

# Southern Discourse

Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association

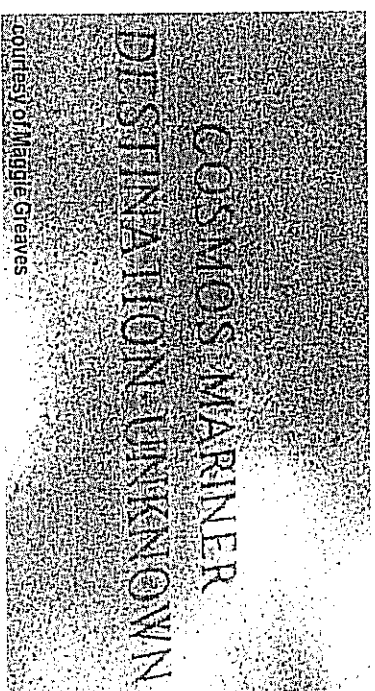


Fall 2007 • Volume 11, Issue 1



Roanoke College  
Chairs ses of Starting  
a Writing Center  
(Articles on page 8)

2008 SWCA  
Conference  
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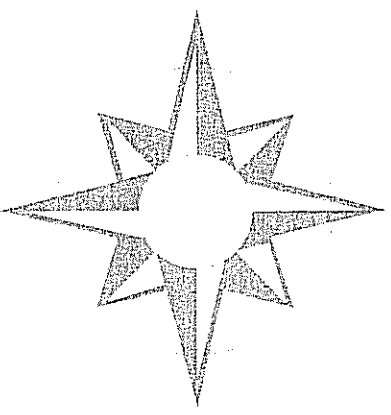


COSMOS MARINER  
DESTINATION UNKNOWN

courtesy of Maggie Greaves

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## Southern Discourse Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association

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THE WORLD FOR WOMEN



## A Note from

the Editor:  
**Tutoring Matters**  
By Christine S. Cozzens,  
Agnes Scott College



*Christine*

As I approached this weekend, I was filled with dread. I'm behind on everything—preparing for class, viewing a film I'll teach next week, grading, writing out upcoming assignments, getting around to seemingly hundreds of administrative tasks, editing *Southern Discourse*, and of course, writing two looming papers promised to others. Yet on Saturday I found myself unusually able to plunge into a heavy round of work. By mid-morning I was sailing along, enjoying reading and commenting on student papers. I wrote a final, a quiz, and a complicated assignment. I planned several of my classes for next week and prepared some handouts. That energy continued all day, in spite of my exhaustion from the busy week behind me.

This morning I finally realized why I had been so ready to work. A student had come to me in tears on Friday. She is one of our older students, a group that brings a great deal of valuable experience to the writing process but also the added burdens of full-time jobs, family responsibilities, and more. I began to reach for some sympathetic and encouraging words and to consider whether I could grant an extension on the upcoming assignment, but I was jumping to conclusions. She was moved to tears, it turned out, because from a recent conversation with her writing center tutor and her own observations of her work, she realized she was making progress in writing.

Of course I immediately emailed the tutor who has been working with her, and I hope that her weekend of work was also made easier by this occurrence. We all have our struggles with writing, but we also know its joys and satisfactions, however rare! Teaching and tutoring writing are work worth doing. I complain about my job like everyone else, but I also know how lucky I am to be doing work that matters and to have students occasionally come to me in tears because they're so happy to be making progress in writing. "You don't know how much this means to me," the student had said. Maybe not, but I can guess. It means a lot to me, too, and to the tutor who worked with her.

# Work in Progress: Destination Unknown

## News and Tips About the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual SWCA Conference

By Beth Burmester, Georgia State University

It is fitting that Savannah is the destination for our 28th Annual SWCA Conference as we retrace our origins and look ahead to our future. Savannah has played hostess to SWCA twice before: the IWCA/SWCA joint conference of 2002, with the theme "The Art of Writing Centers," and in 2000, with "A Renaissance Within the Writing Center" as the theme. The 1999 conference, held in nearby Charleston, SC, presented both theme and directive: "Conversations about Teaching and Writing: Where Are We after 'Two Decades?'" So we return again to this coastal site of creative and artistic gathering to contemplate the state of writing center work alongside the work of SWCA, and to converse about where we are headed as a profession.

We take our theme this year from the memorial bench by the graveside of fiction writer, critic, and onetime Georgia poet laureate Conrad Aiken: "Cosmos Mariner-Destination Unknown." Aiken's life began and ended in Savannah, a city that has both a river of history and a river of industry and commerce. The Bonaventure Cemetery—made famous in John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* (1994)—and the Savannah River are both notable works of nature and architecture, leading us back to our theme. A work in progress is a living text, like a river, which flows between ideas and articulation. The final destination of the work in progress is unknown, even when its origins and route are mapped out, because it can change through so many creative forces and influences. The conference this year will highlight workshops, roundtables, poster sessions, and panel presentations that encourage audience interaction and emphasize innovation, novel perspectives, or going against the current.

Our daily "work" as writing center professionals is constantly "in progress" through administrative and pedagogical inquiry, practice, research, theory, and guiding philosophies. We create our own identities as we contribute to the identities and legacies of our centers, departments, institutions, and the field of

writing studies. In his Winter 1999 *Southern Discourse* article describing the SWCA conference hosted that year by Tom Waldrep, SWCA Vice-President Philip Gardner remarked, "As a founding member of the Association, Tom's successes are indicative of what writing centers are intended to be: progressive, vital centers of thought and action." We celebrate this intention—the vitality and progress of writing centers as sites of progressive, critical actions and thoughts—and the founding of SWCA, by presenting two plenary speaker panels with five featured speakers who will play on and with our theme and guide us as we explore the best of the past and the future. Joining us will be: Gary Olson, Michelle Eodice, Christopher Ervin, Christine Cozens, and Kevin Dvorak.

In addition to a full schedule of intellectual offerings, the Conference Planning Committee is also organizing a number of excursions from historic downtown Savannah to the beaches of Tybee Island. Tutors of the Armstrong Atlantic State University Writing Center will coordinate a series of recreational outings including a moonlit ghost tour, a riverboat cruise, and art gallery tours on Friday night, and Saturday afternoon field trips to Bonaventure Cemetery and Flannery O'Connor's childhood home. Additional opportunities for recreation and dining will be described on the conference Web site: <http://www.llp.armstrong.edu/swca/swca2008cfp.html>. ✨

**Please join us for the 2008 SWCA  
Conference in Savannah, Georgia**

**Dates:** February 7th-9th

**Venue:** The Armstrong Center,  
Armstrong Atlantic State University

For more information about the conference, including accommodations and excursions, visit the conference Web site: <http://www.llp.armstrong.edu/swca/registration.html>

# Tangled Up in the New

By Michael Mattison, Boise State University

"Tutor training embodies both the core of what we do and the ways in which our theoretical commitments and goals are accomplished."<sup>1</sup>

Early one fall morning, another section of English 303: Theory and Practice of Tutoring Writing will begin. The course, as described by our catalogue, is a lead-in to writing center work: "Preparation for tutoring for the Boise State Writing Center. Emphasis on writing processes, interpersonal dynamics, questioning techniques, evaluation of writing-in-progress, and rhetorical theory as it pertains to tutoring." At Boise State, a student cannot become a writing consultant without taking this course, or without having completed a similar course at another institution. Many centers, in fact, make such a course a prerequisite for their consultants.

But is this type of course necessary? Is it so important that writing center staff receive a classroom introduction to the field and our work? Might such a course even prove detrimental? Paula Gillespie and Harvey Kail "come down strongly in favor of the credit-bearing course" or a similar alternative (326), but some fairly recent postings on WCenter are questioning such a stance.<sup>2</sup> Sharon Williams believes that "not having a required course" means that she has a "more diverse and more talented set of peer tutors," and instead of a course she proposes the "minimalist model" of tutor training: "For training, we have a new tutor/veteran tutor three day workshop prior to the beginning of the year. After that, we are very very busy, and the tutors learn on the job and through a few in-service gatherings."<sup>3</sup> Williams, though, takes care to make "very careful selection of new tutors" and she takes "a long time screening candidates."<sup>4</sup> She looks to find tutors who are "naturals at thinking about and talking about writing" and who "interact comfortably with others."<sup>5</sup> The weight, for her, is on the



Michael Mattison

interview process; if you select the right people, then they will be successful. In addition, Williams worries that courses (and handbooks) on writing center work funnel us towards a "standard way to prepare peer tutors" and that we might "[obscure] tutors' natural ability to be peer reviewers."

Natural ability. There's some dangerous terrain, I think. We're close to what Deborah Britzman calls one of the "cultural myths" about teacher education—"that teachers are self-made." For Britzman, this myth is a "highly individualistic explanation that produces the construct of the 'natural teacher.' The natural teacher somehow possesses talent, intuition, and common sense, all essential features that combine to construct a knower as a subjectivist" (230). True, Britzman is focused on classroom teachers (specifically secondary school teachers), but I believe we can (and should) lift her points for writing center consultants, for Williams is indeed constructing a "natural consultant."

Britzman cautions that a belief in the natural teacher "encourages a stance of anti-intellectualism" (230) and "cloaks the social relationships and the context of school structure by exaggerating personal autonomy" (232). Granted, I do not know all the particulars about Williams's training workshops and in-service gatherings, but she admits that her "tutors read very little W.C. literature," and she is certainly emphasizing the individual in her posting. If she can just find the right type of person, that person will prove an excellent tutor. It's all about "selection" rather than education.

Ben Crosby also critiques the "short crash course" approach, saying that "[s]uch methods fail to acknowledge the breadth of available writing center research and leave tutors with the false impression that writing center theory and practice are largely static" (3). Crosby's conclusion is in support of a for-credit course: "A for-credit class places the writing center and its personnel in an institutional, academic, and theory-based context—a context, moreover, that acknowledges tutor needs in real time and sets the stage for a more effective writing center environment" (4-5). And Gillespie and Kail add that "On-the-job training [...] may well put peer-tutors at unnecessary risk, and we want to discourage putting undergraduates in positions of authority that they are untrained to exercise properly" (326).

Worst of all, limiting consultant education can affect the writers who visit our centers. Melissa Nicolas writes, "A tutor who has never taught and maybe has only read a smattering of writing center theory is most likely not prepared to offer the kind of reassurance timid and skeptical clients may need about their writing." Clients, she continues, are "robbed [of . . .] the chance to talk with someone who

is knowledgeable about how writing works." Someone who has gained her knowledge from more than just experience. Asking (requiring) consultants to take a course in writing center theory and pedagogy demands a commitment from them, indicates to them that this is indeed serious business. They need to make the decision to make a commitment—a commitment to writing center work, to the field, and to the students who walk in the door.

Obviously, I'm in favor of a course for consultants. I do not see how we cannot have a course for consultants. If we consider our work important, if we consider ours a field unto itself, with its own history and theory and practices, then we should steep students in just that. Furthermore, such a course gives students a space in which to become consultants.

A relevant essay here is Harvey Kail's piece from *The Center Will Hold*, "Separation, Initiation, and Return: Tutoring Training Manuals and Writing Center Lore." What most interests Kail are the texts used for staff education because he believes that each of these can be read as a "master narrative, an educational creation myth" (74). Kail borrows Joseph Campbell's "narrative schema of separation, initiation, and return as a template" for his study, and reads three texts through this lens: Muriel Harris's *Teaching One-to-One*, Ken Bruffee's *A Short Course in Writing*, and Irene Clark's *Writing in the Center*. What if we add Bob Dylan's "Tangled Up in Blue" to the list?

Dylan's song can also be read as an initiation tale, or a heroic journey of sorts, with the narrator moving from scene to scene, relationship to relationship. (Robert Shelton has mentioned its connection with the "quest myth.") And, I believe that Dylan's song can refocus us on the personal transformation that occurs for a consultant. Dylan's work takes us back to the "I" of the quest, and it helps me view what happens in the consultation course that I teach.

The first two verses of "Tangled" describe moments of separation—separation not only in terms of relationships, but also in terms of the past from the present. The narrator is looking back, remembering what happened before; he has "paid some dues gettin' through." For instance, the narrator describes one relationship with a married woman. He "helped her out of a jam" but "used a little too much force." Eventually they "split up on a dark sad night" and went their separate ways.

And every one of them words rang true  
And glowed like burnin' coal  
Pourin' off of every page  
Like it was written in my soul from me to you.

"Tangled Up in Blue" by Bob Dylan<sup>3</sup>

The third verse finds the narrator "drifting," moving from job to job, yet also constantly looking backwards: "But all the while I was alone/The past was close behind." In addition, and most important for this reading, the narrator is experiencing growth: "But she never escaped my mind, and I just grew." He is maturing, and being initiated into the adult world of relationships; he is reflecting upon the woman(en) he has known, pulling the past along behind him in order that

he might better understand the present. His new knowledge is tested in the fourth verse, when he meets another woman, this one who asks "Don't I know your name?" Instead of acknowledging a past history, the narrator mumbles, and feels uneasy.

The woman in the fifth verse offers the narrator a "book of poems" from an "Italian poet" and the words in the book "ring true" for him and glow "like burnin' coal." He seems here to have discovered what he has long sought—a perfect union (between two people and between language and reality). But then, in the next verse, the narrator is living with a "them" on Montague Street, and there is "revolution in the air." There is possibility, promise. The couple, however, disintegrates. The "he" of the verse "started into dealing with slaves/And something inside of him died." The "she" sold "everything she owned and froze up inside." The bottom falls out at this point and the narrator becomes "withdrawn." It is, to pull in Kail's reference, the nadir of the journey.

In the seventh and final verse, the narrator is heading "back again," trying to "get to her somehow." This is his return. The people that the two of them once knew are "an illusion" now, and he does not know what they do "with their lives." His life, though, will be "on the road/Headin' for another joint."

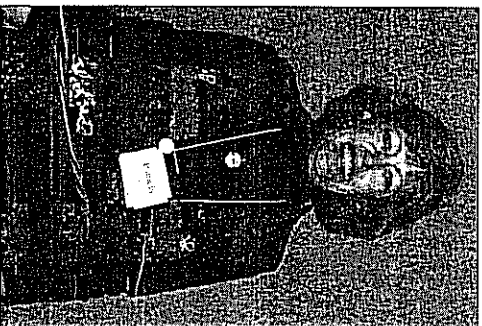
Now consider the song against the experiences of a writing center consultant. Every consultant has a past history—with writing, with language, with school—that she brings with her to a center. Oftentimes, though, the consultant needs to separate in some way from that past. Kail writes (speaking of Clark's book) that a tutor is "invited first to turn inward": "By first interrogating his own writing process, by reflecting upon his positions concerning evaluating writing, and by remembering what it was like to be a student—the tutor/hero can safely cross the threshold of adventure" (90). Interrogation and reflection both require a distance between the experience and the person, and they can be difficult experiences. The consultant and her past have to "split up" in some ways.

"Tangled Up" continued on page 7

# Compass Points: Sometimes Collaborations Seem Doomed but Somehow Succeed

By Pamela B. Childers, The McCallie School

We all may have the best intentions in planning collaborative projects. Right now I am trying to write two conference proposals with people in other parts of the world and as near as one floor up from the Caldwell Writing Center. Distance does not seem to be the problem; rather, it seems that life often interrupts our professional work. If I talk with any writing center director, classroom teacher, college professor or graduate student, I will discover that illnesses, extra duties, professional presentations and travel, family responsibilities, and even financial concerns hinder successful collaborations. Although collaboration is rewarding and inspiring intellectually, it is not an easy job. However, just collaborating can alleviate or allay those concerns and even inspire better work.



Pam Childers

I could refer to the book I worked on collaboratively after all three of us were dealing with major family and health issues; yet we somehow jumped in to cover for one another at those times and the book was published on schedule in better shape than it would have been if one of us had not been part of the project. Our three different perspectives brought a depth of thinking, a greater variety of ideas, and a more comprehensive final product. A few years later, I was involved in yet another book project when one of us lost a mate during the whole process of writing each chapter collaboratively. Instead of letting this loss slow us down, we actually worked harder and became more focused, and two of us made sure that we dedicated the book to the partner of our third collaborator. I feel blessed to have been involved in both of these writing projects and many others that have involved students and professional colleagues.

In the Oceans class I team teach with science teacher Michael Lowry, we use a music video to prepare our students for collaboration. The video accompanying

the CD *Music for Two* follows musicians Edgar Meyer and Bela Fleck on their eighteen-day music tour. Meyer has written a draft of a new piece, which they critique, practice, revise, attempt unsuccessfully to perform on the seventeenth day, then finally perform successfully on the last night of the tour. Students jot down all the qualities of collaboration that they observe as these two consummate musicians work through failure and success to meet their goal of recording all pieces live for the CD during this tour. The qualities students emphasize are: risk taking, humor, respect for each other's talent or ability, hard work, comfort with criticism and listening to each other, acceptance of responsibility, learning from failure, communication of and being honest with each other about failure, encouraging each other, challenging each other, and then reflecting on the collaboration after it ends. At one point Edgar Meyer says, "Understanding each other is going to give us the glue to hold it together"; and Bela Fleck states that this is a "focused period of what is truly about being excellent." The students point out that it is difficult to be honest when egos are involved and you are "under the gun" and talk about how Fleck describes a duo as "a very delicate creature; it's a bit of a tightrope."

So, as tenuous as collaborations may be for musicians, artists, teachers and writers, many of us willingly walk that tightrope because it is a "focused period of what is truly about being excellent." When I work on an article with my science colleague or prepare a proposal with a writing center director at universities in California and Turkey, I respect these colleagues for their knowledge, experience, research, and unique perspectives. I want their critical responses to my drafts, an open line of communication, and a clear understanding of their approach to the project. If any of us in the collaborative project do not accept responsibility for the clear roles we have established, then there is no team and no completion of the project. On the other hand, if roles have clearly been established and one person communicates a problem, then the team continues through renegotiation of roles. For instance, one of the team members on a proposal had to be away at a conference, so the rest of us continued working on the draft until she returned, called and emailed a revision of the work we had done. Her input became more valuable because she had distanced herself from it and therefore was able to give more objective feedback.

Back in our classroom, we hope that this video helps our students with their first collaborative projects considering many of these points. In fact, they have presented this week and are reflecting on the process as I write this column. The

"Compass Points" continued on page 14

"Tangled Up" continued from page 5

Following closely on the heels of the separation, or occurring at the same time, is an initiation into the history, theory, and philosophy of writing centers. In most consultant courses, students are reading some North and/or Canino and/or Bruffee and/or Grimm, and no doubt the consultant feels as if she is drifting, keeping the past close behind, but also discovering what else there is—the writing center, says Kail, is a "unique locale with its own institutional history and its own legitimate brand of scholarship" (89). Then, on top of that learning is the practice, an actual consultation. How often a consultant might mumble a first greeting, and feel uneasy as he studies the lines on a page. More often than not, though, that first consultation is also a breakthrough, an "a-ha" moment similar to that experienced by the song's narrator with the book of poems—the consultant and the writer make a connection. There is then revolution in the air, especially when consultants share these adventures with one another in the course. "It wasn't so bad," they say. "It was fun." Or, "I think I helped a lot." Hearing the story of a consultation makes others in the course more eager for their own first session.

Yet the first consultation is followed by others, and they do not all proceed as neatly as the first—the same rush of excitement and newness is not there, or, even better, the new consultant becomes more astute at discerning what happens during a consultation. That insight at times can cause a consultant to freeze up: "What do I do in this situation?" Or she can become withdrawn: "I think I messed up. I'm not sure if I can do this." Some consultants leave—Kail writes, "The attraction of the old ways might prove so enduring and the stress of the new ways so discomfiting that the transitional subgroup might well dissolve at some point, its members fleeing back across the threshold, back home" (85). Fears and insecurities become most acute at this point, often compounded by the nearing end of the semester—consultants and writers alike caught up in the stress and pressure of finals. Most consultants, though, learn that they need to "keep on keepin' on."

In the return, a new consultant comes to the realization that many of the previous ideas she had about writing and revising are challenged by the writers she works with. She has people from different disciplines to work with—mathematicians, and perhaps a carpenter's wife or two. A consultant realizes that she is on the writing center road, always heading for another consultation. Every time we sit down with a writer, we are tangled up in the new. It's a new relationship, a new challenge. There are connections to our past relationships, our past work, but there is always a different point of view in the chair across from us. Now, here's my favorite connection between Dylan's work and that of a writing

center consultant. "Tangled Up in Blue" was one of the five songs on *Blood on the Tracks* that Dylan re-recorded in Minneapolis after having already recorded the album in New York. In the unused New York version, the opening verse is sung in third person: "he was layin' in bed." In the Minneapolis version, the verse has switched to first person. Isn't that exactly how we want a consultant to progress? From seeing a consultant as someone else—a "he" or a "she"—to identifying as a consultant—as an "I"? That's the transformation. That's the taking on of a new identity, a new role. Dylan's song—as well as his revised versions—highlights the delicate, at times inexplicable and hidden work that consultants undertake with their initiation into a writing center. They are on a journey, a transformational quest, one that will change them as well as change the way they write and work with other writers.

#### Endnotes

- Search for the thread entitled "minimalist model/tutor training."  
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# Back to the Center Start-Ups and Shake-Ups: Reflections on Opening a New Writing Center

By Sandee K. McGlaun, Roanoke College

## August: Arrival

Starting a writing center from scratch is not unlike beginning a new essay. From the moment in February 2006 when I accepted the challenge of developing a center at Roanoke College, I have been in prewriting mode: thinking, brainstorming, listing, in my head, in my journal. I outline workshops, plan research projects, make lists of publications we will subscribe to and produce. And, as often happens at the invention stage, the seemingly boundless possibilities simultaneously over-joy and overwhelm me, so I jot endless notes, but draft nothing.

Having decided little but dreaming persistently, I arrive on campus to find I am not the only one in transition. My colleagues in the new Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) have just moved into offices in the library; the English department, my other home, still awaits completion of their (our) new building. And the writing center space, located on the lower level of the library, houses a bevy of old media carts nestled in amongst massive built-in tables and a smelly darkroom sink. Momentarily, I flash back to SWCA 2006 and a conversation I had, shortly after accepting this position, with another director of a brand-new



Roanoke College Writing Center

writing center. She described a horror: upon her arrival, she had neither office nor computer; the designated writing center space was piled high with broken furniture; renovation took months.

But there is one enormous difference between that director's story and mine. Her colleagues offered no support; in fact, several

actively resisted her efforts. In contrast, I have felt the support of the faculty and administration for Roanoke's writing center ever since informed faculty from disciplines as diverse as math and fine arts participated in my MLA interview; once on campus, a coffee-shop meeting with "two or three students" turned into an engaging conversation with twelve or fifteen undergrads. Just this week, I was asked to make an impromptu address to faculty at a pre-semester workshop on the role the writing center might play in a new curriculum—the pressure was on, but the extent of the campus community's awareness and commitment was also evident.

And soon enough, order begins to emerge out of the chaos, and a vision begins to take shape from that initial maelstrom of ideas. As my offices (embarrassment of riches, I now have two) come together, so do the ideas, and organization emerges not only in the files and on the bookshelves, but in my thoughts. Two priorities sift to the top: we must claim and assemble the physical space, and, until we have a physical space, we must let people know we are here. I plan a series of workshops and creative writing playshops.

## September: First Workshop

Wow! Twenty-two students attend the first writing workshop, held on a Wednesday afternoon in early September. I incorporate sound effects and colorful metaphors in my presentation on integrating textual evidence, and the students participate actively. I am pleased with what seems to me solid attendance, and even more pleased when some of my colleagues express happy surprise and congratulate me on the turnout. Apparently twenty-two is not just solid; it is a coup.

Despite this early success, I have not yet learned all there is to know about my audience. The first workshop takes place in the student center, a central, familiar location. Space there is hard to come by, however, so I have to look elsewhere for the next. Charmed by Monterey House, a cozy former private residence located up a short drive on a corner of campus, I schedule the remaining events there. The second workshop, a "Grammar-Crammer" on run-ons and fragments, draws twelve students; eleven attend the playshop. Monterey is charming, but not to my intended audience. Many students, I discover, are not even sure where it is located.

Plan, revise: until we have our own space, future workshops will move to a more accessible and student-friendly study room in the library.



## October: Interior Decorating 101

I'm not Martha Stewart, but I dressed up as her once for Halloween. It's unfortunate no one is throwing a costume party this year, because I am now living the role. I just spent two days with a palette of paint chips the size of a brick, forty fabric swatches, and three books of carpet samples. I have been called upon to select furniture style and finish, choose cabinet top and counter top, consult about sink placement and outlet locations, and designate the color of the "cove"— shorthand for "vinyl cove base," the molding strip that finishes the carpet. Even my vocabulary is expanding!

No complaints: I love decorating. Put me in a room with cable, and I will have HGTV on before you can say "Divine Design." All these decisions, however, have made me think twice about ever building a custom house. Such pressure: we will have to live with the colors, the cabinets, the cove for a long time.

A missing fabric swatch eliminates our first-choice color scheme, but everyone in the CLT likes the purple and gold combination almost as much. A go at coordinating paint results in what sounds like a grocery list for bohemia: Cider Toddy, Golden Mushroom, and Love Potion. I revise, trading Love Potion for the more innocuous (and less red-toned) Purple Pansy. Few people aside from the painters and the college archivist will know the color names, but I remain acutely aware that all these choices are not purely aesthetic: in designing our space, we are beginning to create a writing center identity. As with a writer composing an essay, every choice shapes our ethos. I am going for a warm, hip, contemporary, coffee-shop-ish vibe, a student-friendly space that reads as both serious and playful. That's not too much to ask of paint and upholstery, is it?

Later, after a spirited discussion at this month's faculty meeting centering, ultimately, around the question of whether a tutor training course could have sufficient intellectual content, my proposed course is almost unanimously approved. And that's a good thing.



Sandee McClain

## November: Let's Talk Turkey

In November, I secure IRB approval for a research project, "Faculty Perceptions of Writing at Roanoke College," meet with the newly hired Writing Center Research Associates to brief them on the project, plan and host student and faculty/staff creative writing playshops, interview applicants for spring semester tutoring positions, and prepare and give a writing workshop on style and a Grammar Crammer on commas. And this is just in the first two weeks.

It is as if I have been drafting furiously, working now on this section, now on that. I know all the ideas are related, but I am so caught up in the energy of production I cannot yet articulate all the connections. It's time to step back from the work, take a break, so I can return to it with fresh eyes.

Oh, happy Thanksgiving!

## December: Stocking the Shelves

A writer may plan ahead, conduct careful research, and find the perfect source—only to discover that a highly-desirable text can only be ordered online, or gotten through inter-library loan. All the writer can do is wait.

A writing center director may view catalogs, carefully choose furnishings, and trade multiple emails with the supplier—only to discover that she has no real control over delivery dates. All she can do is wait.

Last year, while on the job market, I bought two interview suits before actually landing any interviews. I decide to do the same with books for the Writing Center: if I go ahead and order them, we WILL have shelves to put them on by the time spring semester starts.

It works, mostly. By late December, books start arriving. The shelves, and all other furniture pieces, are (finally) scheduled for delivery the first week of January. Hooray!

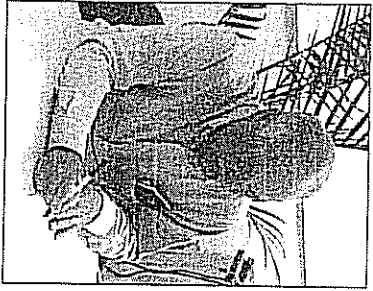
## January and February: Microbial Madness

Officially we are on holiday break until midmonth, but I have shelves to put books on, and a Writing Center to open! I decide to head back in early January to give myself a solid week of preparation before students return.

# What's the Point?

## Dots, Asterisks, or Dashes?

By Peter M. Carriere,  
Georgia College and State University



Peter Carriere

If you look up the word "ellipsis" in the OED, the first item under the term is the word "ellipsis. Now rare." Thus "ellipsis" and "ellipsis" are the same word, but the first definition of "ellipsis" in the OED concerns geometry. If we take a cone, for example, and slice through it, perhaps diagonally, we get an oval or an ellipse. Tracing the origin of the word to Greek, the OED tells us that it comes from several words merged together that originally meant "to come short." I think this definition definitely relates to student writing, though. How many student essays we have all read that "come short" of logic, reality, or sense! One interesting geometric use is in the OED's definition 2 of "ellipsis" from a translation by a man named Bullock of a book on being a midwife: "the abdominal strait has been.. [sic] compared to an ellipse." Frankly, I don't want anyone slicing through my abdominal strait looking for an ellipse or anything else!

Now, if you ignore the word "ellipsis" and go right to the definitions of the word "ellipsis," definition 2 reads "Gram. The omission of one or more words in a sentence, which would be needed to complete the grammatical construction or fully to express the sense. . . ." This definition is a very astute recognition of a standard component of student writing, and several quoted passages of the word's historical use make undeniable reference to it. This entry from 1667 by a pointer named Cowley is one example: "It is an ellipsis; or leaving something to be understood by the reader." I never knew until just this moment that the English had identified and named this feature of student writing, i.e., "leaving something to be understood by the reader." Not everyone quoted in the OED knew how much they were in fact referring to student writing, however. In 1727, Pope wrote that "the ellipsis, or speech by half words [is the peculiar talent] of ministers and politicians." How he could leave students out of that insightful definition is absolutely beyond me! In 1789, one Belsham wrote of "violent ellipses and inversions of language." There is no doubt that he had students in mind when he

wrote that line. In 1874 a pointer named Reynolds equated bad grammar with ellipses when he spoke of "grammatical roughness or ellipses."

But the OED never spoke of periods used to indicate the omission of words in a sentence. In fact, the OED ignored periods altogether and simply stated that the symbol and word formerly used to indicate words left out was the dash, as in "king?" for "king."

American discussions of the ellipsis are less elliptical. The first definition in Webster's *Mill's New Collegiate Dictionary* states that the ellipsis is "the omission of one or more words that are obviously understood. . . ." Of course, the problem with this definition is that in student writing nothing is obvious, or understood, especially something omitted. Entry "b" under the first definition seems much more to the point, so to speak: "a leap or sudden passage without logical connectives from one topic to another." Yes! This definition makes the dictionary a strong heir to its own name, which includes the word "collegiate," an obvious reference to student writing.

As usual, there's no standard way to punctuate the ellipsis. While Webster's tells us that the word ellipsis can refer to "marks or a mark (as . . . or \*\*\* or ~) used to indicate an omission . . . or a pause," the *Chicago Manual of Style* says emphatically that missing words or phrases *must* be indicated by "ellipsis points (dots), never by asterisks (stars)." Well, I never believed for a minute that grammar and punctuation rules are constants. Did you?

And of course French, Italian, Russian, and Spanish are different. Here's what the *Chicago Manual of Style* says. To indicate sudden breaks in thought in French, "a series of three closely spaced periods is frequently used. . . ." In Italian four closely spaced periods are used the same way as in French, except that fifty follow another punctuation mark (an exclamation point, for example) then only three are used. In Russian three are used (the *Manual of Style* calls them "suspension points," perhaps a reference to parastrotika) unless they follow another punctuation mark, and then only two are used. In Spanish three are used to indicate a sudden break in thought. So much for linguistic consistency.

But the entry in the *Chicago Manual of Style* that has most to do with student writing concerns what the manual refers to as "mutilated manuscripts." The writers of the manual could not possibly have known how their choice of words would be so apt, however; they are referring to manuscripts in which letters or

"What's the Point?" continued on page 12

# Guidelines for Prospective Conference Hosts

By Glenda Conway, University of Montevallo

Reprinted from *Southern Discourse* Fall 2002

## General

1. Ability to meet with the SWCA Board of Directors during the summer before the conference (usually over a weekend and usually in the area in which the conference will be held), to plan the general schedule for the conference and to deal with other planning matters.
2. Support and understanding from your local supervisors and colleagues for your pre-conference, post-conference, and actual conference attendance responsibilities.
3. Ability to serve on the SWCA Board of Directors as a past conference host during the following year.
4. Ability to make arrangements for managing money (accounts received and paid) and keeping easily-transferable records (conference registration fees; SWCA/TWCA membership fees; deposits and other payments to the conference facility; honorarium(s) and expense reimbursements to invited speakers; etc.). Depending on your institution's policies, you may use an already-existing account or start a new account at a local bank.
5. Patience. You need to be prepared to deal with continuous interruptions during the year of the conference, numerous questions, requests for changes and other assistance, difficulties with mailings, miscommunications with facility folks and conferees, and all sorts of other challenges.

## Lodging Facility

1. Ability to accommodate up to 150 overnight guests during the "peak" two nights of the conference (generally the first and second night) at varied room capacity (i.e., one-four conferees in each room).
2. Willingness to offer discounted conference rates is a plus, as is willingness to offer a number of rooms for student tutors at an even more attractive rate.
3. The physical location should be in an area suitable and safe for exercise walkers and joggers. If in a large city, it should be near (or within accessible public transportation of) sites of historical or other tourist interest. (Many conferees travel by air, are funded by their institutions only for transportation between the airport and the conference hotel, and thus should not feel stranded in an isolated hotel.)


## Conference Facility

1. Located in the same building as the conference hotel or within easy walking distance of it. If not in same building, shuttle service for disabled conferees should be available at no charge.
2. Capacity for banquet/receptions for at least 200 conferees.
3. At least six available breakout-session rooms with seating for 30 or more conferees.
4. Existence of a central area—ideally with chair and table groupings—suitable both for setting up between-session coffee, soft drinks, and water and facilitating after-session conversations and networking.
5. Reasonable prices and menu choices (including vegetarian options) for banquet style meals. The choice of a buffet set-up is usually economically favorable, since it reduces the need for servers.

## Other Facilities

1. Conferees enjoy time away from the primary conference facility. If a reception or enrichment activity can be arranged with minimal transportation or other expense, this will be a major plus. For example, the 2001 Conference held at Auburn University included a first night reception at Pebble Hill, a historic home several blocks from the Conference Center (a shuttle was available) and a second afternoon visit to the Auburn Sports Museum.
2. Access and permission to use swimming pools and exercise equipment is always appreciated.

## Programmatic Planning

1. Brochure and flyer design skills (or ability to recruit a volunteer or reasonably priced designer) for key conference documents: the Call for Proposals; the official Conference Announcement; the Conference Program.
2. Skill with or working support from someone skilled with web design, so that all Conference publicity can be Internet-available.
3. Ideally, institutional support for copying and mailing of conference materials. Access to assistance in preparing a bulk-rate mailing is a major plus, since bulk-rate mailings cost only a fraction of what first-class mailings cost. (Institutional financial support is not required, however, as SWCA can offer funds for such needs.)
4. Ability to organize a committee to read and rate proposals and to decide whether to accept or reject them.
5. Ability to compose acceptance and rejection letters that are clear and that convey a clear sense of respect and goodwill to the addressees.
6. Ability to set up a program of sessions that fits with the design of the conference set up by the SWCA board during its summer meeting. 

# SWCA Scholarship and Initiative Grant Program

By Kerri Jordan, Mississippi College

The SWCA executive board is pleased to announce our new SWCA Scholarship and Initiative Grant Program. We have created this two-part program with multiple goals in mind, including increasing SWCA membership, conference attendance, and active participation in our organization, encouraging collaboration among new and established writing centers; supporting professional development for writing center administrators, staff, and tutors; and furthering writing center research and scholarship.

Although available funding will vary from year to year, the program reflects the board's desire to channel SWCA monies back into our membership whenever possible.

SWCA Scholarships are needs-based awards helping to enable travel to our annual conference. Scholarships will vary based on need and availability; they may provide support for travel, accommodations, and/or conference registration. Because the awards are need-based, applications will be treated as confidential and recipients will remain anonymous; however, the number and type of scholarships awarded each year will be reported at the annual conference.

Scholarship applications for the 2008 conference in Savannah should be submitted by December 2007. Recipients will be notified by 15 December 2007.

"What's the Point?" continued from page 10

words have been obliterated and are therefore unrecognizable. But those of us who spend our academic lives teaching composition see the phrase as much, much larger than that. We who labor over student writing at night and on weekends have so often been confronted with mutilated manuscripts thrown into a jungle of tangled syntax that we no longer even look for the corpse. I know I don't. It has become an ellipsis. And even if we tried, we would only find ourselves staring into space, wide awake at 2 a.m. and asking of a silent universe, "What's the Point?"

"Back to the Center" continued from page 9

That was the plan, anyway. Five days before I plan to go back, I start coughing. The fever hits two days later. Before driving to the doctor, I stop by the CLT office, check email, and (ever the optimist) tell my colleagues I will be back after my appointment, depending on the verdict. The verdict is pneumonia. I go home and spend the next three days in my pajamas. Not exactly the grand debut of the new Writing Center at Roanoke College I had imagined.

Like an essay that, still finding its voice, has multiple beginnings, we open officially on January 28<sup>th</sup> (a week past schedule) go live with online scheduling in February, and plan a faculty/staff open house for early March. I am reminded of a writing workshop from years ago, in which the professor instructed us to tear off the first four pages of the manuscript under discussion, arguing that the real beginning of the story was on the fifth page. On the days I go home and simply collapse into bed, I wish I could do the same with this semester: tear it off and start "for real" in the fall. Like that great idea that lives so beautifully in a writer's head until she attempts to put it down on paper, our center's debut doesn't match the perfect images I had conjured in my mind—but it is, after all, a first draft, and there is still time plenty of time to revise.

I am grateful for SWCA: attending the conference and connecting with colleagues always reenergizes me.

## March: Evaluating (Re)sources

We are settling in: we have a great space and a good (if small) staff, and after many email exchanges, our online scheduling program is running (relatively) smoothly. Faculty are generally pleased with the tutors' informational class visits, our new posters are up, and the word is slowly getting out to students. And though it seems like I just hired my tutors, it is time to begin recruiting for next year, since new tutors need to sign up for the training class during pre-registration, fast approaching. I am anxious to grow our staff numbers. Right now we have one tutor out with a stubborn respiratory infection, and another who has suffered a broken ankle that will require surgery. Any absence puts a serious strain on our resources with only five tutors, and though that's not a surprising number given our debut-semester, mid-year-opening status, it's just too small.

I put up posters, send out a call on the campus "WebAnnouncer," and post a description on Career Services' student campus jobs list, but receive only three initial applications. So, like any good writer, I re-examine my rhetorical choices,

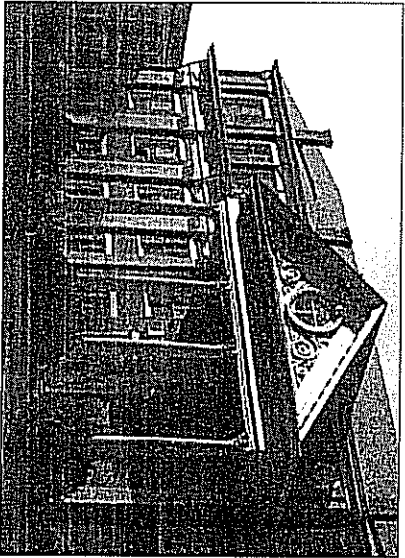
consult knowledgeable sources, and revise my approach, expanding my appeal to additional audiences. I ask fellow faculty to nominate good students, whom I then contact personally. Slowly, my list of nominees grows; steadily, the applications come in. Self-reflection, getting feedback, collaborating with others: essential parts of the process.

## April: Looking

### Ahead to New Vistas

When I wrote papers in junior high and high school, I wanted every word, every sentence to be perfect when I first put it on paper; revision was a foreign concept. Many writing teachers (myself among them, now) caution against this approach; of course, because it requires the writer to think about every aspect of writing at once: invention, ideas, structure, sentences, diction, punctuation. If we try to manage everything simultaneously, we risk writer's block, curtailing our ideas, derailing our syntax. I was reminded of this back in January, the night before the writing center opened, as I listened to an interview on NPR. *Marketplace* host Kai Ryssdal asked *Dreaming in Code* author Scott Rosenberg why it took so long for Microsoft's new Vista Operating System to make it to the market. Rosenberg replied, "It became the kind of project that in the industry they call a 'Boil the Ocean' project, which...basically means you're gonna take on everything at once. But you...need the discipline to address things incrementally and to take bites that are manageable."

I find descriptions of the creative process made by people in other fields fascinating, for their descriptions inevitably reveal similarities across disciplines, across experiences. Software developer or writer, administrator or artist: we all work best in increments; we are most effective when we honor the creative process as a process. Now, when I write an essay, I rarely draft the entire piece through at the first sitting; much less try to perfect it as I go: my first draft consists of pieces of the work, and then, each time I go back to the text, I revise the



Roanoke College

sections already drafted, then add a few new paragraphs or pages, repeating this practice until the essay is complete. As our first-year winds down, I see that starting a new writing center, like writing an essay, is a recursive process, and, if I listen to the lessons of my own learning to write, I understand it must be incremental, subject to ongoing revision. After all, the root of the word "essay" is the French *essayer*, "to try." This trying is hard work, but rewarding, satisfying both in process and product. It is inherently, wonderfully collaborative. Essayist or writing center director, I am reminded, one never stops learning how to create, how to try. ✨

**Update: The Writing Center at Roanoke College opened for Fall 2007 on September 9<sup>th</sup> and hosted six tutorials on the first day!**



### By the Numbers

Roanoke College: the second oldest Lutheran-related college in the U.S., located in Salem, Virginia, with 2000 students enrolled in undergraduate liberal arts programs  
Director: Sandee McGlaun  
Number of Tutors: 5 in Spring 2007; 13 in Fall 2007  
Number of Visits in Spring 2007: 160 students and 5 faculty; tutors made 35 class visits, and we hosted 9 writing workshops and playshops  
Hours of Operation: Sundays through Thursdays 3 to 9 pm; faculty-staff consultations Thursdays 11 am-noon  
Website: <http://web.roanoke.edu/x11406.xml>

# SWCA Executive Board Actions

By Kerri Jordan, Mississippi College

The executive board met three times in 2007: on February 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in Nashville, Tennessee, and on June 30<sup>th</sup> in Ellijay, Georgia.

In Nashville, board actions included the following:

## Incoming Board Member Introductions

Treasurer Sandee McGlaun (Roanoke College) and At-Large Members Kevin Dvorak (St. Thomas University), Jill Frey (Presbyterian College), and Kathi Griffin (Millsaps College) were welcomed to the board. Outgoing Treasurer Karl Fornes and At-Large Members Shevaun Watson, Tracy Hudson, and Deaver Traywick were thanked for their service.

## Reports

The board heard several reports. Beth Burmester presented board election results and described voting plans for the proposed by-laws change. Trixie Smith offered a preliminary report on the 2007 conference. Karl Fornes offered the treasurer's report, in which he noted in particular Eckerd College's \$458 contribution to SWCA's Katrina Relief Fund. On behalf of the Scholarship Committee, Shevaun Watson offered a proposal to establish an SWCA Scholarship and Initiative Grant program. Deaver Traywick presented the Awards Committee Report. Christine Cozzens reported on the current status of *Southern Discourse*, emphasizing that a stronger web presence for the journal would be useful.

## Other Actions

The board approved motions to establish an SWCA Scholarship and Initiative Grant program (with application procedures to be determined at a later date) and to make the *Southern Discourse* Award's monetary value equal to that of other SWCA Awards.

Membership of several committees was determined. ✨

# Membership Passes

## By-Law Resolution

By Beth Burmester, Georgia State University

In the May election, members voted to change SWCA's bylaws in one respect, and that change becomes effective this year. Two-thirds of all members mailed their ballots, voting to change the definition of "a majority" from "two-thirds of the membership" to "two-thirds of members casting ballots." The SWCA Board is deeply appreciative of everyone's efforts in this election process, and especially grateful for membership participation. The results of this change will lead to better representation of members' will and to growth for our organization. ✨



Beth Burmester

"Compass Points" continued from page 6

The collaboration they have done in researching and preparing for their presentations has demonstrated their respect for and responsible work with one another. Whether our students are successful this time or not, we know that, like Meyer and Fleck, they will learn from success and failure that carrying your share of the load may be difficult, but it is worth the effort.

Bela Fleck and Edgar Meyer. *Obstinato: Making Music for Two*. DVD. Sony Classical. 2001. ✨

# President's Letter

By Glenda Conway,  
University of Montevallo

One of the greatest pleasures of working in an academic setting is the recurring fact of the new school year. New beginnings always seem to present opportunities to pay better attention to what we do. And, as those of us who work in writing centers know well, new opportunities give us chances to make changes. To do things better than we did them before. To revise.

In a 1992 *College Composition and Communication* article, Nancy Sommers wrote about what revision offers us: "It is deeply satisfying to believe that we are not locked into our original statements, that we might start and stop, erase, use the delete key in life, and be saved from the roughness of our early drafts."

With the start of each new school term, those of us who administer writing centers have chances to revise policies that did not serve us well the term before. We can rearrange the layouts of our centers. We can add new readings and requirements to our tutor training courses. We can reconsider our ways of talking about and publicizing our centers. We can reassess whether we are truly serving our centers' and our schools' missions.

Those who tutor can reflect on what they do well and ways in which they wish to improve. They can devise methodologies for improvement, whether individually or as a group.

We are very fortunate in our field to believe in revision as a conscious and purposeful act. We should never see ourselves as locked into policies or practices just because things have always been done "that way."

Even SWCA is taking advantage of its revision opportunities. The 2008 conference in Savannah will be different from those we've hosted before. We have decided to engage several plenary speakers to contemplate the destinations of our work, rather than arrange for a single keynote address. We have projected a more



prominent role for poster presentations, with the rationale that posters may serve as the best means of sharing the kinds of thinking- and research-in-progress that happens in our centers.

Too often, our composition students view teachers' revision expectations as unnecessary burdens. It is one of our many jobs to show them that the act of revising a piece of writing actually provides opportunities to make that text more effective. I hope we also will remind ourselves that revision is not just for students. ✨

## SWCA Membership Application 2008-2009

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Center or Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Institution: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address for copies of *Southern Discourse*:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Writing Center Web URL: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2008-2009 Membership

- Student \$12       Faculty \$30  
 Institutional Level I \$50       Institutional Level II \$100

See [www.swca.us](http://www.swca.us) for details.

The membership period is one full calendar year.

Mail application with check to:

Kerri Jordan, SWCA Secretary

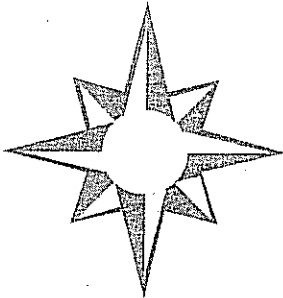
Mississippi College

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If you are interested and can meet the host  
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of the board members listed on page 2.

The Grand Lobby at the Armstrong Center  
courtesy of AASU

