

Writing Across the Curriculum

From the ECB

Daniel Fader

"What's the most pleasing sight you've seen in two decades of teaching at the University?"

"I'm glad you asked."

I have conversations every day that begin this way. A pollster, an interviewer, a stranger on the street...someone stops me and asks the question I'm ready to answer. Not, like so many of my students, the question I'm unprepared for. Unfortunately, my students are real and the others are not.

If someone, some kind English teacher had known last October how much I wanted to be asked about the most pleasing sight I'd seen in twenty years of teaching at Michigan, and if that person had actually put the question to me, I would have said:

"Come with me next Tuesday at 4 p.m. to the Old Regents' Room where I'll show you a sight rarely seen by eyes such as ours. You'll see some seventy-five faculty members and graduate students from the majority of disciplines that make up the curriculum of the College."

"There to discuss (shrinking budgets, teaching loads, tenure etc.), I presume."

"There to discuss their own writing and the teaching of writing to their junior and senior students."

The English teacher stares at me for a moment, then looks away with an expression of gentle concern on her face. Clearly I have lost touch with reality.

Please believe in the scene, oh gentle English teachers everywhere! For if the questioner were a figment of my wistful imagination, the roomful of teachers was not. October of 1979 had five Tuesdays. Between 4 and 6 o'clock in the afternoon

of each, 60 to 75 faculty members and teaching assistants from perhaps twenty departments--humanities, natural sciences, social sciences about equally well represented--gathered to discuss their own writing and that of their students. The lure? A few small posters placed strategically around the campus and a letter of invitation sent to each department and program in the college. Posters and letters invited all colleagues who would like to learn how to be better writers as well as better teachers of writing, to attend a series of five seminars offered by Jay Robinson and Daniel Fader that would teach them how to do both.

Did we fulfill the promise of our advertisements? As well as we knew how. For both of us, however, even more important than the content of the seminars was their attendance. It was the first indisputable evidence we had that members of the faculty would vote for a writing program across the curriculum and regard the teaching skills required by such a program as a significant part of their pedagogical responsibilities.

Now, as I write this brief piece, we are preparing for the second October series of faculty seminars on the teaching of writing. In addition to attendance from a broad range of disciplines within the College, we expect to welcome faculty members from schools and colleges throughout The University. Lawyers, architects, nurses, musicians, pharmacists, conservationists--all find that the practices of the new writing program in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts speak to their needs. Their presence at our seminars testifies to the timeliness of a composition program no less broad than the width of the entire curriculum.

From the formation of the English Composition Board in January of 1976 to the

installation of all parts of the new writing requirement in September of 1979, support for the program has come from a very wide range of disciplines: The chairman of the Chemistry Department stated before the faculty that the minimal written literacy of undergraduate students was one of the greatest problems in the teaching of chemistry. The associate chairman of the Division of Biological Sciences has been the moving force in causing his colleagues to offer the largest selection of upper-level writing courses in the College. Sociologists, historians, anthropologists, classicists, psychologists, philosophers--all have joined their colleagues in English in sharing responsibility for the quality of undergraduate writing.

The list which completes this report is composed of courses offered this semester that may be taken by junior and senior students to satisfy the upper-level writing requirement. Perhaps the most remarkable fact about this list is that only a relatively small number of transfer students has to take such a course before 1981-82, because the full requirement is incumbent only upon the class of 1983 and its successors. In spite of this, nearly every department and program will offer these courses this year, many having done so last year as well. Their reasons for beginning before they must are uniform and compelling: Their students write badly now and must be helped now. They join our English Department and English Composition Board in acting upon the belief that teachers of all subjects must teach writing or the writing of English will become, like the reading of Latin, a rare skill possessed by a few scholars and scribes.

**Junior/Senior Writing Courses:
Fall 1980**

American Studies 490:
American Film

Anthropology 202:
Culture, Thought and Meaning

Anthropology 463:
Expository Writing in Anthropology

Astronomy 429:
Senior Seminar

Biology 351:
General Ecology

Biology 414:
Immunobiology

Biology 475:
Evolution and Human Behavior

Biology 512:
Microbial Physiology

Botany 281/481:
Introduction to Plant Physiology

Classical Civilization 371:
Greek and Roman Sport and Recreation

Communications 302:
Writing for Mass Media

Communications 428:
Writing for Radio and TV

Communications 625:
The Michigan Journalist

Economics Writing Program:
See department

English 225:
Argumentative Writing

English 325:
Intermediate Exposition

French 372:
Problems in Translation

Geography 465:
History of Urban Systems

Geology Writing Program:
See department

History 396:
Plantation Societies After Slavery
(Sec. 004)
20th Century American War (Sec. 005)
Soldiers, Diplomats, Merchants, and
Missionaries (Sec. 007)
Comparative History of Scientific
Criticism (Sec. 012)

History of Art 446/MARC 446:
The Courtly Arts

Linguistics 493:
Undergraduate Reading (independent
study)

Linguistics 495:
 Honors Reading (independent study)

Near Eastern Studies 445:
 Introduction to Islamic Literature

Philosophy 388:
 History of Philosophy: Ancient

Political Science 465:
 Political Development and Dependence

Psychology 486:
 Attitudes and Behavior

Residential College Core 300:
 Writing and Theory

Residential College Humanities 210:
 Classical Sources of Modern Culture

Residential College Humanities 410:
 20th Century Literature of the Absurd

Residential College Social Science 360:
 Power in America

**Residential College Social Sci. 375/
 Environmental Studies 407:**
 Individual and Social Groups

Russian 451:
 Survey of Russian Literature

Women's Studies 430:
 Theories in Feminism

Zoology 326:
 Animal Physiology Lab

Zoology 421:
 Comparative Physiology

Zoology 430:
 Endocrinology Lab

Editorial

Because with this issue we begin a second year of **fforum** for teachers of writing in Michigan and interested readers anywhere, it seems appropriate to review its brief history and restate its policies. The newsletter is only one aspect of the outreach work of the English Composition Board (ECB) of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts of The University of Michigan. In addition to **fforum**, the following activities are designed by the ECB to articulate the teaching of writing in secondary schools and community colleges with the writing program at The University: **writing conferences**, intended primarily to inform pre-university teachers of writing of the ECB's in-house program of instruction, and of its ability and willingness to engage in outreach projects; **one-day seminars** conducted in schools throughout the state, designed to familiarize pre-university faculties with the College's writing program and to discuss with teachers the current state of theory and practice in the art of teaching writing on all levels; **summer-term writing workshops**, held at The University of Michigan, designed to

provide teachers with three days of intensive work related to their teaching of writing; and extended **curriculum- and staff-development projects** undertaken with school districts which have requested such service.

This extensive outreach program is one of seven responsibilities with which the ECB has been charged by the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at The University. The other six responsibilities, within the College, are the rating of an **Entrance Essay**, required of all in-coming undergraduates; **Tutorial** instruction to students who need such assistance; **Introductory Composition**; **Writing Workshop** support available to every student who wishes it; **Junior/Senior Level Writing Courses**-- described in this issue in Daniel Fader's "Writing Across the Curriculum" (p. 37); and **Research** in the theory and practice of teaching writing.

Within this context, **fforum** is designed to provide teachers of writing in Michigan a