

## **IPESL Final Report Outline:**

### **1. Title of Project and name of participant(s):**

**“Writing into Thinking: Developing Web-Based Resources to Support Both Teachers and Students with Their Struggles in Writing-Intensive (IC) Courses”**

**Anne O’Meara (English Department; Valley Writing Project)**

**William D. Dyer (English Department; Humanities Program; Valley Writing Project)**

### **2. Purpose: Identify the purpose of your project (one to two sentences). If your work changed in any way from the original proposal – please note.**

The intention of this project is to develop a web site to provide continuing support to all teachers confronting the challenge of designing, teaching, and assessing writing-intensive (IC) courses in their disciplines as well as assisting students to succeed in them. The ultimate goal is to create an umbrella of support in critical thinking in the areas of writing and reading for those teaching or taking IC courses, an interactive resource for current teachers of IC courses as well as those preparing to teach them. The significance of this project could be substantial: (a) IC instructors for programs other than English would no longer feel bereft of training or support; (b) the teaching of IC courses could be informed by the “best practices” of those teaching such courses; (c) teaching “writing-intensively” and the difficulties associated with it could be seen as a collaborative endeavor shared by all teachers and students in those courses.

### **3. Results: Describe how your project enhanced\* (or will enhance - if project results are to be implemented in future semesters) students’ critical thinking through one or more of the following activities:**

- **development, implementation, and assessment of new support mechanisms**

Dyer and O’Meara determined about a month into the project that, given the amount of time it would take to design web materials for every department on campus, and wishing to customize the web materials they would be developing to the specific needs and assignments of each department, they could not do it all in just a few months. True to the spirit of the project, this would need to be an on-going process and project. Thus, they identified the departments offering the greatest concentration of writing-intensive courses and requested opportunities to make formal presentations to their faculty concerning their plans for the website. They went to English first, seeking specific information about the kinds of “W” assignments customarily assigned and the types of supportive materials their students would need. Upon receiving approval from English for the materials they developed, Dyer and O’Meara approached Philosophy and Biology for the following: a clear sense of the kinds of critical thinking, reading, and writing they required their students to do, the kinds of evidence required, the most valued methods of citing

evidence and sources, as well as the kinds of approaches to thinking and writing most valued and not valued in these assignments by instructors.

Dyer and O’Meara then recruited Andrew Robertson, a G.A. working on publications for the English Department with advanced web development skills, to design and build the new web site (<http://devweb2-english.its.mnsu.edu/vwp/>) that would contain the pages developed for English, Philosophy, and Biology. Part of Robertson’s challenge was to organize and clearly link materials to three different areas—materials to support teachers; materials to support students; and materials associated with the Valley Writing Project, its archives, and its workshops. Through a series of continuing interactions with Dyer and O’Meara through the middle of May, Robertson developed a methodology for organizing materials to be uploaded to the web site under development and provided the means for Dyer and O’Meara to continue the work with “Smart Edit” tools.

A final piece of the web site remained to be developed. Because creating separate pages for every department would be impossible given time constraints, and because the web site needed to include materials useful for ALL “W” courses, Dyer and O’Meara identified a series of areas—“Designing Effective Assignments”; “Reading into Writing”; “Critical Thinking”; “What Constitutes College Writing”; “Responding to Student Writing”—most crucial for helping both faculty and students alike engaged in “W” courses with their struggle. Away from campus over the summer, Dyer and O’Meara independently searched the web for university “writing-across-the-curriculum” and “writing center” sites, culling from them the best available materials in the target areas. They then created separate pages for each of these areas, including on each the title of the area (i.e., “Designing Effective Assignments”), copied in the URLs of the pages they found most useful, and provided detailed annotations of each of these pages for the information of potential users.

In short, the web site is organized in the following manner, with materials streaming from these links:

- Valley Writing Project
  - [Mission Statement](#)
  - [About Us](#)
  - [FAQ](#)
  - [Archives](#)
  
- Student Resources Student Resources
  - [Reading into Writing](#)
  - [Writing Process Toolkit](#)
  - Writing in the Disciplines
    - [Biology](#)
    - [English](#)
    - [Philosophy](#)
    - [Other Disciplines](#)

- Faculty Resources
  - [About College Writing](#)
  - [Designing Assignments](#)
  - [Modeling Research](#)
  - [Teaching Reading](#)
  - [Teaching Writing](#)
  - [Using Peer Groups](#)
  - [Commenting on Papers](#)
  - [Assessment Activities](#)
  - [Online Resources](#)

And all of the materials have been composed in a tone that is inviting and transparent to students and faculty.

Once all of these materials have been shown a final time to the participating departments later during the first week of classes (a presentation has already been made to the English Department before classes began), the web site will be enlivened and made available to all who wish to use it. Instructors from participating departments have been told to introduce the web site to their students, encourage them to use it, and to use it themselves. The web site will soon provide an interactive feature to facilitate communication with 1C instructors, seek input concerning their needs, and request them to use “D2L” to upload materials from their classes that would be useful to other 1C instructors. “W” instructors in the three participating departments will be given an assessment instrument to be distributed to their students before the end of Fall Semester; this instrument will help Dyer and O’Meara determine how the site was used, how often it was used, and the degree to which it helped students in the critical areas of reading, writing, thinking, and revising of their assignments.

The web site will be supplemented with materials implemented in Dyer’s and O’Meara’s courses, through materials developed by the presenters of the Valley Writing Workshop team for the December 2007 “Writing Intensively” workshop, and through the posting of faculty projects from that workshop. Thus, the web site will represent a continually-updated and growing resource, a work constantly in progress.

#### **4. Issues: What issues or challenges arose during project implementation/completion? How were they addressed?**

Dyer and O’Meara were confronted with several challenges. The first was the “comprehensive” issue—that is, how could we prepare a web site for all “W” instructors and students from all areas without having the time or resources to speak to the faculty in every department across campus? We addressed this problem by targeting the departments offering the greatest number of 1C courses, sought specific information from them on their and their students’ needs, and, once we had developed materials to address those needs, brought them back to those departments for reaction and feedback. To bridge the gap between those completed materials and the needs of other departments with their own specific needs, we addressed the most important concerns faced by all “W” instructors and their students, created separate informational pages containing web

sites and annotations of what is contained on them (“Designing Effective Assignments”; “Responding to Student Writing”; “Reading into Writing”; “Critical Thinking”; “What Constitutes College Writing”), sought feedback on these from English, Philosophy, and Biology, and uploaded them.

The departure of our web site designer, Andrew Robertson, did cause some concern for us. But he left us excellent directions on how to revise the materials he had loaded on to the web site; additionally, the English Department has hired another G.A. in charge of departmental publications who has agreed to work with us as the site develops.

Upon returning to campus, Dyer and O’Meara encountered a technical problem in relation to the web site. Over the summer, for reasons unknown, permission for them to enter the developmental web site had been mistakenly removed; but Jeffrey Hundstad has assured them that this only a technical glitch and will be immediately remedied and will not interfere with the process of making the web site operational by the end of the first week of classes.

**5. Dissemination: How did you (or do you plan to) disseminate your project and/or its results? (e.g., published article, department colloquium, professional conference, meeting, college colloquium, university-wide colloquium, publication, IPESL website).**

Results from the project will be disseminated nearly immediately. As quickly as Dyer and O’Meara can surmount the technical difficulties, they will pilot the site for use this fall. The English Department, the Philosophy Department, and the Biology Department have all agreed to use the web site in conjunction with their writing-intensive courses.

Additionally, at the beginning of the second week of classes, the Valley Writing Project will be recruiting faculty to participate in their Fall Workshop, to convene from December 18-20. The theme of the workshop will be “Writing-Intensively,” and team members will be introducing the website to present and future instructors of writing-intensive courses and demonstrating how it can work for them and their students.

Finally, Dyer and O’Meara intend to present this writing/critical thinking/critical reading website during “Faculty Development Days” after the first of the year or at the spring 2008 Minnesota Council of Teachers of English conference.