

California Writing Project

IMPROVING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC WRITING

Empowering ALL
students to write



academically,
analytically,
& engagingly!

A STATEWIDE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY FOR TEACHERS

CWP's nationally recognized program, Improving Students' Academic Writing (ISAW), provides teachers, high school through university, a professional community that focuses on the following goals:

- Demystifying the teaching and learning of analytic writing and critical reading
- Examining how teachers can make academic writing an integral component of the curriculum and a college-going culture
- Accelerating the academic writing improvement of all students—the college-bound, English learners, and struggling writers—and preparing more of these students for college-going and college success
- Fostering collaboration among high school, community college, and four-year university teachers to move students along a pathway of academic preparation that leads to success in and beyond high school.

YEAR-ROUND SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

CWP regional sites offer summer and academic-year ISAW professional development programs tailored to local school or district needs; the ISAW embedded assessment program that helps teachers focus on improving students' academic writing and documents their progress across eighteen dimensions of writing; professional learning communities to support use of CWP's ISAW Analytic Writing and Improvement Continuum for formative and summative assessment; and classroom coaching, mentoring, and demonstration teaching.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE

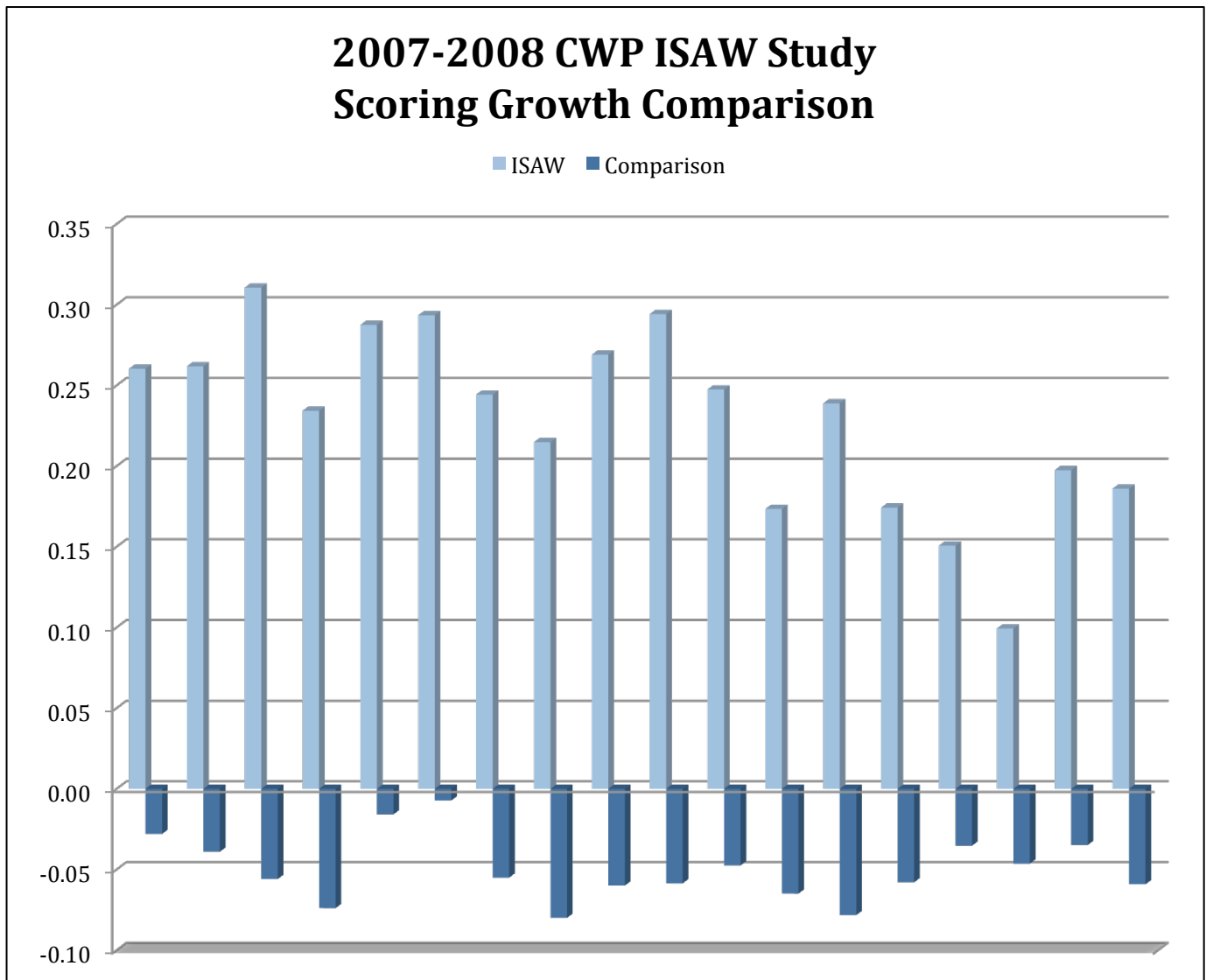
To help students practice the writing they will need for college admission, placement, and academic success, CWP sites sponsor ISAW writing seminars and academies during the summer, after-school, and on Saturdays. Students receive intensive, personalized instruction in writing college application essays, SAT and ACT essays, University of California and California State University placement exam essays, and extended analytic essays.

CLASSROOM TESTED, RESEARCH SUPPORTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A current CWP study, funded by the California Department of Education and the National Writing Project, is comparing the writing achievement of high school students whose teachers are participating in ISAW programs to that of students whose teachers are not. The study is evaluating the student performance of eighty-seven ISAW and comparison teachers from eighteen high needs schools on a recognized assessment of academic reading and writing: the University of California Analytic Writing Placement Examination (AWPE). This examination, used by UC for placement, requires students to write an analysis of a published nonfiction essay. An independent group of experienced AWPE readers evaluated students' improvement from September 2007 to May 2008 across eighteen dimensions of writing. The first-year results, as shown on the next page, demonstrate that students in ISAW classrooms outpace their comparison counterparts in all eighteen dimensions of writing. Evaluators found the differences across all dimensions to be large enough to be considered statistically significant. These findings hold true for students with different racial and ethnic backgrounds, English learners, students from low socio-economic status, and males and females.

2007-2008 CWP ISAW Study Writing Improvement Chart

| | Responding to the Identified Issue/Subject | Addressing the Demands of the Essay Topic | Understanding the Text | Summarizing/ Recapitulating | Making Own Claim(s) or Assertion(s) | Developing Example(s) | Reasoning | Using Textual Support | Structuring and Organizing | Introducing the Essay | Using Paragraphs and Transitions | Concluding the Essay | Choosing Words | Employing Sentence Structure to Convey Ideas | Employing Sentence Boundaries | Using Grammatical Relationships | Using Punctuation | Anticipating Readers' Needs |
|-------------------|--|---|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| ISAW | 0.26 | 0.26 | 0.31 | 0.23 | 0.29 | 0.29 | 0.24 | 0.21 | 0.27 | 0.29 | 0.25 | 0.17 | 0.24 | 0.17 | 0.15 | 0.10 | 0.20 | 0.19 |
| Comparison | -0.03 | -0.04 | -0.06 | -0.07 | -0.02 | -0.01 | -0.06 | -0.08 | -0.06 | -0.06 | -0.05 | -0.05 | -0.06 | -0.08 | -0.04 | -0.05 | -0.03 | -0.06 |



AN ILLUSTRATION OF ISAW STUDENT WRITING IMPROVEMENT

The following paragraphs, one that opens Reid Lamson's ISAW pre-test essay and the other that opens his post-test essay, portray how Reid grows in his ability to read and analyze a non-fiction reading passage and create a thoughtful response to the issue identified in the prompt—the reading and writing task posed by the University of California's Analytical Writing Placement Examination. Just these two paragraphs show what can happen when teachers teach analytic writing and critical reading by putting a laser focus on student improvement.

Honest Communication

She describes many different conflicts. She starts out by describing how she's from a small town in Kentucky and is not at all acostume to big city life. She talks about how she's never been on a plane or an escalator, or even a big bus.

In October, Reid's introductory paragraph to his essay illustrates his inability to understand and respond to an author's position. His short, simple sentences convey his confusion with the task. He also ignores his reader's need for orientation to what the author has written.

For the remainder of his essay, Reid writes three more paragraphs, two that restate parts of the passage with no analysis, and a concluding paragraph that mentions some general points of agreement with the author but are completely disconnected from what the writing prompt requires. Reid was tremendously proud of this essay, not realizing then how much he had to work on in his reading and writing.

Trust Your First Instinct

How would you react in an emergency? That is a complicated question for most people because most people haven't been in an emergency situation and don't know exactly how they would react. Most people would like to think that they would act quickly, and help who ever is in need. But according to two professors named Darley and Latane acting quickly or even acting is usually not what happens. In their essay, "Why People Don't Help in a Crisis," Darley and Latane give examples, based on their research, of what people usually do in an emergency. Darley and Latane say, "the bystander's reactions are shaped by the actions of others and all too frequently by their inaction," meaning people don't react on their first instinct and help. They usually sit back and wait for someone else to make a move.

Reid Lamson

In mid-May, Reid demonstrates in his opening paragraph that he understands the reading passage and can identify the author's position. His sentences illustrate his confidence, control, and ability to weave in a quotation from the text. He engages his reader from the outset.

In the second paragraph of this essay, he analyzes one example the authors use to support their position. Reid ends the paragraph with a delayed claim that is in partial disagreement with the authors. He then develops a line of reasoning, using three example paragraphs that support his claim and flesh out his thinking. Reid closes his essay in a way that invites the reader to keep thinking beyond what he has presented.

Reid, by the way, was accepted to the United States Air Force Academy.