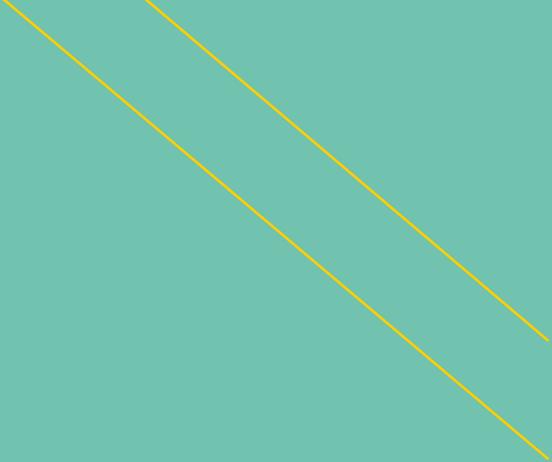


Writing Across the Curriculum Initiative  
Annual Report 2015–2016



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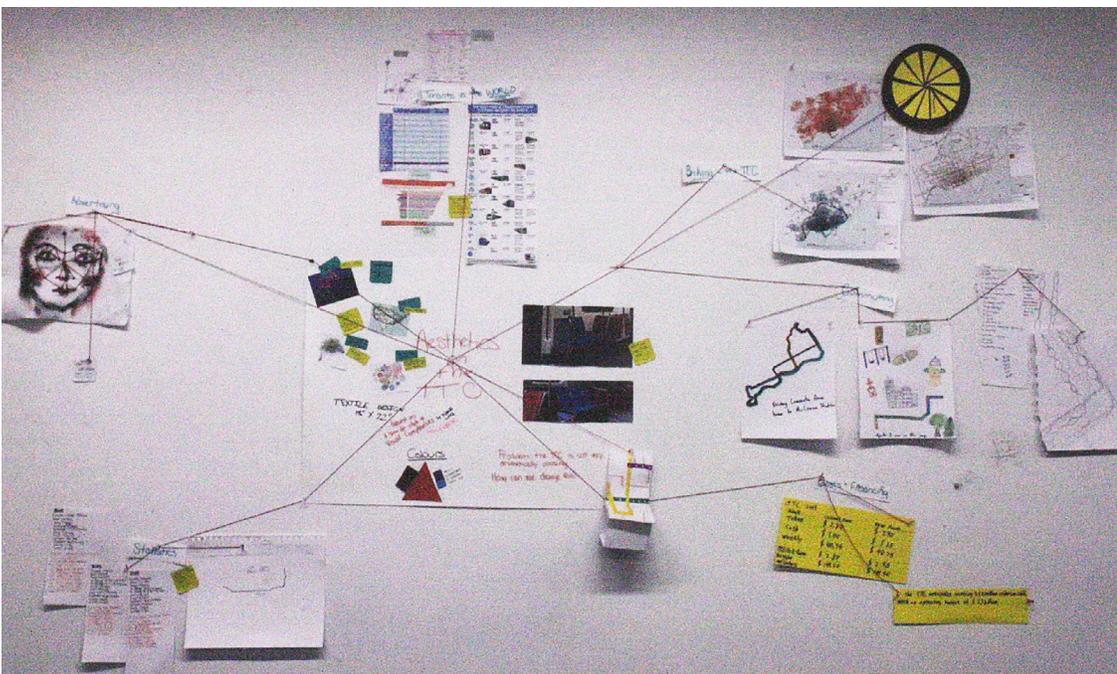
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## OVERVIEW

The 2015–2016 academic year marked the implementation of OCAD University's (OCAD U) Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Initiative in first-year Writing in the Disciplines (WID) courses.

The following pages summarize the year's activities, document the contributions that OCAD U instructors and their students have made to the WAC Initiative, highlight the successes and challenges involved in developing and implementing writing activities in art and design education and point to areas for future development.

As we look ahead to 2016–2017, the second year of WAC Initiative implementation at OCAD U, we hope to build on our accomplishments and challenges in order to best support our students' development as artists, designers, curators, critical thinkers and writers.



Above: Brandon Jones. Untitled photograph of Writing Across the Curriculum End-of-Year Exhibition. OCAD University: 2016.

## About the WAC Initiative at OCAD University

The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Initiative at OCAD U aims to develop an integrative approach to literacy instruction for art and design education that offers undergraduate students regular and progressive opportunities to develop writing and other communication skills (oral, reading, visual and digital) specific to their disciplines and cultures of making.

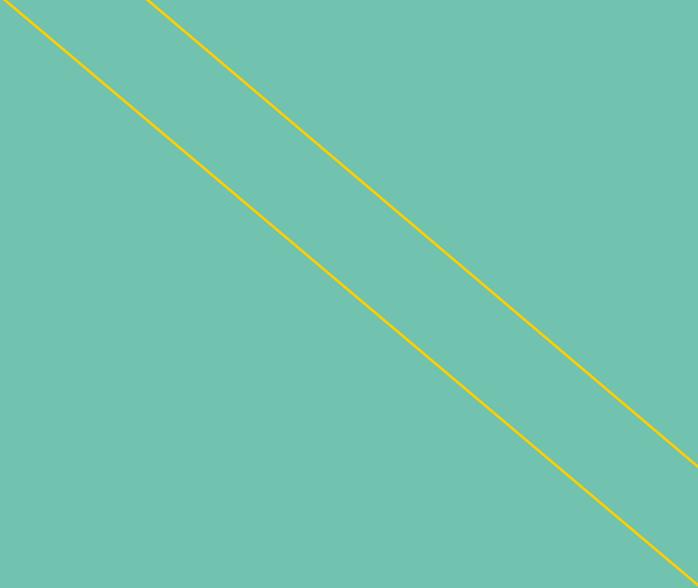
Housed in the Writing & Learning Centre (WLC), the university-wide initiative brings together instructors and undergraduate students from across OCAD U's three undergraduate Faculties (Art, Design and Liberal Arts and Sciences and School of Interdisciplinary Studies), English Language Learning (ELL) and writing specialists from the WLC and educational developers from the Faculty & Curriculum Development Centre (FCDC). Through faculty collaboration and cross-disciplinary dialogue, the WAC Initiative promotes a systematic approach to discipline-specific writing throughout the OCAD U curriculum: one in which writing skills are taught not solely in writing-specific courses, but in required courses in each program of study as well.

## Long-Term Objectives

1. Support undergraduate students to meet program-specific learning outcomes and the benchmarks for undergraduate writing competency established in the *Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency*;
2. Promote faculty leadership in the development of writing pedagogy for art and design education;
3. Advance the culture of writing at OCAD U in ways that value, support and enrich the studio and professional practice of students and faculty; and
4. Recognize and support the language learning needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse student community in all aspects of the WAC Initiative.



Left: Brandon Jones. Untitled photograph of Writing Across the Curriculum End-of-Year Exhibition. OCAD University: 2016.



## In the 2015–2016 Academic Year:

The WAC Initiative was implemented in  
**9 existing first-year courses (total of 47 sections)**  
across all three undergraduate Faculties

**34 instructors taught 1040** unique undergraduate  
students in Writing in the Disciplines designated  
first-year courses

**19 professional development workshops and roundtables**  
were delivered to instructors and staff

**Over 20 consultations** with individual faculty  
members about the WID course stream took place

The WLC ran **8 in-class workshops in 6**  
**first-year WID classes** for 133 students

**63 undergraduate students in 6 classes**  
consented to having their making and writing  
assignments used in a study exploring the  
effectiveness of the WAC Initiative at OCAD U

## Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Steering Committee

The WAC Steering Committee guides the implementation of the initiative and engages actively with the OCAD U community to advance a culture of writing. Committee members include writing specialists from the WLC, educational developers from the FCDC, and the WID Fellows. The WID Fellows guide the initiative and act as its ambassadors in their respective Faculties; the WID Student Fellow serves as a liaison between the WAC Initiative and undergraduate students, ensuring that the diverse needs and interests of OCAD U's student population are represented.

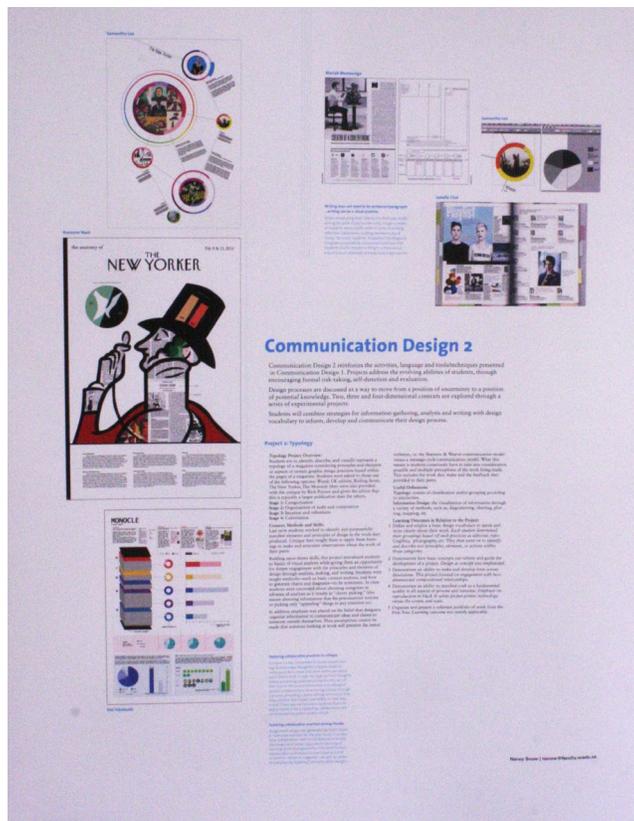
In 2015–2016, Susan Ferguson (Director, WLC) served as Chair of the WAC Steering Committee.

Emilie Brancato (ELL Specialist, WLC) provided leadership and expertise in the development of activities and resources to support ELL students, undertook research and collaborative inquiry with faculty, facilitated course workshops and a faculty roundtable, collaborated with individual instructors on assignment design, contributed to *Including Writing in Your Course: A Toolkit for Faculty* and developed the WAC website.

Cary DiPietro (Educational Developer, FCDC) led workshops for faculty teaching in the WID course stream, coordinated the implementation of the initiative in first-year courses, organized a series of faculty roundtables, and developed *Including Writing in Your Course: A Toolkit for Faculty*.

Joe Lipsett (Educational Developer, FCDC) held individual consultations with WID instructors to support the development of teaching and learning resources for WID courses.

Karen Ruddy (WID Specialist, WLC) joined the initiative in January 2016, and facilitated instructor feedback on the initiative, collaborated with individual instructors on assignment design and course support, created student resources, and organized an end-of-year exhibition of WID faculty posters and first-year student writing.



Left: Brandon Jones. Untitled photograph of Writing Across the Curriculum End-of-Year Exhibition. OCAD University: 2016.

## WID Fellows



Rouzbeh Akhbari,  
WID Student Fellow,  
Undergraduate  
Student, Faculty of Art

From the beginning stages of the Initiative to this year's implementation in first-year classes, Rouzbeh has represented the diverse educational experiences and writing needs of OCAD U students on the WAC Steering Committee. As a WLC peer tutor, he supported first-year students registered in WID courses. In December 2015, Rouzbeh also attended "Idea to Impact: Telling Our Stories," the Eastern Regional Conference of the Learning Specialists Association of Canada. There, he was introduced to important examples of similar initiatives in other universities to share with the WAC Steering Committee.



Catherine Black,  
WID Fellow, Faculty  
of Liberal Arts and  
Sciences and School  
of Interdisciplinary  
Studies (LAS/SIS)

Catherine facilitated course meetings and workshops with LAS/SIS instructors to support the integration of WAC writing strategies into first-year WID courses in Digital Futures and Visual and Critical Studies. In addition, she co-facilitated two faculty roundtables: "Strategies for Supporting English Language Learners" (with Emilie Brancato, WLC) and "Narrative, Anecdote, Metaphor, oh My! Alternative Approaches to Essay Writing" (with Mark Dickinson, LAS/SIS). She also collaborated with faculty and teaching assistants in ENGL 1004: *Essay & the Argument* to develop grading rubrics that align with the learning outcomes for writing.



Nicole Collins,  
WID Fellow,  
Faculty of Art

Nicole facilitated course workshops for instructors in the Faculty of Art and worked with J.J. Lee, Chair of First-year Art, and David Griffin, faculty course leader for Drawing I (GART 1001 and DRPT 1005), to support the development of curriculum-specific approaches to the use of writing in the sketchbook in first-year drawing courses. In November, Nicole and David co-facilitated a faculty roundtable on "Sparkling Creativity through the Sketchbook." Nicole also contributed to research around the initiative by collecting samples of student writing in her third-year drawing course (DRPT 3009 *Process as Art: The Meaning of Materials*) to further understanding of genres of writing in art and design education.



Saskia van Kampen,  
WID Fellow,  
Faculty of Design

Saskia facilitated course workshops for instructors in the Faculty of Design. She presented at the WLC Tutor Training workshop and participated in the WAC end-of-year poster exhibition. With Nancy Snow (WID instructor, Design), she co-facilitated a faculty roundtable entitled "From Intuition to Expression: Using Self-Reflexive Writing to Foster Purposeful Communication and Design Skills." Saskia contributed significantly to research of the initiative, and in collaboration with Nancy Snow and Emilie Brancato presented at a variety of conferences.

## PRIORITY AREAS

### Support Undergraduate Students

The WAC Initiative employed a multi-pronged approach (resource development, curricular and co-curricular supports, and professional learning opportunities) to support undergraduate students in achieving the learning outcomes outlined in OCAD U's Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency.

#### WID Course Workshops

In every program, one existing required course per year level (first-year, second-year, etc.) has been designated as a WID course. The purpose of the WID course stream is to provide students with sustained opportunities to develop discipline-specific writing skills during every year of their programs and in ways that support studio learning. There is no prescribed curriculum for WID courses. Rather, WID courses include discipline-specific assignments that support the learning outcomes for writing identified in the *Framework for Undergraduate Writing Competency*.

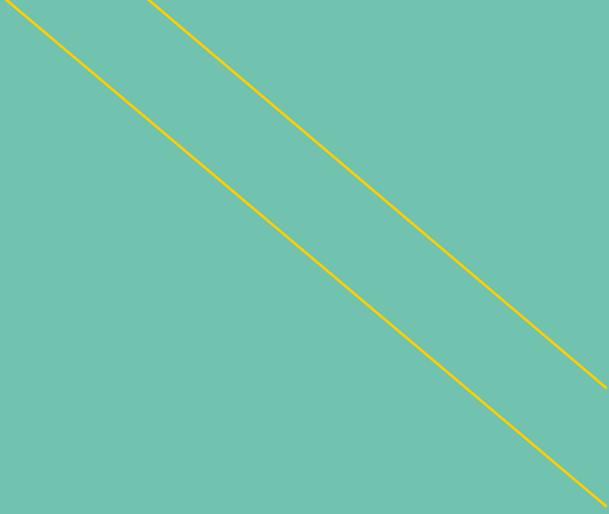
Since the summer of 2015, we have offered nine workshops for faculty teaching WID courses. These workshops introduced faculty to the Initiative, and also provided a forum for instructors teaching the same course to reflect on the role of writing in their disciplines and to share strategies for teaching writing.

In the workshops, writing specialists and Fellows offered feedback to instructors as they collaborated to design a variety of writing activities — including low-stakes (in-class and informal) and formal writing assignments and exercises — that deepen student engagement with and mastery of the existing course curriculum. 100% of faculty participants in the course workshops agreed or strongly agreed that the workshops enriched their understanding of student writing needs and that what they learnt will enhance their teaching.

#### Faculty Discussion and Support Opportunities

The WAC Initiative aimed to provide multiple opportunities for faculty collaboration and feedback in order to foster dialogue within and across undergraduate programs about writing pedagogy and to develop a shared understanding of what kinds of writing activities and exercises best meet the needs of the studio learning environment.

Over 20 one-on-one consultations with individual instructors were held to provide support for new assignment design and the development of grading rubrics for writing assignments and activities. Throughout the fall and winter semesters, WID instructors were offered opportunities to discuss their successes and challenges with members of their teaching teams and the WAC Steering Committee. The Steering Committee also invited instructors to share both anonymous and in-person feedback about their experience in the WID course process, and recommendations for further course and resource development.



## WID Faculty Perspectives on the Initiative

**“The process helped to further refine how I teach critical thinking and creative conceptual development.”**

*– Anonymous instructor feedback from end-of-term WAC survey*

**“The course development process made me more aware of the pedagogy behind my teaching.”**

*– Anonymous instructor feedback from end-of-term WAC survey*

**“I think it will benefit both students and teachers to have more consistency (such as the WID courses) in their programs.”**

*– Anonymous instructor feedback from end-of-term WAC survey*

**“I learnt that risk-taking is applicable to writing, not just making.”**

*– Anonymous instructor feedback on course workshop*

**“The group meetings were well organized and facilitated.”**

*– Anonymous instructor feedback from end-of-term WAC survey*

**“The workshop helped to give me focus as to where and how to implement writing exercises.”**

*– Anonymous instructor feedback from end-of-term WAC survey*

## Student Supports

In collaboration with Rebecca Diederichs (Writing & Learning Consultant, WLC), the WAC Initiative developed a series of activities and workshops to support student learning.

In 2015–2016, eight in-class workshops were run in six classes for 133 students. Through the use of active learning strategies, students were introduced to a variety of writing and critical engagement skills that complement and support studio learning.

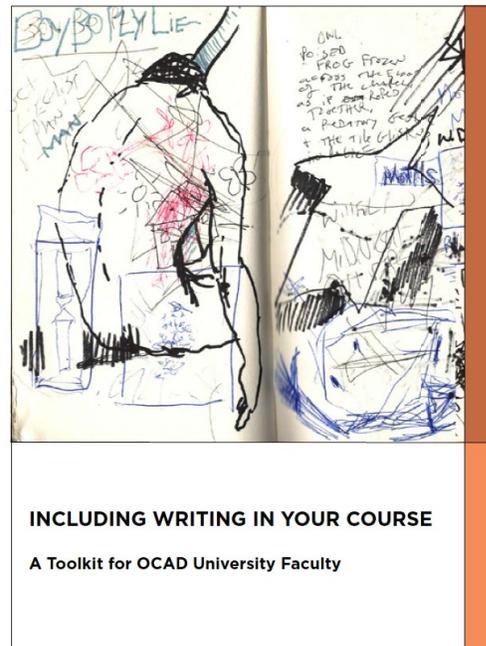
In their feedback, students noted that the workshops offered valuable exercises and examples of how to use disciplinary vocabulary to describe and analyze their work and the work of others. The workshops also helped students hone their critical thinking, research and information gathering skills. First-year students stated that they learnt that “description is a very important kind of evidence,” that “big statements require unpacking,” and that it’s “important to have many drafts.”

Right: Cover page of *Including writing in your course: A toolkit for OCAD U faculty*. Credit for cover illustration: David Griffin. Sketchbook page (mixed media). OCAD University, 2008.

## Resource Development

In the summer of 2015, the WAC Initiative launched its new website. The website offers instructors, students, and staff an overview of WAC pedagogy and principles, includes testimonials from the WID Fellows, outlines the organizational structure of the initiative, and contains links to program events and resources.

The WAC Initiative also developed a toolkit for faculty teaching in the WID course stream. *“Including Writing in Your Course: A Toolkit for OCAD University Faculty”* contains advice on how to design effective writing assignments and suggestions on assessment and feedback for students. The toolkit also includes sample writing exercises by OCAD University instructors David Griffin, Lisa Myers, Nancy Snow and Saskia van Kampen.



## Student and Faculty Perspectives on WID In-class Workshops:

**"I learnt helpful tips that can be applied to my work."**

*Anonymous student feedback on in-class workshop*

**"I thought that the interactive activities  
were educational because I was able to  
gain insight on more points of view."**

*Anonymous student feedback on in-class workshop*

**"I found the workshops provided by the WLC very useful in giving  
students some basic strategies for writing and reading."**

*Anonymous instructor feedback from end-of-term WAC survey*

## WID In-class Workshops

1. Understanding the role(s) of context in the making and presentation of art and design;
2. Generating ideas and gathering information;
3. Tracking, documenting and citing information;
4. Strategies for reading visual and written texts and critical inquiry; and
5. Vocabulary building/experimenting with vocabulary

## PRIORITY AREAS

### Promote Faculty Leadership in Developing Writing Pedagogy For Art and Design Education

The WAC Initiative at OCAD U is one of the first at an art and design school in North America. The initiative therefore promises to make OCAD U a leader in the development of writing pedagogy for art and design education.

#### Collaborative Inquiry

In 2015–2016, the WAC Initiative supported faculty teaching and curricular development through a series of collaborative inquiries between individual faculty members and writing specialists from the WLC. Throughout the year, Emilie Brancato and Karen Ruddy met with five faculty members from three programs to engage in collaborative inquiry about best practices for integrating writing into art and design education. Drawing upon the pedagogical and disciplinary expertise of our WID Instructors, these collaborative teams reviewed samples of student writing to acquire a shared understanding of disciplinary writing needs and to develop discipline-specific course assignments that best address the learning needs of students.

#### New Assignment Design

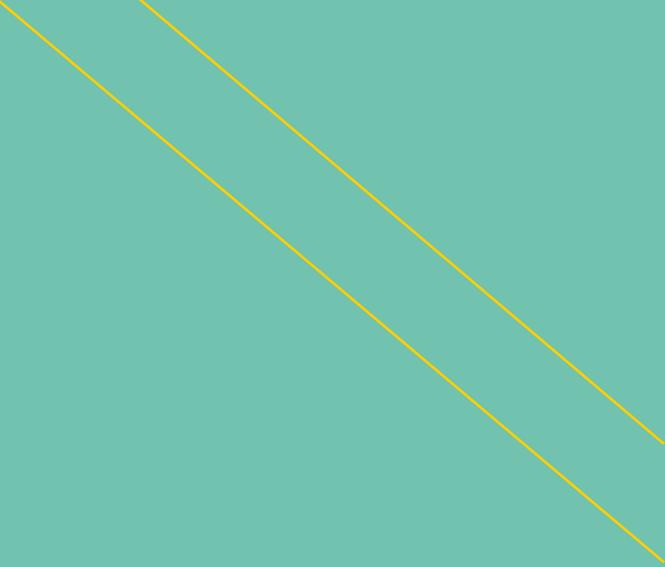
In addition to these course collaborations, WID Instructors were supported as they integrated a range of writing assignments and in-class activities to support student learning outcomes for writing and studio practice. Some of these writing exercises include:

- writing in the sketchbook;
- journaling to record and clarify ideation and direction;
- preparatory writing for artist statements;
- reviews of artist talks and gallery visits;
- mind-mapping, note-taking, and diagramming;
- reflections on project process and development;
- peer critiques of work;
- short review essays;
- scaffolded and staged research projects; and
- site research

#### **In mid-term and end-of-year feedback, instructors observed that writing activities and assignments:**

- Deepened student engagement with the course curriculum;
- Resulted in more focused assignment submissions from students;
- Helped students to develop and apply disciplinary vocabulary, articulate and reflect on the making process, and work iteratively;
- Increased students' oral participation in the classroom; and
- Led to more meaningful and effective peer critique and self-reflection.

Moreover, through this writing practice, instructors and students worked together to generate a common vocabulary that fostered a sense of a shared learning community in the classroom. Through in-class and formal writing assignments, instructors were able to learn about students' interests and to respond to any misunderstandings of the course material.



## WID Faculty Perspectives on the Impact of the Initiative

**“Students’ use of formal analysis and description to support their arguments improved over the semester. Their ability to use strategies such as compare and contrast also improved and became more nuanced.”**

*– Anonymous instructor feedback from end-of-term WAC survey*

**“Students were able to learn how to critically organize their thoughts and opinions, and think about organizing visual messages in a hierarchy, just as in a written message.”**

*– Anonymous instructor feedback from end-of-term WAC survey*

**“Student-led sharing reduced critique time. Students...came with more complex or expanded process and ideation work.”**

*– Anonymous instructor feedback from end-of-term WAC survey*

## Research & Conference Presentations

Through ongoing research projects approved by OCAD U's Research Ethics Board, the WAC Initiative is collecting samples of student writing in WID courses to be used for scholarship, resource development and to evaluate the initiative's success in supporting students to meet the learning outcomes for writing. In 2015–2016, 63 undergraduate students in 6 WID classes agreed to have their visual and writing assignments used in a study exploring the effectiveness of the WAC Initiative in first-year courses.

WID Fellows, instructors and other members of the WAC Steering Committee have presented on aspects of the WAC Initiative at different professional venues.



Above: Uncredited photograph of the Poster Exhibition at the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Conference 2015. Flickr.com. Vancouver: 2015.



## PRIORITY AREAS

### Advance the Culture of Writing at OCAD University

Writing has long been a central pillar of the OCAD U curriculum. The mandate of the WAC Initiative is to promote this culture of writing by showcasing the role writing plays in the creative practice of OCAD U instructors and students. We also aim to create new opportunities for collaboration between faculty, students and staff that complement and enrich the existing writing communities both at and beyond the university.

#### End-of-Year Exhibition

On March 31, 2016, the WAC Initiative held the opening for its first annual end-of-year exhibition celebrating student achievements and faculty pedagogical innovation in WID courses.

The event included an exhibition of first-year student writing and visual work, curated by first-year graphic design students Donya Aref, Breanne Jeethan and Fatima Riaz. The exhibition showcased the variety of writing activities that first-year students completed for their WID courses at OCAD U, including: process notes, journal entries, mood boards, posters, drawings and formal essays. Participants in the exhibition used writing to describe, reflect, iterate, inquire, experiment, dialogue, tell stories, and play with ideas and images. Their works show that, for OCAD U students, writing is not simply a supplement to their art and design practice; it is instead an integral component of their creative process and is itself a creative act.

Alongside the exhibition of first-year student writing, WID Instructors from all three undergraduate Faculties also participated in a poster exhibition that highlighted the various ways in which instructors have implemented the WAC strategies in their courses. Each faculty poster presentation included a new or revised writing assignment, examples of student work, and faculty reflections on their writing pedagogy.

In the poster presentations, Faculty of Art WID Instructors David Griffin, Erin Finley, and Diane Pugen exhibited writing assignments and student work that demonstrated the inter-connections between words and images. From the Faculty of Design, Joni Moriyama, Nancy Snow, and Saskia van Kampen displayed assignments requiring students to use writing to reflect on their making practices and to articulate the intentions of their work. Gabrielle Moser from the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences and School of Interdisciplinary Studies showcased a scaffolded research essay assignment that guided students through the process of researching and analyzing a contemporary artwork.





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## PRIORITY AREAS

### Recognize and Support Student Language Learning Needs

OCAD U values the cultural and linguistic diversity of its student body, and the WAC Initiative plays an important role in fostering inclusivity and enabling language-learners to participate in their communities of practice. The initiative has integrated language learning support holistically in all of its resources and activities. It has promoted the use of an inclusive pedagogy that addresses the specific needs of students whose first language is not English and also benefits students whose first language is English but who need to develop their use of language in a new academic context.

In 2015–2016, support for language learning has been integrated holistically throughout the activities of the WAC Initiative, primarily through the leadership and guidance of Emilie Brancato, ELL Specialist, WLC. Course workshops highlighted and developed strategies and activities that promote language learning, and provided opportunities for writing specialists and faculty to discuss best practices in inclusive pedagogy. The “Strategies for Supporting English Language Learners” Faculty Roundtable served as a venue for faculty dialogue and cross-disciplinary sharing of strategies and activities that foster an inclusive learning environment and support language learning. The approaches outlined in “Including Writing in Your Course: A Toolkit for OCAD University Faculty” are aligned with current best practices in language pedagogy.

Emilie Brancato collaborated with Rebecca Diederichs to ensure that WID in-class workshops were designed with an awareness of the language learning needs of ELLs. She also met with individual WID instructors to provide feedback on assignment design that best supports the acquisition of disciplinary and linguistic skills for ELL students. Through her course collaborations with three WID instructors, Emilie worked with faculty to develop shared understandings about the needs of ELL students, collect data, and contribute scholarship to the area of supporting language learners in the creative disciplines.

In April 2016, OCAD U’s Senate unanimously passed the recommendations detailed in English Language Learners (ELL) Undergraduate Program Development at OCAD University: Needs Assessment Summary and Recommendations. Prepared by Emilie Brancato, the report highlights the importance of identifying support for ELL students as an institutional priority. The WAC Initiative plays a key role in the overall strategy, and the recommendations suggest specific ways in which the initiative can continue to recognize and support the language learning needs of OCAD U’s culturally and linguistically diverse students. These recommendations include enhancing the WID course workshops to support ELL needs, collaborating with WID faculty and program chairs to pilot integrated models of curricular support for ELL students, and providing targeted support for WID instructors.

# CHALLENGES

The WAC Initiative draws its strength from the disciplinary and teaching expertise of OCAD U's instructors. In their feedback to the WAC Steering Committee, instructors of WID-designated courses identified the following challenges to implementing the WAC initiative in their courses in the 2015–2016 academic year.

## Course Support

WID instructors reported that in order to best help students achieve the learning outcomes for writing, they require more time and support to reflect upon and refine their teaching and learning activities. This includes institutional support and resources for sessional instructors to attend course workshops and meetings related to the WID courses, grading assistance to assess new writing assignments, the development of discipline-specific student resources, and opportunities to experiment with different strategies for teaching writing. Some instructors noted the difficulties involved with integrating writing activities on top of the existing curriculum in three-hour studio classes.

## Scholarship of Teaching and Learning on Writing Pedagogy for Art and Design

Many instructors want to engage in further scholarship and research related to the role of writing in art and design education. Yet, to do so, these instructors require time to engage in scholarly research and reflection on teaching practice, and would benefit from additional institutional support and training for new researchers.



Above: Brandon Jones. Untitled photograph of Writing Across the Curriculum End-of-Year Exhibition. OCAD University: 2016.

## Support for English Language Learners

Our instructors are committed to addressing the diverse learning needs of their students, and to incorporating different ways of knowing into the curriculum. Many instructors have requested further professional development and teaching workshops that outline best practices for supporting ELL students in their classes, and access to individual consultations with writing specialists on assignment design and delivery.

## FUTURE GOALS

As we look ahead to the implementation of the WAC Initiative in 2016–2017, we aim to refine and expand our support for instructors and students at OCAD U in ways that are informed by and responsive to the successes and challenges faced in the past academic year.

### **Continue to provide WID faculty with professional learning opportunities to share and develop strategies for integrating writing pedagogy into art and design education.**

Through course workshops and individual collaborations with faculty, the WAC Initiative will offer leadership, guidance, and support to first and second-year WID Instructors as they refine existing assignments, develop grading rubrics, try out new pedagogical techniques, and develop writing activities that address the needs of ELL students.

### **Respond to the learning needs of ELL students by piloting integrated (and sheltered if appropriate) models of curricular supports in WID courses.**

Building on the recommendations of the *ELL Program Development Report*, the WAC Initiative will pilot support models that enable faculty to develop inclusive pedagogy discipline-specific ways, especially in studio contexts.

### **In collaboration with the WLC, develop additional resources to support student learning of writing.**

In order to better help our students make the transition to university in first-year and successfully move into second-year courses, the WAC Initiative will explore opportunities to develop co-curricular support for WID courses, to provide more discipline-specific training for WLC tutors, and to create writing handouts and resources that are aligned with course-specific assignments and the different modes of writing expected in various programs. The WLC will continue to develop and deliver in-class writing workshops tailored to learning outcomes for first and second-year WID courses.

### **Promote the culture of writing at OCAD U by collaborating with student and faculty writing communities at the university.**

In the upcoming year, we intend to work with undergraduate students to launch a publication of student writing. We also look forward to expanding our exhibition of student writing and faculty reflections on writing pedagogy.

Lastly, as of Fall 2016, we will no longer be using “Writing in the Disciplines” to designate the course stream or our Fellows. Instead, all components of the initiative will be referred to only as “Writing Across the Curriculum.” We hope that this change will allow us to streamline our communications with the OCAD U community, and to better raise awareness of the initiative amongst faculty, students, and staff.





For more information about Writing Across the Curriculum at OCAD U,  
visit: <http://www.ocadu.ca/academics/writing-across-the-curriculum.htm>  
Or email: [wac@ocadu.ca](mailto:wac@ocadu.ca)