

**First-Year Writing Annual Report  
2008 to 2009****Overview:****Core Responsibilities: Teaching First-Year Writing Courses to 5270 Students**

The First-Year Writing Program is responsible for providing instruction in college writing to all incoming first-year students as well as transfer students who have not completed the two-semester requirement at other universities. This instruction comes through the core courses: ENWR100 Introduction to Writing, ENWR105 College Writing I: Intellectual Prose and ENWR106 College Writing II: Writing and Literature. This teaching is provided by a rich staff of 10 lecturers, 18 half-time faculty members, and 45 to 50 adjunct faculty, all of whom are trained, supervised, and supported by the Director of First-Year Writing, with support from the English Department and most recently, two part-time assistant directors.

In 2008-09 the First-Year Writing Program ran 282 sections of First-Year Writing classes, instructing a total of 5270 students in First-Year Writing.

The First-Year Writing Program at Montclair State University is directed by an English Department faculty member, Emily Isaacs, who receives 12 tch release for this work, and is supported by two non-tenure line First-Year Writing faculty members, Maria Giura and Tom Kitchen, who each received 3 tch release in 2008-09. Further support comes from the chair of English, Dan Bronson, the English Department administrator, Rashida Batte-Bowden and the English Department secretary, Phyllis Brooks. Finally, major decisions are reviewed, discussed, and approved by the First-Year Writing committee: Melinda Knight, Sharon Lewis, Jessica Restaino, Greg Waters, and Bob Whitney.

**Additional Responsibilities: Placement Evaluation and Supporting Writing on Campus**

In the fall of 2008, the First-Year Writing Program undertook a new, innovative method for assessing and placing incoming First-Year Writing students into appropriate writing courses. This procedure provides links placement with best instructional practices, thus underscoring core values about education and writing to First-Year Writing students while best placing students in appropriate coursework for long-term success in college.

Additionally, the First-Year Writing Program has sought to foster the culture of writing at Montclair State through several initiatives. First, "Live Literature" (formerly Composition UnBound) is a very popular series of readings by first-year and English faculty that initiates Montclair students with a vital experience of an educated person – listening and responding to professional, published writers. Further, the First-Year Writing Program has sponsored workshops for the general student population in MLA and APA.

**Core Responsibilities: Teaching First-Year Writing Courses to 5270 Students**

The First-Year Writing Program provides as much instruction in its three courses as any other program on campus. Further, with increases in enrollment and the decision by the administration to support a 19 student class size in both ENWR105 and ENWR106 – one that is deeply beneficial to students and valued by faculty – we offered fully 282 sections of writing during the academic year 2008-09. As the chart below demonstrates, this represents a significant increase in teaching.

	ENWR 100 sectio ns	ENWR 100 seats	EN WR 105 sect ions	ENWR 105 seats	ENW R106 secti ons	ENWR 106 seats	Total Secti ons	Total Seats	% Increase of Seats Since Previous Year	% Increase of Sections Since Previous Year
Fall08	18	270	109	2071	29	551	156	2892		
Spring09	4	60	24	456	100	1900	128	2416		
<b>08-09 TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>2489</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>2451</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>5270</b>	10.88%	14.17%
Fall07	11	209	99	1881	20	500	130	2590		
Spring08	4	76	21	399	92	1748	117	2223		
<b>07-08 TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>2280</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>2248</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>4753</b>	1.45%	27.98%
Fall06	9	135	76	1900	18	450	103	2485		
Spring07	5	75	17	425	68	1700	90	2200		
<b>06-07 Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>2325</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>2150</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>4685</b>	4.46%	8.43%
Fall05	10	345	65	1625	17	425	92	2395		
Spring06	6	90	17	425	63	1575	86	2090		
<b>05-06 Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>2050</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>4485</b>		

**Faculty: Hiring, Development and Supervision**

Based on student surveys and programmatic assessment (see below for further discussion), Montclair State University's First-Year Writing Program is at its strongest. This is in large part due to successful hiring, faculty development and close supervision. These commitments are much challenged by two factors: a large staff (75 to 80 individuals) and high turnover (about 25 new faculty each year).

For this academic year we hired 6 new full-time lecturers, 7 new half-time faculty, and 9 adjuncts; additionally, 4 Center for Writing Excellence GAs joined the First-Year Writing faculty.

All applications are carefully reviewed. Jessica Restaino joined the chair Dan Bronson and the director for the screening and interviewing of all lecturer applicants; the chair and the director screened and interviewed all half-time faculty; the director screened and interviewed all adjunct faculty.

### **Lecturers in First-Year Writing**

In the fall of 2007 the First-Year Writing Program began a new initiative to hire full-time instructors, to teach 4/4 loads on a 10-month schedule. These positions were created as non-tenure-track, yearly appointments, renewable twice for a maximum of three years. In the first year (2007-2008) five instructors were hired. Of these, four were reappointed for the 2008-2009 academic year, and six new instructors (each now to be given the title of Lecturer) were hired, for a total of ten for this year. The plan for the next academic year (2009-2010) is to reappoint and hire for a total of 15 full-time Lecturers; this will mean that approximately 60 sections of the First-year writing courses will be taught by full-time faculty.

Lecturers constitute a group of faculty whose primary concern is the teaching of First-Year Writing courses. The relatively small size of the group (15 max.) allows for all members to meet together and to discuss perspectives on and objectives for the Program (as opposed to the larger meetings of all faculty, including part-time, which, owing to the size of the group, typically can neither be scheduled so that everyone can attend at the same time, nor conducted as true give-and-take discussions). Lecturers share offices in Dickson Hall, which promotes interaction and collegiality both within the group and with tenure-track English faculty. The anticipated result of this development of a core group of full-time faculty is greater consistency within and among the teachers of First-Year Writing courses; while all teachers are encouraged to teach to their own particular strengths, it is expected (and, thus far, seems to be true) that the sharing of ideas and philosophies will result in far more students having the kind of experience in First-Year Writing that is envisioned by the University.

### **Faculty Development**

Faculty Development is crucial to the program's success. Faculty development begins early – at the interview – and is followed by a three-day intensive Seminar held in August for available new hires. In this Seminar faculty read seminal texts in the field, review expectations of the Program, and practice and receive feedback on core teaching methodologies: assignment development, response to student writing, assessment.

The core values of the program are transmitted and reinforced through faculty development activities. These include:

- A. *Opening Semester Meeting* -- All faculty gather together over the course of two meetings to learn of changes to the program, hear a report on the previous semester, and to talk about teaching goals and student writing, often in the context of a discussion of specific student writing texts.
- B. *The First-Year Writing Program Faculty Website* – [www.montclair.edu/writing/teachingwriting](http://www.montclair.edu/writing/teachingwriting).

The entire writing website is widely and deeply used. In the fall semester alone, after the launching, the fifty+ pages of content have been viewed a total of 1859 times (Google Analytics report). This site, open to all, is a rich resource of material on teaching writing; teachers at other institutions, both secondary and post-secondary, have reported finding these materials and using them in their own teaching. This portion of the web site includes:

- Requirements for the core courses
- Sample syllabi, assignments and other materials for all three courses
- Guidelines for writing syllabi and selecting texts
- Grading criteria, benchmark graded papers, suggested grading methodologies, and samples of end comments
- A profile of Montclair State students (for new faculty)
- Classroom hand-outs – for peer review, revision, editing, and proofreading
- Sample assignments
- Plagiarism – avoiding it, teaching against it, and catching it
- Links to useful sites about writing and teaching writing

This web site is a crucial resource supporting First-Year Writing faculty. The web site serves to reinforce, clarify, and expand upon the pedagogical work begun in the August seminar and supplemented through workshops. First-Year Writing faculty frequently report that they use these support materials in their teaching at other institutions, commenting that they have not seen such extensive and useful support elsewhere.

### C. *Faculty Workshops*

A total of eight faculty workshops were offered during the academic year: they represent the ongoing commitment of the First-Year Writing program to offer support and professional development for its faculty. All First-Year Writing faculty were required to attend one workshop but many faculty opted to attend more than one. Varied topics offered at varied times gave faculty ample opportunity to attend workshops that addressed classroom issues that were most meaningful and relevant to them. Presenters included senior MSU writing faculty and staff as well as text book authors.

The Fall workshops included the following topics and presenters: *Making Arguments with Literature* presented by John Schilb, professor of Indiana University and editor of *College English*; *What Are Students Learning When They Are Learning to Write?* presented by Ken Bain and James Zimmerman, Research Academy, MSU; *Working with English Language Learners in the First-Year Writing Class* presented by Melinda Knight, Director of the Center for Writing Excellence; *Strategies for Teaching Revision* presented by Emily Isaacs, First-Year Writing Program Director.

The Spring workshops featured the following four topics and presenters: *How to Use Handbooks with Students* presented by Carolyn Lengel, editor of *Everyday Writer* ; *Discussion in the First-Year Writing Class* presented by Jessica Restaino, Assistant Professor of English; *Plagiarism: Teaching Against It, Avoiding It...Coping with It* and *Error in Student Writing* both presented by Emily Isaacs, Director of First-Year Writing.

D. *Increased Contact with and Support of Faculty*

In Spring 2009, two First-Year Writing instructors, Maria Giura and Tom Kitchen, were hired to work part time as assistant directors. As a result, there was increased support of faculty from the directors. The directors worked individually with faculty on all aspects of teaching writing: assessment effective response to student writing, increasingly student confidence, classroom management, effective use of electronic technologies.

E. *Blackboard Community*

In Spring 09, the First-Year Writing Program implemented a new Blackboard Community for First-Year Writing faculty, which provides them an electronic forum to share ideas, assignments, challenges and successes as well an opportunity to find answers to questions, try out new ideas and give and receive feedback. Not only does the site provide an additional and alternative way to develop community, it's also time effective and, because of this, likelier that faculty will use it as a means to dialogue with one another.

F. *Electronic Communication and Newsfeed on First-year writing Website*

Through regular emails and postings on the First-Year Writing Program website, First-Year Writing Program constituents and the larger campus community were informed and reminded of Live Literature! readings, career opportunities in the department as well as publishing news and awards won by the faculty, all of which helped increase event publicity as well as helped foster camaraderie and support among colleagues.

### **Faculty Supervision**

Faculty are supervised through the following means: student evaluations, faculty observation reports, review of teaching materials, review of assessment practices on representative essays, final grade review. Faculty who are not fully successful are notified and provided with additional support; faculty who continue to struggle are not renewed.

Lecturer and half-time faculty complete a more lengthy reappointment process which enables full review of teaching approach and effectiveness.

### **Direct Support of First-Year Writing Students**

Although all First-Year Writing activities are all designed to support students, the First-Year Writing Program provides direct support through student advising, evaluation of transfer courses submitted for equivalency, workshops, and the writing at Montclair website for students. More publicly, the First-Year Writing Program sponsors two great programs: Live Literature! (formerly Composition UnBound) and The Exemplary College Writing Award.

#### *A. Advising*

The appointment of the Assistant Directors has made possible the expansion of available hours for students to meet with First-year writing administration. With 3 administrators keeping office hours, students coming directly to the Program offices can get direct or rapid responses to their questions and requests for help. Currently there is at least one administrator on hand Monday-Thursday, and the division of labor ensures that at least one administrator is available to meet with students whenever the office is open.

Students are advised on course equivalencies, problems with faculty and challenges to plagiarism accusations.

#### *B. Database for Course Substitution*

In January 2009 the Director brought on line a new database to record course substitutions allowed for students, primarily as the result of the evaluation of transfer credits for courses taken at other institutions. With three administrators now involved in the decision-making process for course substitutions, as well as some involvement from English Department staff, a single but mutually-accessible database was required in order to track the progress of applications. The new system is simple, secure, easy to read, and easy to use; it should ensure that anyone with a question about a particular student's application can be given a quick, accurate answer.

#### *C. MLA Workshops*

In fall 2008 First-Year Writing faculty Jina Lee and Derrick Williams (both Lecturers) conceived, promoted, and conducted 4 workshops that were designed to help students in First-year writing courses understand and use the MLA guidelines for writers of research papers. MLA documentation and paper format are required for all formal writing done in First-year writing courses; students are required to buy handbooks detailing the guidelines, and teachers regularly teach the rules as part of the standard curriculum. Some students, however, have difficulty grasping the details of the MLA system, and it seems obvious that providing them with extra opportunities to see demonstrations of the rules and to ask questions about them may be helpful. The workshops were designed to be interactive; Profs. Lee and Williams developed a PowerPoint presentation with examples and problems, and solicited responses and further questions from those in attendance. Many of the First-Year Writing faculty recommended the workshops to their students, and the room was full for each presentation. We anticipate reprising the MLA workshops again in fall 2009.

#### *D. First-year writing Website for Students.*

In fall 2008 the First-Year Writing website (which had formerly been geared specifically to faculty) was re-designed and divided into two separate sites, including designated for students in First-Year Writing

courses, and geared to their needs. This student site includes course descriptions for First-year writing courses, as well as links to information relevant to students in these courses (e.g., information on the Exemplary Writing Awards, academic integrity (plagiarism), placement, assessment, etc.). Email addresses and drop-in hours for the Assistant Directors are provided, making it easier for students to contact First-Year Writing Program administration with questions and requests for help.

#### E. *Live Literature!*

In the Spring of 2009, Composition UnBound, a reading series featuring the creative works of the First-Year Writing faculty was revamped and renamed Live Literature! A total of six readings were offered in '08 –'09 with attendance at these events increasing so significantly in Spring 2009 that the courtyard atrium in University Hall was standing room only. The increase was due to greater publicity that included posting the readings on the CHSS college wide web page and working more closely with First-Year Writing Faculty to encourage their students, especially those in College Writing II Writing and Literary Study, to attend at least one Live Literature event. Furthermore while Live Lit primarily showcased the work of the First-Year Writing Faculty, members of the English faculty were also invited and participated in a few of the readings. David Galef, of the English Department, has joined the organizing committee, along with First-Year Writing faculty Sarah Kobasowski, Paul Caruso and Daniel Levine; the organizing committee produces an exciting and well-appreciated series.

The benefits of Live Literature! were numerous and reached various constituents; however among those who benefited the most were First-year writing students who were given the opportunity to gain perspective on the writing process while also enjoying literature as a sensory experience. Live Literature! also served as a helpful curriculum complement for Faculty teaching College Writing II and other courses. Furthermore, Live Literature! gave the First-Year Writing Program an opportunity to showcase the work of its talented and driven faculty—poets, dramatists, novelists, memoirists and others writers of various fiction and nonfictional forms who publish locally, nationally, and even internationally. Finally, Live Literature! helped to encourage those faculty who read their work as well as those who received it to go back to their own work with renewed satisfaction and energy.

In addition to the six readings, Live Literature! also served as a *compilation* of additional campus-wide creative readings, which facilitated greater interaction and pooling of resources between the First-Year Writing Program and other committees and departments such as the *English Department's Visiting Writers Committee* and *The Women's and Gender Studies Program*.

#### F. *The First Annual Exemplary College Writing Awards*

As of Spring 2009, MSU's First-year writing Program now joins the ranks of other First-Year Writing Programs across the country that offer awards for outstanding essays written in a First-Year Writing course. The *Exemplary College Writing Awards*, were instated to recognize such essays written in Introduction to Writing, College Writing I and College Writing II. A total of twenty-five essays were submitted. The essays represented essays written in eighteen faculty members' courses, and the Program awarded one prize for an essay written in College Writing II. The availability of such an award provides an incentive to current and future First-Year Writing students to write to their highest potential and gives faculty an opportunity to encourage individual students and their work. Furthermore, the submitted essays may serve as a useful curriculum complement for First-Year Writing faculty.

**Curriculum Development**

Developing and re-developing the curriculum is a central task of the First-Year Writing committee. In this work the director is supported not only by the assistant directors but by the First-Year Writing committee (Melinda Knight, Sharon Lewis, Jessica Restaino, Greg Waters, and Bob Whitney). Throughout the year curriculum is clarified and explained, and also routinely reviewed for revision. The major substantive projects are as follows:

- A. *Handbook*: In the fall of 2009, all First-Year Writing students will use the same handbook, a customized Montclair State University version of Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference*. Working with the composition publisher Bedford/St.Martin, the director wrote a new introductory chapter that fully outlines the expectations and goals of First-Year Writing and provides students with guidelines for best success for writing in college. Adoption of a universal handbook and inclusion of a program-authored chapter will provide greater consistency for the First-year writing program.
- B. *Revised Recommended Textbooks*: As in previous years, the First-Year Writing Program writing program evaluated the textbooks used in 100, 105 and 106. Faculty surveys largely determined if a particular text would or would not remain on the current recommended list of texts. The Director and Assistant Directors reviewed and made final decision regarding new texts.
- C. *In-House Pedagogical Guides*: For fall 2008 several sample syllabi and assignments were drafted and shared with faculty. These new syllabi reflect departmental values but allow faculty to choose among a small selection of texts.
- D. *EPortfolio Project*: The First-year writing program is collaborating with Information Technology to plan the use of Eportfolio in First-year Writing classes. Rather than submit hard copies of their final portfolios, students will submit them electronically, which will facilitate the grading process for faculty at the end of each semester. Furthermore, Eportfolio provides students an electronic repository of their best work and enable increased research on the effectiveness of First-Year Writing courses.

**Programmatic Assessment: ENWR 105 Survey**

In January 2009 the Director set in motion a plan to gather information about ENWR 105 (College Writing I: Intellectual Prose) by surveying students in ENWR 106 (College Writing II: Writing & Literary Study). The survey was designed to gather the lasting impressions that students carried forward from the previous semester's work (students who had not taken 105 in fall 2008 were asked to exclude themselves from the data set). First-Year Writing faculty were encouraged to nominate their classes for participation in the survey, which was made available to students online, via a secure site maintained by the University. Collection of data was coordinated and supervised by Susan Vervaet, one of the First-Year Writing faculty.

The survey was conducted in April 2009. 755 students participated, responding to questions asking students to compare their experiences in ENWR 105 to their previous writing experiences and to their expectations, and also asking them to report what they could recall of the methods, practices, and goals

of the course. The results showed that most students surveyed had the sort of experience that First-Year Writing is designed to provide. Among the results:

- a majority of students (70%) reported producing at least 3 drafts for a typical essay
- a majority of students (86%) reported being taught and using peer-review methods
- a majority of students (79%) reported that ENWR 105 was either moderately or very helpful in terms of improving their ability to write focused, analytic, developed and clear essays
- an equal majority (79%) reported that ENWR 105 was either moderately or very helpful in improving their ability to analyze or critically think and write about ideas

Complete results of the survey are available at:

<<http://www.montclair.edu/writing/firstyearwriting/Survey%20of%20ENWR%20105%20College%20Writing%20April2009.pdf>>

## Administrative Accomplishments

### Assistant Directors

In the spring of 2009 permission was granted to appoint two Assistant Directors for the First-year writing Program from among the ranks of the First-Year Writing Faculty. Maria Giura (Half-Time faculty) and Tom Kitchen (Lecturer) were selected for spring 2009, and it is anticipated that both will continue through fall 2009; both were granted release time from one course, and each committed to spending nine hours per week performing duties associated with the position. The Assistant Directors handle much of the regular communications with and collection of data (e.g., syllabi) from First-Year Writing faculty, as well as student course transfer applications; also, among other things, they have shared in the development of the Exemplary First-year writing Awards, the selection of textbooks for First-year writing courses, updates to the website, and the development of guidelines for a program-specific writing handbook. Maria Giura has taken over the scheduling and planning for Live Literature (formerly Composition Unbound).

### Task Management System

Commencing January 2009, the First-Year Writing Program has a task management system that allows for greatly improved tracking of student requests for waivers and course equivalencies, and also management and tracking of all tasks completed by the three directors. "The First-Year Writing" task management system was designed entirely within the program and was therefore without costs. All of this data is collected to ensure best review of director staff time. A brief summary of the breakdown of time spent on tasks is below:

First-Year Writing Task Category	Hours
Assessment	121
Curriculum Development	104

Faculty Development	34.5
Faculty Support	92
First-Year Writing Students	126
General Administrative Tasks	118.5
Hiring	47.5
Issues for Introduction to Writing	14
Placement	18.5
Scheduling	18.5
Website	29.5
Writing Issues in the University	17.5

### Replacement Process

Beginning in Fall 2008, the program undertook a new procedure for assessing for and ascertaining the appropriateness of the placement of students in First-year writing courses. Previous to this academic year, the University had supported in-house placement testing, but with the move to use combination of SAT reading and writing scores for placement, the decision was made to enlist the help of First-Year Writing teachers to verify the placements determined by the new method, and so replace the more personal level of assessment that was missing.

Accordingly, each teacher was asked to assign, on the first day of class, a paper to be completed by students in their own time, under conditions that would reflect their normal writing experiences; teachers collected the work at the next class, and reviewed it quickly with an eye to determining the appropriateness of the placement. Students who had been identified by their teachers as possibly misplaced had their work reviewed by a second reader, and the Director of the program made the final decision as to whether to recommend re-placement.

In all, 90 students were recommended for replacement; of these, over half (54) elected to remain in the classes where they had originally been placed; of those who moved, 10 moved up from ENWR 100 (Basic Writing) to ENWR 105 (College Writing I), and 26 moved down from ENWR 105 to ENWR 100. Based on the data collected on all 90 students, it would appear that placement was relatively successful. Students moved up from ENWR 100 to ENWR 105 fared best, with none failing to meet the challenge. Students moved down from ENWR 105 to ENWR 100 fared less well, but even so, of these nearly 70% performed at least satisfactorily. 1 of the 4 students who remained in ENWR 100 failed, which is regrettable, but hardly surprising. 3 of the 26 who moved down from ENWR 105 to ENWR 100 failed, compared with 4 of the 50 who remained in ENWR 105.

This spring and summer we are pursuing significant revision to the replacement process to even better align it with the best instructional and assessment practices in writing.

**Future Plans**

For academic year 2009-10 the following projects are planned:

- With the Center for Writing Excellence, a proposal for a common book program for all university First-Year Writing students
- A direct assessment of student success and achievement in ENWR105 College Writing I.
- Initiation of limited shared assessment of student portfolio writing, spring 2010.
- Assessment of transfer students' success in writing at Montclair State.

Submitted by Emily Isaacs, Director of First-Year Writing