

NEWSLETTER WAC AT BMCC



SPRING 2025



WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AT BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By Danny Pisari

WRITING processes have long been established as powerful tools in learning and instruction. With decades of development through practitioner research, educators have been exchanging Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) pedagogical principles and strategies since the 1970s.

[WAC at BMCC](#) is rooted around the mid-1980s to early 1990s, when English professor Leonore Hoffmann saw its potential benefits for BMCC students. Seeking support and collaboration, she reached out to faculty in other disciplines, including Gay Brooks from the Developmental Skills (Academic Literacy and Linguistics) department. Together, they began discussing WAC strategies with interested colleagues and experimented with informal writing exercises. As faculty members observed increased student engagement and comprehension in their classes, interest in WAC spread around the college.

*Danny is a WAC Fellow
at BMCC and PhD
Candidate at The
Graduate Center, CUNY,
in the Educational
Psychology Program*

In 1999, the CUNY Board of Trustees formally established the WAC/WID (Writing in the Disciplines) initiative across all CUNY schools as a system-wide effort to emphasize the significance of writing as an opportunity for student learning techniques.

BMCC added a WI course to its graduation requirements in 2008, cementing the need for faculty training through the WAC program—not only providing professional development opportunities and certification but also fostering a culture of cross-disciplinary collaboration centered on writing as a tool for learning.

Today, our current WAC coordinators Christa Baiada, Rifat Salam, and Holly Messitt are assisted by Writing Fellows from the Graduate Center as we continue to work with faculty throughout WAC training sessions to refine their courses to align with WAC pedagogical principles, as well as support faculty through their first semester teaching writing-intensive courses.

We develop and host faculty workshops each semester, demonstrating how WAC pedagogy continues to be a valuable tool in scaffolding students to meet their learning goals. Additionally, Writing Fellows interact directly with students as writing tutors through the BMCC Writing Center.

From its early days as a grassroots effort by faculty to its current form with institutional support, WAC at BMCC has been providing instructors with valuable tools to enhance student learning and engagement through writing processes, prioritizing writing as a means of learning rather than just an end product to be graded. As the program evolves, we remain committed to fostering an environment of reflective teaching and student-centered instruction, offering faculty a resource for continual professional growth.●

BMCC Writing Across the Curriculum

**ATTENTION: WRITING INTENSIVE FACULTY...
SPRING 2025 REFRESHER WORKSHOP**

Prompting and Artificial Intelligence: An Overview

Tuesday, April 8th

3:00 PM – 4:15 PM

WAC Fellows Daniel Pisari and Caroline House
Zoom

This workshop, led by Writing Across the Curriculum Fellows Daniel Pisari and Caroline House, takes up the question of "prompting" as it relates to the use of AI language models like ChatGPT. The workshop looks at "prompting" two ways: the development of writing prompts for students, and student interaction with AI models through "prompting" an interface with questions. This workshop will offer strategies for faculty in developing effective writing prompts for the AI era and resources for teaching students productive and responsible AI use. We will conclude with a brief, discussion-based model on incorporating language around responsible AI usage into course policy and syllabi.

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/81105498857?
pwd=WzMiHP7auIMArtQBIXEHXNRrISilmM.1](https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/81105498857?pwd=WzMiHP7auIMArtQBIXEHXNRrISilmM.1)

Meeting ID: 811 0549 8857
Passcode: WAC

Calming the Nervous System: Breath Practices to Help Ground Your Students

Thursday, May 1

1:00 PM – 2:15 PM

Holly Messitt, English/WAC Co-Coordinator
Zoom & In-Person: CETLS

Using simple breath practices with students can help to ground their nervous systems and set them up for the work you want to accomplish with them. It can help to calm them before activities like informal writing exercises or peer review. It is also a great way to create a sense of community with the class. Both in-person and on Zoom, we will move through a breathing session and then reflect on ways such a practice can work in your class.

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/86080334139?
pwd=3G8ZGf8DEhTdjBTP3luMaaeFEBiPZ3.1](https://bmcc-cuny.zoom.us/j/86080334139?pwd=3G8ZGf8DEhTdjBTP3luMaaeFEBiPZ3.1)

Meeting ID: 860 8033 4139
Passcode: 341762

Highlights

WAC AT BMCC has for years connected faculty teaching partners to Writing Fellows, Ph.D. candidates who have been trained in WAC pedagogy. The Fellows aided their faculty partners in developing and implementing a writing intensive curriculum and adopting practices that foreground writing in and out of the classroom as a tool of learning. This close working relationship with faculty members has had an equally great impact on the Fellows, who benefit from faculty member's perspectives and experiences.

As a Fellow in this final year of Writing Across the Curriculum across CUNY, I can attest firsthand to the profound impact WAC has had on my teaching philosophy and professional development. We reached out to previous Fellows to learn about how the lasting impact of their WAC experiences.

By Caroline House, WAC Fellow at BMCC and PhD Candidate at The Graduate Center, CUNY, in the Art History Program.

THOMAS, FELLOW 2017-18

"I'M CURRENTLY teaching a WI course at Lehman College, and I frequently reference the readings we discussed in our WAC meetings when constructing assignments, thinking about how to leave comments on students' work, addressing the particular needs of ESL writers, etc. The kinds of conversations we had in our meetings and the literature we read has given me a very solid foundation for teaching writing...My specific training in WAC, I believe, makes me a more competitive candidate on the academic job market. I have a set of skills that many other qualified candidates do not, all because of the year I spent learning about writing pedagogy with BMCC's expert WAC coordinators."

CALLUM, FELLOW 2021-22

"THE THING that has stuck with me most is probably the ways in which my own teaching improved as a result of the program. I've taught three more CUNY undergrad courses since the WAC fellowship, and I found that by organizing my classes around the WAC principles we discussed in our pedagogy workshops (especially by making effective use of structured discussion activities) my classes have become much more lively, engaged, and interesting—and I've enjoyed teaching much more (and received better student feedback and teaching observations) as a result."

SARAH, FELLOW 2017-18

"I'VE GONE through pedagogical training... elsewhere, and my training as a WAC fellow was much more rigorous and set me up for success in a variety of teaching contexts. I also believe that my time in the Writing Center helped develop my ability to write clear assignment instructions, and to give valuable, actionable feedback to students."

JOANNA, FELLOW 2013-15

"WAC PEDAGOGY informs almost everything I do in the classroom from syllabus design at the start to exam format at the finish (teaching students how to engage with difficult texts, low-stakes writing, scaffolding of assignments, substantive comments on student papers, etc)... Every aspect of the program was a learning experience. And I use many of the pedagogies and approaches I learned at BMCC on a daily basis as a member of the full-time faculty at Las Positas."

LIANG, FELLOW 2012-13

"I HAD THE chance to work with faculties from different disciplines, discuss on various subjects with students coming to the tutoring center, and most importantly, [I had the chance to] learn from WAC members at weekly meetings and workshops. It definitely helped me getting positions in academia after graduation, since in most of my job interviews I was asked about the WAC program."

BENJAMIN, FELLOW 2013-14

"I CREDIT my time at BMCC with really opening up my eyes to the structural issues preventing historically marginalized students from succeeding, as well as giving me many useful strategies for encouraging (interesting) writing in my classes. I regularly mention WAC in my job letters and I really believe that having the experience has helped me get interviews, especially at other community colleges.●



Jackie Edwards, PhD Candidate,
Art History. Graduate Center of the
City University of New York;
Second-year WAC Fellow, BMCC

Jason Schneiderman is a Professor
in the Department of English at
BMCC.

Sophie Maríñez is a Professor of
French and Spanish in the
Department of Modern Languages
at BMCC.

FROM WAC FELLOWS TO FACULTY: REFLECTIONS ON WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

By Jackie Edwards

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) has long been a cornerstone of pedagogical innovation within CUNY, and many faculty members across the university have served as WAC Fellows during their graduate studies. These experiences have shaped their approaches to teaching, mentoring, and curriculum development in profound ways. In this issue, we spoke with two BMCC Writing Intensive faculty members, Jason Schneiderman (Professor and Deputy Chairperson, English) and Sophie Maríñez (Professor and Program Advisor, Modern Languages), about their time as WAC Fellows, the impact it had on their careers, and the ways they continue to incorporate WAC principles into their teaching. Their insights highlight the lasting value of WAC training—not only in fostering student

success but also in strengthening faculty collaboration and engagement across disciplines.

When and where were you a WAC Fellow?

JS: I was a WAC fellow at BMCC from 2008-2010.

SM: I was a WAC fellow at Lehman College from 2006 to 2008.

What was your favorite part of the fellowship?

JS: I loved getting work with other faculty from other disciplines. I was amazed at how much teaching styles varied across subjects. It was exciting to see.

SM: It helped me become a better graduate student and academic writer, as it allowed me to acquire tools and

strategies for engaging with scholarship that no professor ever gave us in class.

The WAC program freed me from the pressure of pouring something “perfect” from scratch. Informal writing allowed me to see paper as a place to put down my thoughts so that I could visualize them, draw circles and arrows, and play with these thoughts like puzzle pieces I could reorder infinitely.

In retrospect, I think that WAC has been at the forefront of what we now call Universal Design Learning because it gave tools for those of us who learn and think differently for whatever reason.

What was it like training faculty, as a graduate student?

JS: It was exciting. I was

surprised at how open faculty were to my suggestions, and I felt embraced by the faculty here in a way that I hadn't at other colleges where I had taught. I always presented myself as a thinking partner, there to help the professor reach their own goals for student learning. I loved being part of the planning process.

SM: It was a great opportunity to develop a relationship with a faculty member in a horizontal, collegial and collaborative manner, without the pressure of the more traditional vertical student-professor relationship. Visiting their classes and exchanging ideas about possible writing assignments also exposed me to disciplines outside my own and the expectations of those disciplines.

Are there any WAC principles that you regularly incorporate into your syllabi and/or pedagogy? Why are those principles the ones that seem to have stuck?

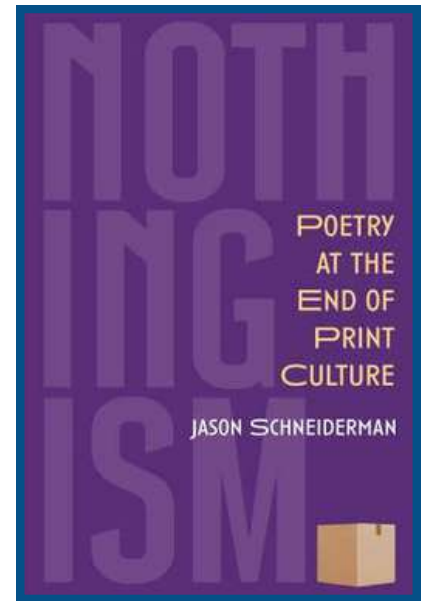
JS: Start with the concrete and move to the abstract. It's so completely the opposite of how I was taught and how I had started teaching, but it works brilliantly every time. I wrote a pedagogy essay in my collection *Nothingism: Poetry*

at the End of Print Culture (U Michigan Poets on Poetry), and that was one of my principles. I did credit John Bean.

SM: The most important principles, are:

- 1) "To meet them where they are" and do what it takes to bring them where they should be according to that course's expectations. This is crucial, especially at a community college like BMCC, where our student population brings an uneven academic foundation, and we must adopt a non-judgmental approach.
- 2) The concept of scaffolding, which I always use, be it in undergraduate or graduate classes. I later discovered this was an excellent tool to avoid plagiarism (and now AI-generated papers) since students are asked from the beginning of the semester to start thinking about their final paper. This semester-long close guidance and support may seem like a lot of work, but it helps students grow as writers (which is our job) and, with rare exceptions, saves me lots of headaches or disappointments at the end of the semester.

How did the WAC Fellowship prepare you for your teaching career?



JS: I'm still here, and I'm a full professor! So, I'd say the fellowship prepared me successfully. The WAC fellowship embedded me in the BMCC community, and I've been very lucky: I never left.

SM: It prepared me to be a more compassionate teacher and to better understand the challenges our students face in the classroom.

Any other takeaways?

JA: The WAC Fellowship cultivated my pedagogical skills and embedded me in the college culture in a way that was profoundly transformative for me. I found true mentorship and support. I probably should have spent more time on my dissertation and less time on assignment design, but it had a powerfully positive impact on my life and on my career.

SM: Anyone who considers an academic career—in any field—should consider training in the principles of the WAC program because it makes us better writers, thinkers, and teachers. It also increases our popularity among students, who deeply appreciate it when their professors have the tools and strategies to help them succeed!●



WAC FACULTY FELLOWSHIP Call for Applications!

General Info

- **Any faculty member** who has previously been **certified in WAC at BMCC** and who currently teaches WI courses is eligible to apply
- Fellows will receive **\$650 a semester** for two semesters—one academic year—for a **total of \$1300**
- Five Fellows will be selected in each Fellowship cycle. The Fellowship **can be renewed for a second year**

Why is WAC pedagogy still relevant at BMCC?

- Faculty need support in **changing their syllabi, coursework and grading strategies** to acknowledge, integrate, and contend with AI in the classroom
- Faculty want to **teach writing as process**, writing-to-learn and practice **student-centered pedagogy**.

Brief summary of what WAC Faculty Fellows will do:

- Fellows will mentor faculty that is training in WAC to help them **design more effective writing assignments**, develop writing-to-learn strategies and (re)design syllabi that make the most of writing as a way of learning in academic disciplines.
- Enhance WAC pedagogy, including but not limited to analyzing and interrogating academic genres and disciplinary conventions of writing; considering **strategies for writing assessment** and providing student feedback; enacting **antiracist pedagogy** about writing; considering ethical and effective ways of **integrating AI** into writing assignments.
- Each fellow will select his/her own topic of inquiry and select readings to share with the group for an asynchronous discussion.
- Develop and run **one workshop per year for the larger WAC community** on a topic of their choice.
- **Contribute to WAC projects**, like assessments or the incipient WAC podcast and WAC events.
- Opportunity to develop new assignments, revamp and revise current WI strategies to **meet new challenges like Gen AI**.
- Share **innovative ideas and strategies with WAC/WI colleagues**.
- Develop **workshops and projects** that can be expanded and presented beyond BMCC, at CUNY and disciplinary conferences.
- Opportunity **to connect with like-minded faculty** both within and outside your discipline.
- Share and connect with other BMCC WAC/WI faculty, and **contribute to the ongoing and future success of the BMCC WAC program**.

[For more info click here](#)

For more information about BMCC's WAC program, email **Holly Messitt** (hmessitt@bmcc.cuny.edu) or **Rifat Salam** (rsalam@bmcc.cuny.edu)



Thanks to **Ada Gafter O'Higgins**, WAC Fellow at BMCC and PhD Student at The Graduate Center, in the Department of Comparative Literature for composing this Call for Applications, and to **Luis Escamilla**, also a WAC Fellow at BMCC and PhD Candidate in the Latin American, Iberian, and Latino Cultures Program at The Graduate Center, for layout and design of this Newsletter.