

# THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E W T T L E R

Volume 31, Number 5

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing

January, 2007

## — FROM THE EDITOR —

We have some excellent reading to start your new year as this issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* offers new directions to head into. William Macauley starts us off with a rationale for joining forces with other programs on campus, and he includes a proposal he wrote that can serve as a model for how to request support from administrators for these joint efforts. To help tutors guide writers toward more interesting ways to write, Jennifer Howard reminds us of the power of creative thinking and writing. Her discussion of strategies can be worked into handouts for tutors to use.

Cinda Coggins Mosher asks us to take a different perspective on assigned readings included because they bring diversity into the classroom. When non-native speakers of English attempt to read these texts, they may be unable to understand references, words, and dialects. They appear in writing centers for help because they cannot respond to writing they can't decipher. And finally, while we think we know what friendship is and the role it plays in tutoring, Trent Mikesell provides fresh reflections on strategies and consequences of bringing signs of friendship into the tutorial.

You'll also find new job announcements, calls for conference proposals, and a description of a set of videos for use in tutor training. Find a quiet corner in your writing center and enjoy some good reading.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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## "THE (WRITING) CENTER THAT I CANNOT FIND/IS KNOWN TO MY UNCONSCIOUS MIND": RUPTURING THE BOUNDARIES OF A WRITING CENTER

◆ William J. Macauley, Jr.  
*The College of Wooster*  
Wooster, Ohio

Michele Eodice begins her 2003 chapter in *The Center Will Hold* with these words: "My purpose here is to invite an *apperception*, what William James says in *Talks to Teachers* 'means nothing more than the act of taking things into the mind' (1958 [1899])" (114). I follow these examples. Later in the same piece, Eodice writes that

If we could flip the *working on the margins* thing to a *working the margins* thing . . . we might see that every department, every member of our academic communities, is struggling with a range of issues—from budget to pedagogy—and that while our farm may be on the outskirts of town, our campuses need what we grow there (117).

Eodice makes a case for what she calls boundarylessness, which can mean that we, in writing centers, have a great deal to offer when we let down our guard enough to do so. For me, part of the schizophrenic split of writing center directing comes from the writing center being perceived as on the margins, as entirely different from other programs, offices, or facilities on campus. Because so many of the directors I know see administrative work as something separate from their writing center work,

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**Manuscripts:** Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format. If possible, please send as attached files in an e-mail to [manuscripts@writinglabnewsletter.org](mailto:manuscripts@writinglabnewsletter.org).

they necessarily see themselves as separate from other administrators, too. When we add to this our desires for autonomy as well as inclusion, we, in a lot of ways, may be providing the ropes with which our institutional hands are tied. But, when we reach out, we make that tying much more difficult.

While Eodice advocates collaboration as a primary writing-centered export, there are other options, too. Open inquiry, higher-order thinking, dialogic learning, active learning, experiential learning—all of these can happen for both consultants and their clients. Because, as an administrator, I am striving to overcome a sense of isolation and marginalization, I seek options that break down barriers, that open the writing center to others and opens the rest of the academic community to the writing center. I have sought openness, as reflective of open inquiry in writing center practice, as well as a more appropriately open space for the writing center itself.

Other programmatic needs within my home institution became obvious, which lined up nicely with the writing center's goals and interests. I found that the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Program wanted a space where workshops and meetings might be conducted. The Information Literacy Program needed an extension of its staff to accommodate the needs of the college. All three, including the writing center, seemed to be focused on providing a similar range of resources toward a shared goal: supporting students with close attention as they became more self-sufficient researchers and writers. I began to think about options for collaborations on three levels—programming, staffing, and physical space. As I did so, I focused on three aspects of a new kind of writing-centered space.

First, the three programs together needed to think about what we could and could not do together. In other words, what were the limitations of our openness to one another? Each of us wanted a space within which to conduct workshops. Each wanted to be able to work with individual as well as groups of students. Each wanted to make the most of what the other two programs had to offer. We really didn't find any areas where our interests contrasted. We needed a flexible space that could accommodate all or most of these interests, and we needed staff who could work in all three areas (information literacy, WAC, and peer tutoring in writing).

Second, we needed to think about human resources. The writing tutors were already writing tutors and functionally WAC tutors, as well. That could become more formalized and supported. Often times, tutors also worked as information literacy specialists; it was not unusual for writing tutors to spend their time with students in pursuit of on-line reference materials to support ongoing writing. Training here, as well as in WAC, could only add to both what the tutors gained from their working experiences and also to what they might be able to offer to students seeking help in the convoluted, recursive, and irregular processes of academic writing.

Finally, I sought a model for the working location. Because my dissertation focused on studio pedagogies and how they might be shaped toward first-year writing, I was of course eager to put that knowledge to work. In my research, I found that studios consistently included three features (regardless of discipline or location):

1. Studios are generative: they allow, encourage, and expect the production of quality work.
2. Studios are individualized: they anticipate and require a high level of individual (student) ownership over the work being done.
3. Studios work on the assumption that each participant has a role to play: architect, engineer, musician, painter, or writer.

Certainly, these aspects of studios lined up nicely with the interests of all three programs: students as empowered thinkers, researchers, and writers; students as informed and active participants in their

own work; students as active participants in identifying roles in their own work. This kind of approach would certainly call for a malleable physical arrangement within a large, flexible space.

We also needed to think about money. It would have been very simple to advocate a completely idealized space that would meet our needs. If money were no object, we might have done so, but money was more than an object in that small, private, and general education college. We knew that we could not get a lot of money because the known money pots had been exhausted. What we needed was an argument that allowed us to work together *and* did so in a way that made better use of existing resources while asking for minimal new material resources. So, we advocated a space that would go virtually unaltered, that would make use of the furnishings available and, most importantly, would be left open, both in terms of the arrangement of the physical space and the availability of that space when these three programs were not using it. So, instead of isolating the Writing Center and virtually losing that physical space for other purposes, this new Information and Literacy Center would remain open for multiple users and uses.

This design reflected not only our desire and willingness to work collaboratively but our ability to facilitate that sense of collaboration with anyone else who might be able to put the space to good use. It indicated our interest in working with the institution rather than against it. It also promoted our idea of openness to our colleagues, programs, and the campus' benefit.

Here's what we proposed:

It is proposed that space on the Library's Mezzanine level be recommitted as the Mount Union College Information and Literacy Center (ILC). The ILC would initially provide tutoring in English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL), Information Literacy/ Bibliographic Instruction, and Writing (the range of services available there can grow and change as necessary). This new space would be remodeled to include segregated group work areas and one-to-one tutorial spaces while maintaining significant open space for informal discussion, quiet reading and study, and computer-based work. The ILC would provide space for computer use but remain flexible through the installation of a wireless Internet hub and availability of up to 20 laptops with wireless modems, to be used on site. A representative of the Library, a representative from the ESL Program, and the Writing Center Director, would oversee the ILC cooperatively. It would be staffed entirely by student workers; and it would provide Mount students with greater access to resources and services available through all three programs. The increased fluidity of common resources and shared services, cooperative training, flexible scheduling, and readily adaptable space would facilitate each program's increased success in meeting student needs. Access to the Mezzanine space would not be jeopardized because the space would be open even when services were not available.

The selected space on the Mezzanine is a good choice for this facility because of its size, its minimal use, and its aesthetic qualities. The Mezzanine space is large enough to accommodate a range of activities without losing its intended purpose of providing a quiet study space for students. However, it sees limited verifiable use. The shape, furnishings, and location make the Mezzanine an appealing space that can be used more deliberately. Most of the furnishings found currently in that area would be used in this new configuration, thereby minimizing costs. Minimal materials costs, beyond the laptops, are necessary.

*"Because as an administrator, I am striving to overcome a sense of isolation and marginalization, I seek options that break down barriers, that open the writing center to others and opens the rest of the academic community to the writing center."*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO**

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro announces the opening for an Assistant Director of the University Writing Center, beginning August 1, 2007. This is a full time, 10-month position, and the Assistant Director also serves as a Lecturer in the Department of English, teaching two courses per semester. The initial appointment is for one year and is renewable based on satisfactory job performance. Specific duties in the University Writing Center will be determined in consultation with the Director, but may include the following: assistance with staff training and supervision, record keeping, maintaining Web site, designing and presenting class workshops, coordinating online tutoring, and overseeing work of the Summer Writing Center.

The Assistant Director is a member of the Steering Committee of the Communication Across the Curriculum program, participating in an ongoing program of faculty development and support for writing-intensive courses. Master's degree in English and successful experience in a writing center required; OWL experience and ESL training preferred. Closing date for applications is February 1, 2007. EEO/AA. Send letter of application and CV to Walter H. Beale, Director, Communication Across the Curriculum, 3143 HHRA Building, Greensboro, NC 27402.

A reception area/desk, securable storage, and chairs (waiting area) would be needed along the ILC entrance. Along the west wall of the ILC, three larger spaces would be set off by partitions to accommodate group tutorials, small group work, or project team meetings. Stuffed chairs and low tables would remain along the east and north sides of the room as reading, study, and discussion areas. Along the south wall, small tables and chairs, again separated by partitions, might be set up to accommodate one-to-one tutorials, student-faculty conferences, and/or individual work. The center of the room could be adapted to any number of purposes. With a wireless Internet hub installed on the south wall, students could check out and use laptops anywhere in the room. The space could also be made available to class meetings, presentations, and/or other kinds of group activities. The Information and Literacy Center, as described, would:

- Provide currently unavailable ESL support at minimal cost
- Enable the Library to increase student training in, knowledge of, familiarity with, and informed use of research resources without overtaxing or increasing the Library staff
- Provide more appropriate space for both the type and volume of use seen by the Writing Center
- Provide another computer lab without permanently or physically dedicating space
- Put to more thorough use the wonderful Mezzanine that currently sees minimal use
- Help the Writing Center to increase the range and availability of services without overreaching student tutor capacities
- Increase the range of resources available to all three programs while minimizing material (or duplicated) costs
- Generate an increased range of student employment, independent study, and internship options for Mount Union College students

This proposal seeks to cooperatively meet significant needs that already exist on our campus while minimizing costs and making the most efficient use of Mount's physical resources. All three programs need more than they currently have; by working together each can contribute to the success of the other two. By making better use of spaces like that selected on the Mezzanine level of the Library, we demonstrate our commitment to good stewardship.

Planning and discussion with folks from the physical plant indicated intent on the part of the college to make this proposal a reality. It could still. However, because of the departure from Mount Union of several key players in this process, the Information and Literacy Center did not come to fruition. I am certain that we would have collaborated to develop workable usage protocols and cooperative resources. I am also certain that these negotiations would not always have been easy. However, the importance of this idea is exactly that: it is a good idea, one that can be adapted and activated in any number of contexts with any number of players involved. It is a great idea regardless of its location or implementation, which would not have occurred without a) the Writing Center letting down its guard and b) others working cooperatively with the Writing Center to collective benefit. I hope that, by sharing this process here, the likelihood increases that cooperative facilities such as this will continue to develop and succeed.



## UNLEASHING THE BEAST: CREATIVITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING

♦ Jennifer Howard

*University of Missouri – Columbia*

Writing and freedom are intimately connected in my life. The writing process lets my thoughts roam where they please. Seeing the shape those thoughts take on paper is both exhilarating and intimidating. However, many college students experience only the intimidation. As a writing center tutor, I regularly meet students who have a tremendous fear of writing, especially academic writing. Academic writing, for them, is a threatening creature that stifles their own thoughts and voices. As writing center tutors, we have an opportunity to shatter that misconception and encourage students to write unconventionally by showing them that many modern scholars incorporate creativity into their writing, and we can offer students suggestions for enhancing creativity in their own writing.

### WHAT CREATIVITY IS AND WHY IT MATTERS

At this point, it might be helpful if I define creativity. When I say that students should write creatively, I do not mean they should write fiction when the assignment is a research paper. Nor do I mean that every paper should be filled equally with poetry and facts. I simply mean that students should be willing to push the boundaries of conventional writing. Writing creatively is just cutting the rope, letting the creature within run free. Creative writing allows writers to “learn how to explore alternate modes” (Smith vii) of looking at things. Indeed, connection is a key part of creative writing. The originality that is a natural product of a new view or unexpected connection is what professors often seek. To be more creative, students may alter writing styles, change voices, incorporate literary devices, include anecdotes, or just find an unusual angle on a subject.

Sometimes it seems that creativity in writing has little value. However, it is important to realize that creativity increases the likelihood that writers will put thought into their papers. Wendy Bishop argues that creativity leads to “greater engagement and investment” (44). She goes on to say that this means writers will ultimately spend more time with their papers, a positive by any professor’s standards (45). The more time is spent with a paper, the more likely it is that the writer has put a lot of thought into the essay. Bishop also suggests a link between engagement and good writing, citing Donald Murray and Peter Elbow to support her claim (44).

Connection between the reader and the text is another important effect of creativity. In Aristotle’s world, the real world could be shown through “sense impressions” (Berlin 49). The words of the writer should clearly illustrate the truth being proven in the essay. Descriptive language may very well play a role in such illustration. Aristotle also believed in the use of pathos, an appeal to readers’ emotions, and ethos, an appeal to readers based on the writer’s authority (Berlin 50). Both pathos and ethos are forms of argument that may be best developed creatively. For example, more emotion may come into play in a line of poetry than in any other kind of writing. “The fiery blaze sinks slowly behind the mountain peaks,” creates an experience that appeals to the senses, while “The sunset occurs each day in the Rocky Mountains,” evokes nothing. Similarly, it will be easier for writers to establish their credibility with personal narrative than with stilted third person accounts. I have seen the importance of well-used pathos in my own life many times. Most recently, I had to read a book about the development of the musical scale, something I know nothing about. However, I was able to understand, and even enjoy, the book, because the author used anecdotes in addition to the necessary technical language. For example, one part of the book was about the invention of pianos. Instead of recounting only the mathematical reasoning behind



### LOOKING FOR TUTOR TRAINING VIDEOS?

Joe Essid offers us the following description of the tutor training videos on their Writing Center Web site:

“Training for Tough Tutorials” began with an idea shared by Dona Hickey (WAC Director at the University of Richmond until 1998, now Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences) and Joe Essid (current WAC and Writing Center Director). Most training videos for tutors are linear in format and do not exploit the Web’s ability to “choose your own adventure.” The Web site provides video clips, sample papers, and feedback forms that explore various outcomes for a dozen common tutorials situations, such as an angry writer, one expecting a “fix-it shop” tutorial, and a tutor stepping over ethical lines when tutoring a student-athlete. Tutors-in-training designed the content, acted, and directed production for this project.

For those with very fast connections (the videos are large) everything is free of charge at <<http://writing2.richmond.edu/training/tough/index.html>>. The source materials are also available, in the spirit of open-source, for \$25 on a DVD. They may then be freely installed on a local Web server (some technical knowledge and cooperation with IT staff will help for installing the online forms). Contact Joe Essid <[jessid@richmond.edu](mailto:jessid@richmond.edu)> for more information.

the arrangement of the keys, the author also included a few stories from the life of an early piano manufacturer. The use of interesting stories drew me into the book. After I finished the book, I felt I understood musical scales much better than I would have had I only read about the technical aspects of scales. Students, too, can use creativity to create emotions that encourage the reader to keep reading.

### WHERE CREATIVITY FALLS INTO ACADEMIC WRITING NOW

Many college students seem to believe that creativity is always looked down upon by instructors. Even in an honors course, I recently heard a student say she felt she was being punished for her writing style. In his book *Clueless in Academe*, Gerald Graff describes the disbelief of his graduate students when he tells them that academic writing does not need to be filled with jargon: “One or two firmly insisted” that a certain level of confusion due to language was necessary to succeed in the professional world (134). Other students revert to words they may not be familiar with because they are not yet comfortable in a new setting (Williams 4). The vocabulary of the new field, though still strange, provides a safety net—students may believe that using the jargon will make it appear that they understand the subject. The natural side effect of the belief that technical language must be used is the fading of figurative, descriptive, and narrative language.

However, students do not seem to realize that even scholars have begun to move away from the stuffy, traditional writing style that once characterized all academic writing. Donald Murray provides wonderful examples of creative academic writing. His writing often uses clear, interesting language and catches the reader’s interest with unexpected metaphors. An obvious example is the sentence, “Process can not be inferred from product any more than a pig can be inferred from sausage,” from his essay “Writing as Process” (3). Later in the same essay, Murray provides a jumbled drawing that is meant to represent the writing process (11). Both the sentence and the graphic are inventive ways Murray caught the readers’ attention. Another scholar, Gerald Graff, uses a similar writing style in his book *Clueless in Academe*. The book was written especially to encourage clarity in academic writing. Throughout the book, Graff refers to the fact that academic discourses are relevant to mainstream life, but people often cannot see the connection because it is buried under language that the general public cannot understand. Graff believes that this jargon only hinders the effectiveness of the author’s argument.

Another recent trend in creative academic writing is the use of first person. A number of books and articles have been published supporting first person and semi-autobiographical writing. *Liberating Scholarly Writing*, *Relocating the Personal*, *Personal Effects*, and *Personally Speaking* are only a few of the many books on this subject that have been written since 2001. The message of their publication is clear: Academic writing needs to be invigorated with something new and unique. Many college students, however, are still afraid they will be punished for unleashing their creativity. The disconnection between what students believe is required of them and what instructors actually would like to see has been a problem for years, but as writing center tutors, we can begin to bridge the gap. By introducing students to writers such as Murray and Graff, and by helping students think creatively, we can show the students we tutor that scholarly writing does not need to be boring.

### HOW TO INCLUDE CREATIVITY

- *Include personal narrative.*

Scholars have already shown that personal narrative has the potential to be an effective method of writing more creatively. Both Murray and Graff use first person very well in their books, for example. When used appropriately, first person can actually encourage creativity (Nash 2). Personal writing brings life into what could otherwise be an ordinary, flat piece of academic writing (Spigelman 2). Despite all the benefits of first person writing, tutors should still inform students about the risks of first person narrative. As I wrote above, personal narrative has the *potential* to be very effective. It is not always. A misplaced story could ruin a paper. Students should be encouraged to always question the relevance of their story. Does this illustrate a point I want to make? Before telling students they should use first person, the tutor should also find out if

the professor will allow it. Although views toward first person are changing, some professors still believe that only third person should be used in scholarly writing.

- *Have the writer write a few lines of poetry about the subject.*

Poems are filled with vivid images and figurative language. Such language may help “forge new connections between seemingly unrelated objects and events” (Smith 41). That connection will help students see the subject of their writing in a new light. Coming face to face with something fresh, students may initially be a bit bewildered, but the most unexpected connections could spark ideas that can be incorporated into the final piece. Poetry, or poetic language, can also blow a fresh breeze into what could otherwise turn into a stale academic paper.

- *Ask the writer to connect the topic to something in pop culture or how it could affect everyday life.*

Often students in the writing center simply have no interest in what they are writing. This lack of engagement leads to flat writing. If tutors ask students to make something relevant to their own lives, it is likely that the student will become engaged in some way. By gaining the interest of the student, this exercise removes one of the obstacles to incorporating creativity. Like the poetry exercise above, this pop culture exercise also encourages metaphors. Making unexpected connections is a key part of an original paper.

- *Discuss different writing styles; what makes them distinctive?*

Most professional writers cross genres (Bishop 47). However, many students limit themselves to the so-called academic writing style. Encouraging students to analyze the writing styles of some of their favorite authors allows them to see what individualizes writing (Masiello 62). Does the writer write informally? Why does the narrator or character seem authentic? Does the writer use any special rhythms or patterns? Tutors should then ask the student what style of writing he or she wants the paper to be in. Bishop recommends what she calls “Something-likes”: “Which kind of writing that I admire is something like the writing I’m doing? Then, what of those something-like writings—theme or style or both—might I import into this text?” (46) Ultimately, the purpose of this exercise is to help students find their own voice, not just imitate others. After all, where is the excitement if we don’t each have our own voice? (Bishop 51)

- *Imagine and experiment.*

Bishop also suggests that we look at the possibilities of creative writing to determine which are most appropriate in a particular setting (48). There is wisdom in that statement; a heavy dose of creativity is inappropriate in some settings. However, convention should not always constrain students. There is a point at which the line between creativity and scholarship must be drawn, but where that line is varies dramatically. Tutors should encourage students to let their imaginations go wild. What would it look like to use poetry in a scientific paper or a metaphor in a paper about mathematics? It may be wise to have students write their thoughts down. Hazel Smith says that “experimentation is fundamental to creativity” (vii). Experimentation also allows students to see when they may have gone too far.

## CONCLUSION

Although it sometimes seems to college students that academic writing can only be done well if there are a lot of technical words and complex ideas, students should not be fooled into believing that such writing is the only acceptable or desirable style in the academic world. There is an increasing movement toward allowing scholars and students alike to unleash their inner beast and write creatively. However, at this point, it seems that only scholars have begun to use their new liberty. Fear still forces many college students to hold onto the leash for dear life. Writing center tutors have the unique position of seeing both scholars and students’ writing, and may be able to help connect the two styles effectively. Tutors, by engaging students in activities to start the creative mind, may help students begin to loosen their grips. Only after preconceived notions about academic writing have been broken will students begin to write in a style that shows both intelligence and artistry.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### WRITING CENTER DIRECTOR COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

Columbia College Chicago invites applications for the position of Writing Center Director, full-time, academic staff. The Director of the Writing Center is responsible for leadership and administration of the Writing Center and for teaching one course per semester in the First-Year Writing program.

Applicants should demonstrate an understanding of current theories that underpin tutoring and peer-tutor training and possess a sound pedagogical vision that integrates WAC and tutor development. Experience in tutoring and teaching writing to culturally and linguistically diverse populations of college students strongly preferred. Preference will be given to candidates with a Ph.D. in composition/rhetoric and writing center administrative experience.

To apply, send letter of application, CV, three letters of recommendation, statement of teaching and writing center philosophy, and sample teaching materials (e.g., syllabus, in-class activity) to:

Suzanne Blum Malley  
Chair, Writing Center Director  
Search Committee  
Columbia College Chicago  
English Department  
33 E. Congress, Suite 300  
Chicago, IL 60605  
sbmalley@colum.edu

Review of applications will begin January 15, 2007, and applications will be accepted through February. Interviews at CCCC's 2007.

### WHEN DIVERSITIES CLASH: TUTORING STUDENTS THROUGH INITIALLY INACCESSIBLE TEXTS

◆ Cinda Coggins Mosber  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

As “diversity” has assumed a more central role in universities throughout the country, its definitions have become increasingly comprehensive. For example, following the movement in academia to curb all forms of discrimination, the University of Iowa in Iowa City has adopted an inclusive Human Rights Policy that expressly “prohibits discrimination in employment or in its educational programs and activities on the basis of race, national origin, color, creed, religion, sex, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or associational preference.” Similarly, the expansion of the literary canon in recent decades has been motivated by an enhanced appreciation of a wide array of genres and identities. The resulting diversification of texts in university classrooms has had far-reaching and, at times, disconcerting effects.

While efforts to end discrimination and give voice to long-oppressed voices are certainly commendable, “diversity” can be more complicated in practice than in theory, specifically when diversities, or different notions of diversity, clash. What concerns me most is that one person’s conception or enactment of diversity can, and often does, further marginalize others. In my fifteen years of working in the University of Iowa Writing Center, I have seen numerous instances in which syllabi and assignments that were designed to empower oppressed individuals or challenge the outdated canon have initially alienated some students, particularly International and ESL students who find themselves overwhelmed by the unfamiliar language usage or subject matter.

Three types of texts in particular—popular culture textbooks that rely heavily on students’ familiarity with American pop stars, movies, sports figures, etc., texts by such authors as Zora Neale Hurston and William Faulkner that feature vernacular or colloquial expression, and disjunctive or experimental texts by such authors as Gertrude Stein or e.e. cummings—wreak havoc on writing center students. However, there are strategies for effectively addressing these initially inaccessible texts and for using them as tools to educate students.

### POPULAR CULTURE TEXTBOOKS

Our writing center students often come to us with assigned readings from popular culture textbooks such as Joan T. Mims and Elizabeth M. Nollen’s *Mirror on America: Short Essays and Images from Popular Culture* and Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen, and Bonnie Lisle’s *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*. The mass appeal of *Mirror on America* is understandable because this text offers many selections that most first year students would find appealing. For example, Chapter Seven, “Changing our Tunes: Culture and Music Keeping Time,” refers to Tupac Shakur and Death Row Records, Sean “Puffy” Combs, and Bad Boy Entertainment and includes articles on MTV, Lauryn Hill, The Beatles, and the Spice Girls. Similarly, Chapter Eight covers many different sports controversies like Title IX and figures like Michael Jordan.

Most of our writing center students who are native English speakers welcome such texts because they “can relate to” the material. In fact, *Mirror on America* opens with:

This is not your usual English textbook. The material within focuses on reading and writing about things in your world, like television, movies, music, and sports, often called popular culture. . . .In



# TAKE NOTE

## MIDWEST WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals

Oct. 25-27, 2007

Kansas City, MO

*"Writing Center Crossroads: Community, Conflict, Change"*

We invite anyone involved in writing center work to submit a proposal that explores community, conflict, creativity, and change within writing centers. Proposals will undergo blind reviews and should include the following: name(s), of presenters and institutional affiliation, title of presentation, presentation format, a 50-word abstract, and a 500-word description of the presentation.

Information about submitting proposals is available on the following Web site: <<http://www.usiouxfalls.edu/mwca/mwca07/MWCA07CFP.pdf>>. The complete conference MWCA Web site is <<http://www.usiouxfalls.edu/mwca/mwca07>>. Proposals may be submitted via surface mail to Thomas Ferrel, University of Missouri-Kansas City, College of Arts and Sciences Writing Center, 5201 Rockhill Road, Kansas City, MO 64110. Questions about the call for papers may be directed to Thomas Ferrel at [ferrelt@umkc.edu](mailto:ferrelt@umkc.edu).

Deadline for submissions is March 9, 2007.

the most general sense, popular means "of the people"—the common people or the population at large, not the elite or chosen few... Broadly defined, culture refers to the body of beliefs, behaviors, values, and thoughts that influence us every day." (Mims and Nolen xiii) However, the casual references in the articles to the Rebel Alliance and Woodstock can quickly make an apprehensive ESL student feel like even more of an outsider, especially when others in the class share in this "common knowledge."

While *Rereading America's* organization around "a diverse set of readings focused on myths that dominate U.S. culture" differs from *Mirror on America* in terms of theme and focus, the text's dependence upon readers' familiarity with "the myth of the model family," "the myth of individual opportunity," and "American mythology in a 'New World Order'" can shut out students who are new to America (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle v, xiii, xxiii). A number of our international writing center students have expressed considerable frustration when reading articles like Ralph Temple's "The Sorrow and the Pity of Racial Profiling" which begins,

There is an echo of lynchings and pogroms in the indiscriminate arrests of over eleven hundred Middle Eastern men following September 11 terrorist attacks. Such raids are an atavistic yet time-honored response. The dragnet of Arabs and Muslims has not yielded results, any more than did the 1920 Palmer raids, the 1940s internment of Japanese-Americans, or the 1979 crackdown on Iranians during the hostage crisis. But the roundups reassure the public. (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle 798-9)

This single paragraph depends upon an understanding not only of complex vocabulary but also of a complicated network of American involvement in recent world affairs.

Even if international students are confident about their command of English, the subjects that are covered in texts like *Mirror on America* and *Rereading America* can be intimidating, especially when students are asked to analyze articles or write a 4-5 page paper on a topic they have never encountered. Many of my students have been initially distraught when faced with such presumptuous articles that are often filled with slang or American historical references. The problem is compounded in cases where an instructor with little or no experience working with ESL students assigns the material without considering possible drawbacks. Writing centers are often left to pick up the pieces.

### DISJUNCTIVE TEXTS

The second potentially disastrous situation for writing center students and tutors concerns disjunctive texts by such authors as Gertrude Stein or e.e. cummings. Imagine, for a minute, that you have just earned an outstanding TOEFL score, are conversing well with Americans you have met, and are excited about further improving your English skills in the 20<sup>th</sup> century American literature course you're taking. You are happy to see on the syllabus that Gertrude Stein is going to give you practical instruction via her cute purple text on *How to Write*. Upon opening this innocuous-looking book, you find that her sage advice includes:

What is a sentence. A sentence is why they like that. And it is true. Feel theirs as do delight.

A sentence. One or three they make a little a prize and it is very easy to be one of which of them only they do which has been one. (Stein 135)

While you know the technical definition of each word, you surely don't find this helpful as you sit before your computer to compose.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### MARY NELL KIVIKKO EXCELLENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP AWARD

Sponsored by the North Texas Writing Centers Association

The North Texas Writing Centers Association is now accepting entries for the 2007 Mary Nell Kivikko Excellence in Scholarship Award. The award is open to all writing center professional staff, graduate tutors, and undergraduate peer tutors in the South Central Writing Center Association region (Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana).

The paper based on the winning proposal will be presented at the NTWCA Spring Conference to be held March 30, 2007, at the Langdon Center in Granbury, Texas. The winner will receive a \$150 honorarium upon presentation of the paper.

The 250-word abstract of the entry should include a title and the name and contact information of the presenter. Please submit entries to Cheryl Carithers (C.Carithers@tcu.edu), Contest Coordinator and President of NTWCA, by February 14, 2007. Electronic submissions only please.

For further information regarding the NTWCA, please visit our Web site at <<http://orgs.tamu-commerce.edu/ntwca>>.

Or maybe you are assigned the e.e. cummings' poem, "anyone lived in a pretty how town" that begins,  
anyone lived in a pretty how town  
(with up so floating many bells down)  
spring summer autumn fall  
he sang his didn't he danced his did

Again, these are not unfamiliar words, but they surely do fit together in a peculiar manner. You have a two-page reading response due before class begins discussing the poem, and you can't come up with a single thing you might say about this "poem."

Because Iowa has a fairly high concentration of specialists on disjunctive prose, it is not uncommon for this type of literature assignment to find its way to the Writing Center. Invariably, ESL, and many native speakers as well, experience disorientation when they first encounter texts that don't have a linear narrative structure. Again, the situation is compounded when literature instructors don't have experience with international students or when assignments are given before the class discusses the genre or text.

### TEXTS THAT RELY ON VERNACULAR OR COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE

The third potentially lethal literary encounter for international writing center students concerns extensive use of vernacular or colloquial language. In these texts, regional expressions are prevalent, and words are often spelled phonetically. Naturally, many words are unrecognizable to certain students.

The following passage from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is representative of Zora Neale Hurston's text:

"Dat mule uh yourn, Matt. You better go see 'bout him. He's bad off.

"Where 'bouts? Did he wade in de lake and uh alligator ketch him?"

"Worser'n dat. De womenfolks got yo' mule. When Ah come round de lake 'bout noontime mah wife and some others had 'im flad on de ground usin' his sides fuh uh wash board. . . .

You'se uh stinkin' lie, Sam, and yo' feet ain't mates. Y-y-you!

"Aw man, 'taint no use in you gittin' mad. Yuh know yuh don't feed de mule. How he gointuh git fat?

"Ah-ah-ah d-d-does feed 'im! Ah g-g-gived 'im uh Full cup uh cawn every feedin.'" (Hurston 82-83)

Not only are the words spelled phonetically, many words in the passage are either not included in any dictionary or are not grammatically standard, e.g. yourn, ain't, y'all, yo', yous'e uh stinkin' lie." Add to that a stutter, "Ah ah ah d d does feed 'im," and its no wonder that students such as my Japanese student who read this in her Interpretation of Literature course came to me in tears with no initial hope of ever reaching page 286, much less of ever passing the course.

Faulkner is another perpetrator. The following selection comes from *As I Lay Dying*:

Durn that road. And it fixing to rain, too. I can stand here and same as see it with second-sight, a-shutting down behind them like a wall, shutting down betwixt them and my given promise. I do

the best I can, much as I can get my mind on anything, but durn them boys. . . .

And Darl, too. Talking me out of him, durn them. It aint that I am afraid of work; I always is fed me and mine and kept a roof above us: it's that they would short-hand me just because he tends to his own business, just because he's got his eyes full of the land all the time. (Faulkner 34, 35)

Faulkner's use of words like "durn," "fixing to," "a-shutting," and "betwixt" and expressions such as "he's got his eyes full of the land all the time" are incomprehensible to international students even in the best of circumstances.

To some students, the only thing worse than *As I Lay Dying* is the longer and even more vexing *The Sound and the Fury*. While an instructor's decision to teach a critical edition such as David Minter's *William Faulkner The Sound and the Fury: An Authoritative Text (with) Backgrounds and Contexts Criticism* can help illuminate the text for some, others may not find comfort in critical essays such as Jean-Paul Sartre's that kindly reassure readers that "Faulkner did not first conceive this orderly plot so as to shuffle it afterwards like a pack of cards; he could not tell it in any other way" (Minter 265).

Faulkner's first chapter in particular, narrated by developmentally disabled Benjy, is enough to prompt international students (and many native speakers alike) to kick the book across the room:

"I seen you," Dilsey said. "Oho, I seen you." She dragged Luster out of the corner, shaking him. "Wasn't nothing bothering him, was they. You just wait till your pappy come home. I wish I was young like I use to be, I'd tear them years right off your head. I good mind to lock you up in that cellar and not let you go to that show tonight, I sho is." (Minter 38)

As in *As I Lay Dying*, there is colloquial diction such as "pappy" "good mind" and "sho is." However, there is the additional challenge of assembling Benjy's observations into a recognizable storyline. To Faulkner's credit, the text becomes clearer with each subsequent narrator, but it requires much patience on a reader's part to ever get to the second, much less the final, clarifying chapter.

## HOW CAN WE BRIDGE THIS GAP?

What can we as writing center tutors and administrators do when the introduction of diversity of one sort alienates students who contribute to the university's diversity in seemingly conflicting ways?

One possibility is to insist that the anti-discrimination policy be taken to an extreme and advocate that any text that isn't equally accessible to all students should not be taught. In this case, we would explain our students' frustration and demand that instructors adhere to a safe curriculum that allows only accessible texts that students can immediately "relate to." Of course, such a policy would counter progressive thought. The purpose of education would become the affirmation of what people already know and feel safe with. Shakespeare is inaccessible to many 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans—take it off. Hurston and African American writers who choose to celebrate African American culture—take them off. Stein alienates everyone at first—take her off. And so forth.

Another possibility is to use our writing center experiences to encourage instructors to give alternative assignments to students who find these texts inaccessible. The University of Iowa did, for instance, have the "Unusual and Unexpected Classroom Materials Policy" for a number of years in the 1990s in which students who found materials in classes like Rhetoric "unusual or unexpected" or otherwise objectionable could request and expect to be given alternative assignments. Surely, the texts in question could

# TAKE NOTE

## EAST CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals  
Bowling Green, Ohio  
March 15, 16, and 17

*"Under Construction: Writing Center Strategies, Research, and Contributions"*

Just as writing is a powerful mode of learning, so too are writing centers powerhouses of learning. They are powerful centers where knowledge and ideas are constructed and revised, without which universities and larger communities would be less compassionately, logically, and coherently built.

Bring your testimonials about the critical nature of writing center work. Share the strategies, research, and contributions of your writing centers. Bring your construction hats to this conference. And look for signs that announce: "Caution! Writers at Work!"

Individual papers, workshops, panels, roundtable discussions, and poster sessions are welcomed.

Proposal deadline: February 2, 2007 (early submissions encouraged)  
Notifications by February 9, 2009  
Submission link "under construction" and TBA soon!

Questions? Please feel free to contact the conference chair:  
btoth@bgnnet.bgsu.edu  
419.372.8319

be deemed unusual and unexpected by many students. However, this compromises the view of the university as a forum for open debate.

I endorse a third option that involves teaching programs, departments, and writing centers collaborating to openly discuss the implications and advantages of including such challenging texts on a syllabus. Even after seeing firsthand the real stress ESL and international students often go through when faced with these texts, I am unapologetically supportive of including these books and many more like them on syllabi. The advantages of effectively incorporating such works in the classroom far outweigh the largely avoidable disadvantages.

### A COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT A CULTURE

Our international students have a right to participate in all aspects of the culture in which they are immersed. Our goal as writing center instructors should be to facilitate this process rather than shelter students from challenging materials. Even if initially inaccessible texts were omitted from the classroom, American diversity would remain, and international students would come in contact with it daily. Protecting them from popular culture or dialects would allow students to remain uninformed on important issues that shape American culture. For example, Hurston's and Faulkner's texts can give students newfound appreciation of groups of people and regions of the country that they may be initially biased against because of preconceptions or stereotypes they have heard.

Texts such as Cummings' and Stein's poetry and prose can ultimately empower students because these texts call for a movement away from the notion that there is but one definition for each word and toward the possibility of many different ways of looking at a single word or text. If taught effectively, international students can learn that they're not left out of some perceived self-evident-to-native-speakers interpretation. In fact, their interpretation is as likely to be acceptable as anyone else's if it is supported well.

Writing center personnel need to advocate that the effective inclusion of popular culture, disjunctive, and colloquial texts into the curriculum can enhance the experience of being in a diverse culture and offer a multi-dimensional look at a country whose canon was once so narrowly defined. We need to call for a diverse reading list in classrooms, while simultaneously sharing our writing center success stories with instructors. Writing center tutors need to make instructors aware of the effects their assigned texts may have on students so that they can avoid the problems we so often see when our students first encounter such works. Our first-hand experiences helping students with these challenging texts is indispensable to instructors who find themselves in frustrating situations in which such works, while opening doors for some, have initially shut doors for others in their classes.

### HOW TO TEACH SUCH TEXTS EFFECTIVELY

To have the desired effect, of course, it is crucial that writing center instructors gain experience dealing with a variety of texts as well as tutoring a variety of students. Our writing center practicum courses need to focus heavily on helping students and instructors alike access challenging material. I have spent many hours on this very thing, with predominantly positive results. Because such texts differ radically from each other, there is no blueprint that works across the board. We must get creative and help students in any way we can think of. I provide background on the authors; I teach students how to Google pop culture references; and I walk them through the experimental writing genre and explain that it's intended to be disorienting at first. I refer students to films that

feature southern dialects or that contain vernacular expression. I have even made an exhaustive word chart for my student who was reading Hurston's text: "Duh=the," "ah=I," etc. Sometimes I direct students to a synopsis of a text to use as an overview before they begin reading. I am willing to do anything I can to help a particular student gain access to a particular text.

Approaching challenging texts with students who have no initial point of entry is hard work every step of the way, for the student as well as for the writing center tutor. I admit that at times I secretly wish that some different text, perhaps by Hemingway, had been assigned or that some other tutor was working with my student on Stein. But the vast majority of the time, I can see that helping students learn more about the culture in which they live and about different ways of considering language and interpretation is eminently beneficial to everyone involved. Every student who broadens his or her appreciation of multiple races, social classes, sexual orientations, etc. marks a small but important step toward a true appreciation of diversity in all of its manifestations.



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## TAKE NOTE

### EUROPEAN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals

June 19-22, 2008

Freiburg, Germany

*"Initiating Writing Center Work ^ Connecting Secondary, Higher, and Professional Education"*

This Conference Call encourages discussion of concepts of institutional development to set up writing centers and to integrate writing center work into discipline-specific and cross-disciplinary instruction and learning. This call also looks for training programs for writing/reading experts who work in the writing center and beyond. Suggested subthemes and formats of presentation will be included on the conference Web site: <<http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/eng/>>.

For further information, contact Gerd Braeuer@ph-freiburg.de, EWCA Chair, 2006-2008. Please submit proposals online any time before Feb. 1, 2008.

## TUTOR'S COLUMN

### MI AMIGO, MEIN FREUND, MY FRIEND: UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE OF FRIENDSHIP IN TUTORING

◆ *Trent Mikesell*  
*Brigham Young University*  
*Provo, UT*

When I was a poor, innocent, and naïve high school student (my goal is to get a smile for every cliché I use), I had an experience that forever opened up my eyes to the crassness of the cruel world. As part of my AP English class, we were required to submit a copy of all our papers to both our teacher and the ominous “reader.” We never met the reader, but she would affect both our grades and our lives when we received her comments and score back. The comments always seemed heartless and unfeeling; they did not focus on us as people, but rather focused on the paper as a thing. The reader was a faceless entity who cared little about us as students and even less about being our friends. However, one good thing came from this. My experience with the reader led me to take a solemn vow. I promised myself that if I were ever in a similar situation, I would be a living and loving human being who cared more about people than writing in my approach with the student. Happily, this seemed an easy promise to make because I knew I would never be in a position where I would be forced to keep it. Nevertheless, as often tends to happen, I am now a writing tutor, and must make good on the promise I made in my tender years (ok, it was only 5 years ago). I must be more than a faceless response to the students that I tutor; indeed, in many ways I must be their friend. Fortunately, I have an immediate advantage over my high school reader because I get to meet with my students and become more than just an enigma to them. Unfortunately, I must still struggle with the concept of being a friend and understanding how this is to be done. Therefore, as an accumulation of my tutoring experience, the experience of others, and the research I have done I propose a few rules that tutors can follow to become friends with those they tutor and create a constructive learning environment. Ultimately, this goal is accomplished by learning the language of friendship. Each one of these points can help us, as tutors, become more than an unkind response to our students as we learn to communicate fluently as friends in the tutoring sphere.

First, to understand the language of friendship we must understand the language of collaboration. The Brigham Young University Writing Fellows packet defines collaboration as “the kind of learning that happens between friends” (Hendengren 5). Thus, we must approach tutees as friends. We are not writing demi-gods who know all there is about writing and have the final say. We are a friend and a peer to those we tutor, and should help them with the humility and love of a friend. One of the most effective ways to do this is to avoid condescending speech patterns. Vicki Blanchard, in a paper on tutoring, noted two forms of condescending speech: non sequitur and lecturing. Non sequitur communication is that which does not acknowledge what the other person says. Tutors should acknowledge the student’s point before moving on in the conversation to validate both them and their response. The other type, lecturing (whose definition is as the name implies) should be replaced with “discussion-oriented” type communication (Blanchard). We should allow for a mutual dialogue between the students and ourselves. Tutors should note these two types of condescending speech, and be diligent about avoiding them. Shunning condescending speech is paramount in helping the student and the tutor work together. It allows them to collaborate and can lead to a friendship of sorts, improving the tutoring situation. Blanchard said that we need to regard our tutees as “coworkers” and should approach the tutoring session with this attitude in mind (Blanchard). No one wants to be friends with a person who treats them as a lesser, and understanding the language of collaboration can aid us in preventing this as we help our students and work on their paper as a friendly face.

Once we understand the attitude and language of collaboration, we are ready to approach the tutoring and employ befriending strategies there. Key among these is a people skill that is often taught to businessmen and clergy. It is known as building relationships of trust. This is a method used to make others feel comfortable around you as you ask and share personal background information. Understanding how to communicate in a manner that builds personal relationships is a key element in tutoring situations. Again, there are several methods to accomplishing this end. Tutors can send out pre-tutoring emails; they can greet students by name in the hallways; they can take time to learn about a student before meeting with them. The methods are limitless and, in many ways, intuitive. Tutors should apply themselves creatively. Elisa Findley, a writing tutor at BYU, knows the importance of building personal relationships with the student. “[At times] I’ve ended up in lengthy discussion about feminism, missionary work, and life in the Midwest [with the students]. I don’t feel like these conversations are a waste of time, because they establish a rapport and create a more comfortable interaction wherein the student can tell me of her concerns and I can give my honest advice” (Findley). As we open up to the student, we will also want to share with them personal things about ourselves. Relating personal vignettes or bad writing experiences are great ways to get students to open up to you and realize that you are human like them. Sandra Eckard says that sharing such experiences, “connect teller and listener in a space without walls” (36). Thus, opening up to the student as you learn about them can tear down walls to friendship. They learn something about you and both feel more united from the sharing. Writing tutors should actively pursue methods of developing personal relationships with the students that they work with in order to develop a friendlier tutoring environment.

As we use these ideas to create a more positive tutoring situation and to become better friends with the students, we must still keep an important concept in mind: we are professionals doing a job. This means that we must remember to communicate as such and approach each situation with a professional attitude as well as a friendly one. Many doctors understand this seeming contradiction well. They care about their patients, but they are professional in their work. Most people would probably not trust a doctor who tries too hard to be their buddy, and most students will not trust a tutor who crosses the professional line. Chris Klomp gives an excellent example of this with flirting. Definitely, this practice should be avoided, and is a breach of professionalism. He advises: “Be open, friendly, and relaxed, but ease your students into the writing process some way other than flirting” (Klomp). Flirting, in many ways, can seem like an excellent way to develop a personal relationship. However, it is not. It crosses the professional line and can lead to a number of other problems as well. Tutors should look for ways to be friends, but they should never take the easy way out, and they should never compromise their standing as professional friends. As Klomp glibly states, “No kissing on the first [tutoring]” (Klomp).

A tutoring session seems like the worst place to make a friend. We offer seemingly little more than criticism to the students we work with. However, as we apply ourselves to understanding the language of friendship, we can turn our tutees into friends. We must collaborate with them and seek to establish a personal relationship while continually maintaining our professionalism. These methods will help the student trust us, improve the tutoring situation, and may lead to friendship both on and off the tutoring floor.



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# CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

**February 8-10, 2007:** Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Nashville, TN  
**Contact:** E-mail: SWCA@Comcast.net. Conference Web site: <www.mtsu.edu/~uwcenter/swca2007>.



**March 3, 2007:** Northern California Writing Center Association, in Sacramento, CA  
**Contact:** Cheryl Smith at smithc@saclink.csus.edu and Dan Meltzer at melzer@saclink.csus.edu. Conference Web site: <http://ncwca.stanford.edu/>.



**March 15-17, 2007:** East Central Writing Centers Association, in Bowling Green, KY  
**Contact:** Barbara Toth, 419-372-8319; btoth@bgnet.bgsu.edu.

**March 30-31, 2007:** Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Radnor, PA  
**Contact:** John Nortlof, e-mail jnordlof@eastern.edu, phone: 610-341-1453. Conference Web site: <http://www2.mcdaniel.edu/mawca>.



**April 12-14, 2007:** South Central and International Writing Centers Associations, in Houston, TX  
**Contact:** Dagmar Corrigan at corrigan@uhd.edu. Conference Web site: <http://ahss.ualr.edu/iwca>.



**April 27-29, 2007:** Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association, in Bellingham, WA

**Contact:** Sherri Winans at Whatcom: <http://faculty.whatcom.ctc.edu/swinans>. Conference Web site: <<http://www.acadweb.www.edu/writingcenter/PNWCA.htm>>.



**Oct. 25-27, 2007:** Midwest Writing Centers Conference, in Kansas City, MO  
**Contact:** Thomas Ferrelt at ferrelt@umkc.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://www.usiouxfalls.edu/mwca/mwca07>>.



**June 19-22, 2008:** European Writing Centers Conference, in Freiburg, Germany  
**Contact:** Gerd Braeuer at braeuer@ph-freiburg.de; Conference Web site: <<http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/eng/>>.



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