Sustainable Excellence in Communicating Across the Curriculum

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Martin Luther King famously said "I have a dream"....and we as faculty at AUC have our dreams too. One of these dreams is of being professors who have lively interaction with intelligent students. This dream depends on effective interactive communication in all the disciplines, across the entire liberal arts curriculum of the university. The reality empowers students as well as faculty in a sustained communal synergy.

How are students in fields such as Computer Science and Engineering and Business Administration – which attract the largest number of majors – going to be prepared to engage in the lively intellectual discourse we faculty dream of? How can not only students' written but also their verbal skills be developed to the point where they can begin to communicate as peers with their professors? How can we ensure excellence in communication is sustained throughout the years at AUC and beyond? How can we foster "communication synergy"?

One of the solutions adopted at over 4,000 American colleges and universities (Richmond et al. 2001) arose out of a movement initially known as "Writing Across the Curriculum" (WAC), and now expanded as Communicating Across the Curriculum (CAC) (see "Communicating Across the Curriculum" 2002). The philosophy at the heart of this movement is that students learn best by interactively writing and talking about what they read and hear, and that the faculty's responsibility to ensure that graduates of their university can think critically and communicate effectively is best fulfilled by a campus-wide communication program in all the disciplines throughout the students' educational careers (Richmond et al. 2001). Implementing such programs not only improves the discourse of the students, but also increases faculty morale and faculty collegiality as well as intellectual interchange among all departments (see research reported in Glick 1988). Thus the entire campus becomes a livelier, more stimulating environment for all.

A campus-wide communication-intensive program requires more effort from everyone – students and faculty – and administrative support and appreciation expressed in concrete terms (Glick, 1988). It also requires renewed commitment to teaching students how to think independently and critically, rather than just telling them what to think (Glick, 1988). It is a step away from traditional security for both professors and students, but it is also a step away from a moribund academic atmosphere often characterized by lack of academic integrity.

The well-known neurologist, Oliver Sacks, argued in his book *Seeing Voices* that human "abilities with language and the ability to convey that language in cogent forms to other members of our species are central to our critical abilities and essential to our ability to really think about concepts" (Richmond *et al.* 2001). Thus, it is central to the academic mission to educate ourselves and our students to communicate effectively with each other, both in writing and orally (Richmond *et al.* 2001). Sustaining excellent communication across the curriculum must also be central to lifelong learning...it doesn't stop developing when a student – who might one day even become a university professor – is handed his or her diploma upon graduation.

A faculty member in the sciences at Iowa State University once remarked that his students didn't write – they worked in groups to use computer analysis programs to analyze their data and then they framed the data to solve the problems presented in case studies, and they wrote essay questions in their examinations. To him, that wasn't writing, but 'writing up' – yet it still should have been perceived as interactive communication that was integrated with what they did and thought (Russell in Richmond *et al.* 2001). And it was not only written, but also spoken, visual, and electronic (see "Communicating Across the Curriculum" 2002).

As AUC moves into the era of modern educational technology, with 'smart classrooms', WebCT, and Power Point teaching, it is more imperative than ever that we as an academic community – faculty and students – gather together to see how we can integrate enhancing communication into every department and curriculum. As the world becomes more of a 'global village', a sense of the importance of how one frames a message – what to include, what to leave out, what words and images to use – is essential in developing the social responsibility expected of global citizens.

To this end, we invite you (and your students) to join us in contributing your ideas and experiences at the symposium below. Through this gathering, AUC aims to create *an interdisciplinary dialog – and even an inter-institutional exchange – to foster a learning community that values written and oral communication as tools for cognitive development and inquiry-based learning, a community that empowers students to explore, assess, and create, a community where passion for knowledge is inspired, rhetorical skill promoted, and civic responsibility instilled. Learning excellence – in all disciplines, and among all members of the academic community – can and must be cultivated and sustained.*

"On the Road to Sustainable Excellence: Communicating Across the Curriculum"
International Symposium • November 11-12, 2005 • American University in Cairo organized by The Writing Program • The English Language Institute • The Core Curriculum ▪The Center for Learning and Teaching

Keynote speaker – one of the leading experts in the field – **Dr. Chris Anson**
(www.home.earthlink.net/~theansons/Portcover.html)
Proposals may be submitted before June 30, 2005, at
www.aucegypt.edu/academic/wpconference/
For further information, contact the organizers at cacprop@aucegypt.edu

<u>**Sources**</u>:
- "Communicating Across the Curriculum: Integrating more Communication Activities into your Classroom". (2002). University Center, Rochester. Retrieved February 23, 2005, from www.roch.edu/dept/spchcom/cac.htm
- Glick, M. D. (1988, Spring). "Writing Across the Curriculum: A Dean's Perspective", in WPA: Writing Program Administration, 11, 3, 53-57. Retrieved March 20, 2005, from cwp.missouri.edu/cwpinfor/facultypub.htm
- Richmond, R., Russell, D., Duin, A. H., McLeod, S., and Kaufer, D. (2001, Spring). "Communication-Across-the-Curriculum Panel". Panel transcript. Iowa State University. Retrieved March 20, 2005, from www.engl.iastate.edu/ISUCComm/s1proceedings/CAC_Panel.html

Share with us your experiences by contributing to the New Chalk Talk series, or by simply sending comments/suggestions to aellozy@aucegypt.edu