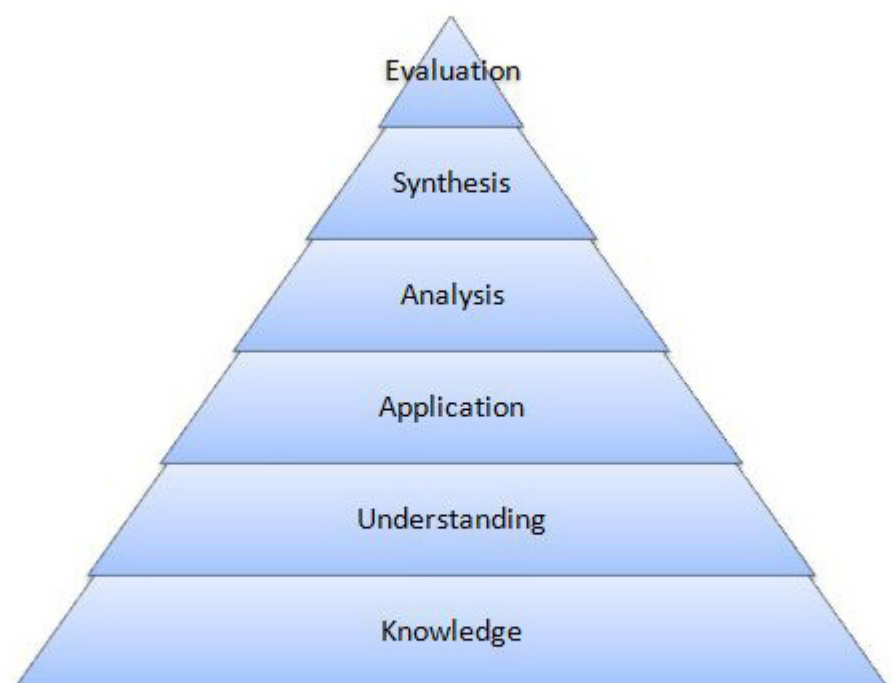
"Best Practices for Students with Disabilities Make Good Teaching/Tutoring Practice." Conducted by Heather Robinson, Writing Center Director, and Angela Ridinger-Dotterman, WAC Writing Fellow, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

April 29th

"What Faculty Teaching Writing Intensive Courses Need to Know about Multilingual Learners." Conducted by Jonathan Hall, Writing Fellows Coordinator, and WAC Writing Fellows Janice Capuana, Laurel Harris, and Aneta Kostrzewa. Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

SCAFFOLDING (cont'd)

relation to their conceptual elements. Writing Fellows Coordinator Jonathan Hall asked faculty to identify an assignment they had given in the past that students found particularly problematic. He explained that composition research suggests that students often find assignments difficult because the assignments assume a conceptual complexity that previous course work has not prepared them for. Professors who examine their syllabi using a measure such as Bloom's Taxonomy are often surprised to discover that they have asked students to perform the most conceptually difficult assignments early in the semester. Hall encouraged faculty to think of scaffolding as more than breaking up a longer project into components. Research suggests that students are better able to take on not just longer writing assignments, but more intellectually complex assignments, when faculty plan for the assignments to work together conceptually, leading students from assignments that require students to demonstrate less complicated intellectual behaviors like "Knowledge," and build toward the more complicated tasks like "Evaluation."



Bloom's Taxonomy