



The Write Place for Communication

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For two days in November, the American University in Cairo hosted an international symposium on Communicating across the Curriculum, which allowed faculty from over 37 universities in 17 countries to share their experiences in integrating communication and critical thinking skills in the disciplines. As Dean Lesch noted in the Opening Address to the conference, "AUC is currently grappling with the issues of how to promote writing, oral communication, critical thinking, and creative thinking in its courses in all disciplines." The AUC Writing Center's tutoring services, workshops, and online resources assist faculty and students in this endeavor.

Creating assignments, guiding students through the writing process, and evaluating the results require a lot of faculty effort and time. Tutors in the Writing Center help by assisting students through the writing process and sustaining writing effectiveness in all AUC courses. According to Walvoord et al., students have trouble in the following six writing and thinking areas when completing an assignment:

1. Gathering sufficient specific information
2. Focusing on the audience and creating a voice
3. Stating a position
4. Using appropriate discipline-based methods to arrive at a position and to support it with evidence
5. Managing complexity
6. Organizing the paper (as cited in Sully, 1995)

The most effective tutoring sessions are those in which the student is still brainstorming, planning, developing, and organizing ideas because it is at this stage that tutors are best able to assist students with these six areas involving writing and critical thinking. It is during these tutoring sessions, as Harris (2000) explains, that students "function in a non-evaluative, supportive environment" in which they have the opportunity to write and think through their ideas while receiving constructive feedback (p. 109). Although tutors may also provide editing and proofreading guidance, the Writing Center is primarily a place for student writers to communicate and develop as critical thinkers while tutors listen, ask questions, and provide instruction for clear and effective communication.

The Writing Center's services include workshops and online resources to support student writing beyond tutoring sessions. These workshops and resources further encourage students to be self-reliant and to participate in all aspects of the process of communicating. The group workshops develop communication skills used in every discipline, such as grammar, in-class writing and essay exams, writing with technology, and oral presentations. Because communication in specific disciplines or for specific assignments may require specialized instruction, the Writing Center is able to provide tailored workshops for students by faculty request. Similarly, the online resources provide general guidance through the writing process as well as guidance for writing for specific purposes and in specific disciplines.

The Writing Center provides a variety of resources and services for faculty too. The philosophy of communicating across the curriculum is that courses accomplish learning objectives through assignments that require communication and critical thinking skills. Faculty can use the Writing Center's online resources to help create effective writing assignments using these skills. Additionally, the Writing Center and the Center for Learning and Teaching invite faculty from all disciplines to attend a three-workshop series to conceive, create, and evaluate an actual course assignment. This workshop series will provide faculty the chance to collaborate with others in the development of assignments. Long-term support for faculty is provided through the Writing Specialist Program, currently being piloted by the Writing Center and Law Department.

For specific details about tutoring, workshops, online resources, and faculty services, visit the Writing Center website at www.aucegypt.edu/academic/writingcenter/

The Writing Center exists to help undergraduate and graduate students improve their communication skills, thus supporting every AUC course by preparing students for the challenges of the academic and professional worlds while immersing them in these dialogues. Effective use of the Writing Center's services and resources can enhance communication in all disciplines and encourage students to think more independently and critically.

References:

- Harris, M. (2000). The Writing Center and tutoring in WAC programs. In S. McLeod and M. Soven (Eds.), *Writing across the curriculum: A guide to developing programs* (Chap. 10). Retrieved March 12, 2006, from http://wac.colostate.edu/aw/books/mcleod_soven/
- Lesch, A. (2005, November 11). *Opening address*. Retrieved March 12, 2006, from the American University in Cairo, On the Road to Sustainable Excellence: Communicating Across the Curriculum Conference Web site: <http://www.aucegypt.edu/academic/wpconference/Opening.htm>
- Sully, B. (1995). *Malaspina University-College's Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Project*. Retrieved March 12, 2006, from <http://www.mala.bc.ca/www/wac/proj.htm>

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