WAC Grants
Faculty may submit grant proposals for up to $1000 on projects to improve writing instruction in their discipline. Deadline: March 12, 2000. See the proposal guidelines on the WAC Webpage: <Http://www.niu.edu/english/wac/ciuwac.html>

DID YOU KNOW?
Thomas Van Vleet is WAC Consultant in Psychology. Contact him at 3-7088 or <tomvanvleet@hotmail.com>

Writing Tips. Ask students to take five minutes in writing to:

- Summarize a reading assignment.
- Interpret a graph, chart, or index.
- Review what they’ve found important in a week’s lecture notes.
- Formulate questions for a discussion (or exam)
- Contrast/compare key concepts.
- Evaluate sources they are using for a project.

Informal writing can provide a “script” for class dialogue. Later, you can read it quickly and respond with a +, √, or –. This technique provides evidence of class participation, promotes critical thinking, and encourages written fluency—writing to learn!

Dialogue: Kevin Anderson and Kit O’Toole on Writing Consultants

Prof. Anderson: My students in Sociology 473 (Sociological Theory) usually write two papers each semester. Over the years, I have tried to help them not only to understand theoretical texts, but to develop their writing. Given the fact that many will not pursue graduate studies in a field related to sociology, I have long believed that improving their writing skills is one of the prime goals of my course.

However, with forty students per section it’s hard for me to give individual attention to their writing. Sometimes meet with me ahead of time with a rough draft. In these sessions, I spend most of the time helping them with content issues.

Therefore, I encourage students to visit a WAC Consultant, giving them small incentives to do so. In class I tell them going to a consultant does not mean that one is a poor writer; working on one’s writing is a lifelong task. I mention writing tips I’ve gained from the copy editors of my books and articles and from the editing of my grant proposals by people at NIU’s Office of Sponsored Projects.

Ms. O’Toole: A writing consultant can aid your department in many ways. I help individual students with their writing. Some students see me from their professors’ recommendation, but many return for further help. I prepare handouts and style sheets on such concerns as writing term papers, essays, and citation styles. Other handouts are available for students on NIU’s WAC website, http://www.niu.edu/acad/english/wac/wac.html. I provide help with writing resumes, essay exams, and personal statements on applications. I do presentations for classes on topics such as peer editing and conducting student writing workshops. I can also custom design handouts or provide advice on designing assignments.

Serving the University in Many Ways by Brad Peters

After a two-year hiatus, the Writing Across the Curriculum Program at NIU is gathering impetus again. The purpose of WAC is to support a faculty that is committed to excellence in teaching through writing. This support takes many forms.

For instance, in the spring ’00 semester, the professional development seminar ENGL 600: Training in WAC will be offered to graduate students from every discipline. Grad students will acquire preparation in the most up-to-date techniques in writing instruction for three possible goals: to teach an introductory course with a writing emphasis, to tutor in the Writing Center, or to become a WAC Consultant in their own department or college.

Advisors will want to know that ENGL 250: Practical Writing is being developed into a Writing Across... (cont’d on p. 2)
Steps in Writing are an Intellectual and Rhetorical Process

For the past several semesters, I have used essay writing as the central component of my general education survey of U.S. history. In-course instruction centers on discussion of assigned readings with a view toward teaching about sources, perspective, context and other concepts central to the discipline.

Students work all semester on one 6-8 page essay by completing a series of short assignments. Early in the semester all students do assignments that help them examine their biases, introduce them to contextual reading of primary sources, and lead them through close and critical reading of scholarly secondary sources. They then identify and research a topic, finishing short exercises about their reading that are similar to the earlier ones about sources.

Finally, they compose an outline and write a rough draft. Corrections of that draft become their preliminary finished draft, which they then rewrite in response to comments from the teaching assistants or me.

To help students with this process, I have developed a booklet on historical writing that includes a short introduction to concepts in the discipline followed by a skeletal rhetoric and style book. I have tinkered with assignments, but the general process has remained the same. I believe this steps approach, which I also use in teaching a senior writing seminar, is one of the best ways to improve students’ writing skills in a manner based in their discipline.

Workshops are Held in the College of Business

A series of workshops have begun in the College of Business and will continue throughout the fall semester. Interested Business faculty may note the following schedule:

- “Making the Transition to Business Writing,” 10/11, 3-4 PM, WZ 216
- “Designing Assignments in Manageable Stages,” 10/26, 3-4 PM, McM 202
- “Seven Ways to Respond to and Assess Writing,” 11/8, 3-4 PM, WZ 216
- “Objectives and Outcomes: What do Students Need to Know for Minimum Competency in Business Writing?” 11/23, 3-4 PM, McM 202

Call B. Peters, x3-6718, or email <bpeters@niu.edu> for further details.

Serving (cont’d from p. 1)

the Disciplines course that should be especially attractive to pre-teaching majors and transfer students. 250 will also appeal to undergrads who want to study and practice the written forms of their majors, in preparation for writing in their professions.

Again for graduate students, a program for a Certificate in the Teaching of Writing is being drafted. This certificate will be recorded on the graduate’s transcript. The proposed program would require 15 credits, coinciding with an area of specialization for the Masters’ or Ph.D. 6 credits might come from a writing-intensive course or work on the thesis or dissertation. 3 credits would come from a course in pedagogy, such as ENGL 600. 3 credits would come from a course in theories of rhetoric and composition. The final 3 credits might come from a course in history of rhetoric, genre studies, or special topics. The Certificate will help graduates seeking jobs that increasingly demand writing proficiency.

Tutoring assistance at the Writing Center also continues. Students may e-mail: <writing@niu.edu>— or go to Reavis