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Fall 2013 Newsletter

UGA's Writing Intensive Program

Dr. Nicole Lazar has been with the Writing Program for the past six years. She brought to the WIP the yearlong capstone course required for statistics majors because the connection between statistics and writing is fundamental. "You can't get away from it," she says of writing. Statistics without writing is "useless."

For students, this simple fact can be a "real shock." But that's where the WIP comes in. The program offers the course a dedicated TA for the whole year, and this means statistics majors in the class obtain the support and advisement of a statistics graduate student who has extensive WIP training.

The course Dr. Lazar has developed is two-part: the fall semester involves low-stakes writing while the spring engages students in "a system of pieces" of the final project with individual deadlines, plenty of feedback from the instructor and TA, as well as opportunities for revision. This assignment sequence provides students with "time to stew and think about" their statistical analyses and push them not to "stop at analysis."

Throughout the process, students are issued the following reminder: your writing represents "yourself and the entire department." This caution welcomes students into the field as statisticians and invites them to see the essential role writing plays in all statistical work.

In the end, Dr. Lazar notes that students acknowledge how helpful the course is as training for jobs and graduate school. "They hate writing at the time," she admits, but then stresses that their early resistance gives way to the realization that all the writing "is a good thing." In the end, Dr. Lazar sees improvements in the writing of her students and the WIP TA; she also sees an enhanced willingness to write, an openness to dig in and "work on it more."

And that willingness, nurtured through continual writing practice, will no doubt benefit students beyond future statistical analyses – in all aspects of their academic, professional, personal, and civic lives.



WIP Tips:

On The Transfer of Student Learning

Transfer is the application of knowledge from one context to the next. It is the process by which what is learned (i.e., information, skills) becomes actively engaged in a new situation and contributes to further learning. When students experience transfer, they progress through their coursework by building on prior knowledge and acquired skills instead of starting from scratch with each new class. For writing specifically, transfer refers to the way writing skills, heuristics, and processes flow from one course to the next, even from essay to essay. But transfer does not happen automatically. **The following tips promote transfer in writing courses:**

- Help students develop **connections** between courses and skills.
- **Eliminate** the distinction between class content and writing instruction.
- Promote **activity-based writing** assignments early in the semester. Get students doing something relevant to the field and then reporting back on the experience.
- Have students **annotate a rubric** and then discuss as a class to give you a sense of what they thinks the terms and concepts mean.
- **Frame assignments** and especially new tasks in terms students are familiar with.
- Use **disciplinary readings** for content learning as well as examples of disciplinary writing models.
- Develop a **class toolkit** of core concepts, skills, and models as go-to heuristics for writing in the discipline.
- Encourage **reflective writing** – post-writes, cover letters, memos, journal entries – so students can see how their writing functions within their course of study, the class, the discipline, and the university.

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