

# GTPathways



WRITING INTEGRATION NEWSLETTER

Volume 1, Issue 1

Fall 2007

## Moving Forward: Responses to Writing Integration

As many departments this fall faced the difficult task of integrating a 25% writing requirement into their curricula, Dr. Karla Gingerich, Course Coordinator of PSY100 (formerly PY100), could sympathize. Last year, the Psychology Department piloted the Writing Integration Program and began a tentative revision of their core class, PSY100. They were unfamiliar with many of the better practices associated with assigning and responding to student writing, and they were confronted by the additional challenge of incorporating it into one of the University's most highly attended courses. While Psychology understood and supported the basic tenets of the Writing Integration Initiative,

they struggled with its implementation. "We were asking ourselves to do things that, it turns out, we didn't need to be doing," says Dr. Gingerich. For instance, they developed overly complex grading sheets (rubrics) and tried to provide detailed editing advice on every student paper.

This year, thanks to additional University funding, more resources are available to help departments meet the new writing integration requirements. Sue Doe, Coordinator of the GTPathways Writing Integration Program, provides training sessions on writing integration issues, offers a one-credit course for Writing GTAs, provides individual assistance to faculty and GTAs, and maintains a new web site to support the

GTPathways writing initiative. These efforts are aimed at providing instructors and Writing GTAs with the basic tools they need to create meaningful writing assignments, grade and respond to student writing, and integrate writing into classroom delivery of course material in order to enhance learning.

George Stetson, a Writing GTA in Political Science, says the erroneous assumption that these techniques develop intuitively can be one of the largest handicaps instructors now face. "Just because you can write and just because you're a scholar doesn't mean you can teach this," says Stetson, "I think just recognizing that is a huge first step."

Will Shoshin, a doctoral candidate and Teaching Fel-

### About GTPathways:

GTPathways general education courses are courses that the state of Colorado guarantees to transfer within public institutions of higher education statewide.

Approved courses in GTPathways work to build competency in five areas, among them written communication. CSU's AUCC codified the goal of written competency by establishing a 25 % writing requirement for certain core courses. To read CCHE's expectations for Written Competency go to: [www.state.co.us/cche/academic/transfer/criteria/competency/writtencomm.pdf](http://www.state.co.us/cche/academic/transfer/criteria/competency/writtencomm.pdf)

## Tuning in to Turnitin.com

Greg Dickinson and his colleagues in Speech Communication had become discouraged by the effort involved in sniffing out the original sources of student papers that were suspected of plagiarism. So this year they invested as a department



Greg Dickinson

in a subscription to **Turnitin.com**. With **Turnitin** subscribing parties pay an initial subscription fee and then a per-paper fee. The Speech Communications Department reports that their subscription costs little more than giving up the purchase of a single new computer.

And the benefits, they believe, have made the price worthwhile. Dickinson says that the subscription mostly serves as deterrence to students who know up front that

their papers are being screened. Yet **Turnitin** also provides another way of teaching appropriate use of sources, Dickinson says. "We're reinforcing source use in multiple places."

With **Turnitin** students submit their papers to the software, and the software produces an "originality" report, comparing each paper to the thousands of papers in the expanding database, using a word matching process that nearly instant-

GTPathways Writing Integration Coordinator:  
Sue Doe  
GTPathways Publications Editor and Intern:  
Sunshine Dempsey

### A Word from the Coordinator and Publications Editor

Welcome to our first GTPathways Writing Integration Newsletter, made possible by a grant from TILT (The Institute for Learning and Teaching). We hope it will initiate conversation on issues related to the integration of writing across the curriculum. This first issue attempts to address the following: How is the challenge of integrating writing being experienced by students, graduate teaching assistants, and faculty? We believe that where there is conversation, there is the potential for learning and exchange.

We're learning, and we hope you are too.

Send us your ideas for the spring newsletter.

## WRITING TIP:

“When doing in-class writing assignments, I use a remote response clicker to time the assignment. I open a question and tell students to vote ‘A’ if they are still working and change their vote to ‘B’ when they’re done. This provides a visual indicator of how much of the class is still working on the assignment.”

—Serena Enke,  
Doctoral Candidate and  
Teaching Fellow, PSY100



Dr. Alexandra Bernasek  
Associate Dean  
College of Liberal Arts,



Dr. Karla Gingerich,  
Course Coordinator of  
Psychology 100

## GT Pathways

### Turnitin.com Continued...

neously compares a student’s words to the thousands of words stored in its database. As a paper is submitted, it becomes part of the database, so even local papers that are submitted during a semester can be compared instantaneously to others, and these are maintained in the database for comparisons done next semester and next year. Such an approach serves notice to “paper-recyclers.” At the same time, *Turnitin* reports that student privacy is

guarded since the database records the paper with a document number.

One option the software offers is the opportunity for students to submit their papers early and then go back and revise to bring their “originality levels” within a desirable range. This range can vary, Dickinson explains, since some papers will be more reliant on outside sources than others. *Turnitin* does not recognize citations, so any quoted material, even

if it’s cited, will be flagged on the originality report. It is then up to the instructor to check the areas that are highlighted as having word matches with another source. If these words are properly cited, then a benign use of sources has occurred. Dickinson says that this process reinforces appropriate source citation.

Dickinson also reports that in the Speech Department students submit their papers both in electronic form for

### Responses Continued...

low in Psychology, has redesigned aspects of his course to make better use of the writing integration. “What’s actually in the curriculum or what gets covered hasn’t really changed or been affected. *How* it gets covered has changed,” he says. “With writing involved, the way I’m covering [the material] is geared a little bit differently. I think students understand it better. I see on their tests . . . they’re averaging 7, 8 points higher than they did last year. I can only attribute this to the fact that they’re learning the material better by writing about it.”

Dr. Alexandra Bernasek, Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts, and Professor of Economics, believes the feedback students receive on assignments aids in their development as academic writers. “I think they will have many more opportunities to write,” says Dr. Bernasek, “as well as to get feedback on that writ-

ing and to make improvements so that once they get through the core their writing skills should be a lot better. By the time they get into their upper-division courses, where they are expected to write more, they should be starting, from a higher level.” That’s good news for Jake Benfield, another doctoral candidate in the Psychology Department and a Teaching Fellow. “I used to teach the upper-division labs and they have to write an APA-style paper, this big research report, 15 to 18 pages, and the writing was horrible,” Benfield says. “The biggest value [of this writing integration effort] we might not see for three years. The goal would be that my freshmen now, taking my 100-level class, are *developing* writing skills.”

Professor Sandy Davis, Political Science, is optimistic about the potential for student writing: “I hope the writing

does give students an opportunity to think about a more general question,” she says. “If you’re using multiple choice, you’re dealing with much smaller bits of information, and whether it be a research paper or an essay, they’re going to have to think about more global kinds of questions.”

Shoshin advises, “If you do this right, it’s not necessarily more work. You can get the students to communicate effectively, to write well.”

### AN IN-CLASS WRITING TIP

“To summarize an in-class video, we use a template of blank ‘idea boxes,’ encouraging students to find main ideas instead of merely listing events. One box is for a personal supporting example. Students then trade papers and must attach the appropriate course terminology to their peer’s example.”

Marc V. Richard  
Teaching Fellow PSY100,  
Classroom of 400+ students

## Katy Stephen ... A Student Writer's Perspective

Katy Stephen is in Marc Richard's PSY100 class where she writes academic papers and regularly does in-class writing. The in-class events are moments that Richard calls WTF's, short for "Where's the Fun?"—a novel customization of the generic concept of Write To Learn or WTL.

For Katy's first writing assignment in PSY100, she was assigned to design an experiment, to dream up data, and then report the findings while using the essential vocabulary of the course, specifically the notions of dependent and independent variables. Katy says she was expected to explain why the scientific method is needed and how it works, applying the scientific method to a real



Katy Stephen

## Turnitin.com Continued...

*Turnitin* as well as in traditional hard copy. Instructors then engage in two separate processes, one having to do with the originality report via *Turnitin* and the other a traditional grading exercise, including marginal and end commenting. "It's an additional step and, in many ways, involves more work," Dickin-

son acknowledges, "but question she had. In Katy's case, she wondered whether listening to music affects a person's performance on homework.

Katy says the goal of the assignment was to help students become more aware of the scientific method's usefulness for inquiring into any question they might have. "We really can't do without it," she says.

When asked if doing this writing assignment required any special effort from her, Katy replied that the assignment reinforced what was going on in the course, motivating her to return to the textbook and the lecture notes as well as to review essential vocabulary. She says that this approach is different from your average test because with the test you only need to recognize the key words, while with writing you have to use the terms accurately for the circumstances you've described. Further, Katy says that she learned what's involved in applying the scientific method, explaining its principles all the way through from start to finish of the experiment's description.

son argues, marks the program's true value. Students who might otherwise avoid doing the work--and the learning--that's involved with an honest effort, are now absolutely required to engage in this effort.

Dickinson also points out that using *Turnitin* amounts to more work for students, too. Yet such work, Dickin-

son argues, marks the program's true value. Students who might otherwise avoid doing the work--and the learning--that's involved with an honest effort, are now absolutely required to engage in this effort.

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"I'D LIKE SOME SPECIFIC DETAILS ABOUT WHAT I'M DOING WELL AND HOW TO IMPROVE ON WHAT I'M ALREADY DOING."

-KATY STEPHEN

What do YOU think about plagiarism detection software? Drop Sue Doe a line at Sue.Doe@Colostate.Edu and we'll report the results in the next newsletter.

## WRITING TIP:

"Write-to-Learn exercises can be used to gauge students' understanding of a topic covered in class. In my Physiological Psychology lab course, asking students to detail what belongs in the Methods section of a paper or to differentiate between two similar physiological measures we've discussed are both good ways for the students as well as the teacher to assess understanding of a concept without a graded quiz."

— Amanda E. Sensenig,  
Instructor, Physiological  
Psychology Laboratory

OPINIONS VARY ON THE USE OF PLAGIARISM DETECTION SOFTWARE. Sample challenges include:

- Graduate writing tutors at Indiana University of Pennsylvania report that they could, with little effort, utilize options within *Turnitin* to pull up whole documents with student authors' identifying information still intact and visible on the documents. \*

- Some students argue that they have little choice but to relinquish both control and ownership of their texts, or else risk failing the course. A student at McGill University in Montreal successfully sued his university on this point in 2004.

- Once a program subscribes to *Turnitin*, that program must continue to subscribe in order to maintain the ability to check any paper, even those authored locally. Once submitted, papers become the property of *Turnitin*.

- The Writing Program Administrators official policy on plagiarism detection advises faculty and universities to "use plagiarism detection services cautiously . . . [as] their availability should never be used to justify the avoidance of responsible teaching methods." WPA advises: 1) have clear policies and examples that are discussed in class, 2) make assignment designs that sequence expectations to discourage last-minute writing, 3) avoid generic topic assignments, 4) provide direct instruction in disciplinary conventions for citation.

—For more information, go to <http://writing.colostate.edu/GTPathways/plagiarism.cfm>  
—\*Brown, Fallon, et al. "Taking on Turnitin: Tutors Advocating Change." *Writing Center Journal* 27.1 (2007): 7-28.

THIS NEWSLETTER WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GRANT FROM THE INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING.

## TILT and Teaching Certificates



The Graduate Teaching Certificates program, offered through the Institute for Learning and Teaching (<http://tilt.colostate.edu>), provides graduate students an opportunity to learn about, reflect on, and practice teaching at the post-secondary level. The program is flexible, allowing graduate students to focus on areas of teaching that most interest them and best meet their professional needs. In collaboration with the Graduate School and Computer Training and Support Services, the Institute offers four Teaching Certificates:

- The Certificate in College Teaching\*
- The Certificate in Service-Learning
- The Certificate in Teaching With Technology
- The Certificate in Learning Management Systems

Visit the Teaching Certificates Web page at <http://tilt.colostate.edu/grad/certificates/>.

*\*E680 GTPathways Writing Integration and GTPathways Writing Workshops can contribute toward The Certificate in College Teaching*

## The Writing Center

The CSU Writing Center offers the following services, including half-hour walk-in sessions at the following times and locations:

- Eddy 6: M-Th, 10:00-4:00
- Morgan Library, Su, 6:00-9:00
- Corbett Hall, T, Th, 6:00-8:00
- Braiden Hall, W, 6:00-8:00

For more information contact the CSU Writing Center at (970) 491- 0222 or by email at [wconsult@lamar.colostate.edu](mailto:wconsult@lamar.colostate.edu).

—Online Consultations: Submit drafts to the Writing Center through the link at [writing@colostate.edu](mailto:writing@colostate.edu).

—Writing Center Tutorials: Students seeking additional help with academic writing can enroll in a WCT, a weekly, one-hour consultation.

—Writing Workshops: In association with the Writing Across the Curriculum Program, we offer a number of workshops that address topics as various as “Writing the Essay Exam” to “Writing the Dissertation Abstract.” Visit our Website for details.

### Dedicated Tutoring at the CSU Writing Center:

Collaborating with faculty in writing-intensive courses, the Writing Center “dedicates” a consultant, who has comprehensive knowledge of the discipline-specific writing conventions, to work with students in those courses.

If you are interested in working with the Writing Center to develop a Dedicated Tutoring program for your class or classes, please contact

Lisa Langstraat, Writing Center Director, at [lisa.langstraat@colostate.edu](mailto:lisa.langstraat@colostate.edu).

## Writing@CSU

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The Writing@CSU Web site and its Writing Studio are designed to help writers by providing access to writing guides, activities, tools, and links to other resources available on the Web. The site offers an experience similar to a well-run workshop - timely advice from teachers, feedback from other writers, helpful examples, and access to tools (such as the To-Do List, Ideas, Outline, Bibliography, Draft, Blog, and ePortfolio tools). These tools can help any writer write effectively for varied audiences and occasions.

The work a writer creates in Writing@CSU's Writing Studio is stored in a

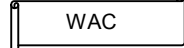
database so that it can be revised, shared with other writers, or submitted to other writers for comment. A writer's work is kept in a confidential, password-protected account so that the only people who can view the work are the writer and others the writer invites to review it. To get a Writing Studio account, simply go to <http://writing.colostate.edu> and create one.

Writing Studio Instructors can create and manage class pages -- and any teacher can request to become a Writing Studio Instructor by simply sending an email message to Mike Palmquist at [Mike.Palmquist@ColoState.edu](mailto:Mike.Palmquist@ColoState.edu) or to Jill Salahub at [Jill.Salahub@Colostate.edu](mailto:Jill.Salahub@Colostate.edu).



### Writing Across the Curriculum

For questions about Writing-Across-the-Curriculum consultations or workshops for spring 2008, please contact Professor Sarah Sloane (Director of WAC) at [Sarah.Sloane@Colostate.Edu](mailto:Sarah.Sloane@Colostate.Edu) or Associate Director of WAC, Laura Thomas at [Laura.Thomas@Colostate.Edu](mailto:Laura.Thomas@Colostate.Edu)



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TO: