

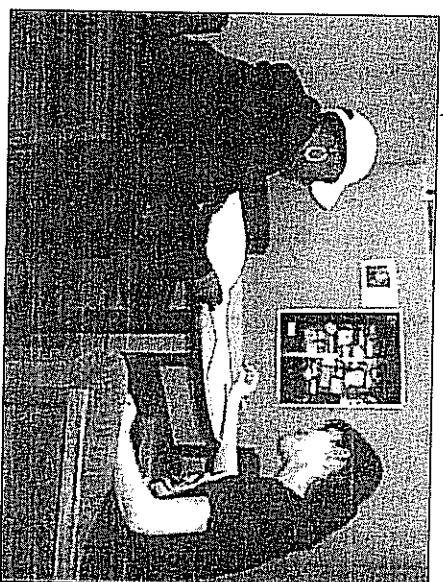
# Southern Discourse

Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



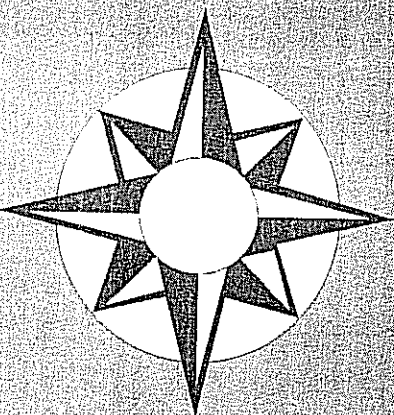
Fall 2008 • Volume 12, Issue 1

Typewriters and blue doors:  
Back to the Center with  
Armstrong Atlantic State  
University (see page 8)



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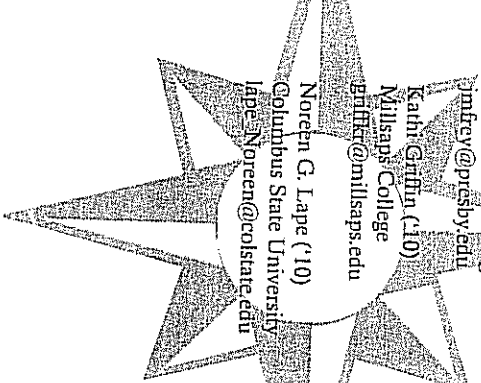
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## A Note from

### the Editor:

## Writing-Centered Person

By Christine Cozzens,  
Agnes Scott College

Last week Pam Childers gave a talk at Agnes Scott to a group of teachers and aspiring teachers, including me and the tutors from our center. Pam spoke inspiringly of the important work that goes on in the secondary writing center. At one point, she handed out paper and colored markers and asked the audience members to draw their ideal center. We all had a lot of fun imagining what the perfect center might look like. Mine had a dome like the wonderful center I saw at Smith College, and pathways leading to academic buildings, residence halls, administrative offices, the student center, the athletic building, and out into the community.



*Christine Cozzens*

## *Southern Discourse* Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association

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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE  
THE WORLD FOR WOMEN

One member of our group took an unusual approach. He drew the figure of a man seated in the lotus position, with symbols on his body and nearby; it looked a bit like a Buddha or a Hindu god. One symbol indicated the "fire in the belly" of a person passionate about writing centers, for example. The figure struck a chord with me: the phrase "writing-centered person" came immediately to mind. The artist's point was that the writing center was embodied in each of us; that we carry within us the characteristics that make the writing center a special and meaningful place to do writing or just to be.

When Pam asked us to revise our ideal centers at the end of her talk, I made only one change to mine. I drew a dozen or so figures—stick-figure versions of the writing-centered person I'd seen—and had them coming out of the center and into the world. I like to think that these writing-centered persons—tutors with ideas about how to help others do their best work or writers with a more confident approach to their craft—will spread the good work of writing centers in their future careers, their daily life, and their writing. ✨

# Bringing Socrates to the Center: The Socratic Method as Functional Peer Tutoring

By Adam Pacton, East Tennessee State University

At SWCA's conference this year, I presented a poster on using the Socratic method as a tool for peer-tutoring. My premise was simple: by adhering to the Socratic method as a functional guide, tutors (and administrators) can ensure fidelity to the peer-consultant model of tutoring. In Plato's dialogues, the main element of the Socratic method is *elenchus*. *Elenchus* is the method whereby Socrates demonstrates that his audience holds inconsistent beliefs. Once the beliefs which cause the inconsistencies are identified and removed, the audience is ready to search dialogically for more consistent replacement beliefs. In practice, however, the "Socratic method" generally refers to the process whereby an interlocutor uses leading questions to help his or her audience arrive at a particular realization or conclusion.

My poster was motivated by my desire to capitalize upon the decentralization of authority that this dialectic is predicated upon, and, after receiving encouraging and insightful feedback at the SWCA conference, I decided to implement this method at the writing center where I work. The results have been both surprising and illuminating.

When I returned from the conference, my director asked me to present my ideas to our staff and to encourage the implementation of the Socratic method in our center. While most of the tutors saw the value in asking students leading questions about issues of content, structure, and style, some tutors remained skeptical; after all, how can a tutor help a tutee with citation or grammar by asking questions? To address these concerns, I took on the role of the Socratic tutor:

Adam: "Where is citation information located in the center?"

Tutors: "In the MLA, APA, or Turabian handbooks."

Adam: "Where would a student look in these handbooks, or any reference book, for specific information?"

Tutors: "In the index at the end of the book."

Adam: "If a student knows how to use the index correctly, they can find specific citation directions and examples, right?"

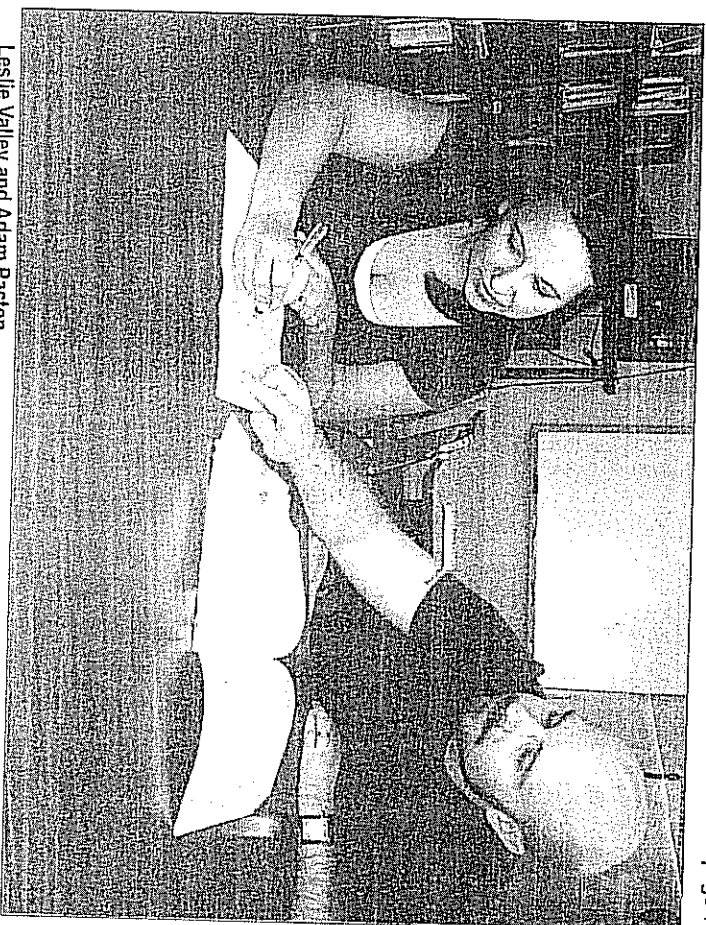
Tutors: "Of course."

Adam: "Have I answered your question?"

Tutor: "..."

Concerns about using the method for questions of grammar were also prevalent, but these were diffused by offering a deductive model for tutors to use. Tutors were instructed to articulate a given rule to tutees and then ask the tutees if they could find any violations of the rule in their work. This method of approaching grammatical issues has a number of salient benefits. First, tutors are forced to articulate grammatical rules which they may only implicitly know. Thus, tutoring becomes an explicit learning moment for both tutors and the tutees. Second, tutees are forced to apply general principles to specific instances, thus raising the probability of their internalization of grammatical rules and their subsequent ability to apply the rules themselves. Third, and most important,

"Bringing Socrates" continued on page 11



Leslie Valley and Adam Pacton

# 2009 Conference: An HBCU Answers the Call

By Hope Jackson, North Carolina A&T State University

A couple of years ago, 2006 SWCA Conference cochairs, Kim Abels, Vicki Russell, and current SWCA secretary, Karen Keaton-Jackson, each approached me about hosting an upcoming SWCA Conference. Through my work with the writing center staff, who are graduate and undergraduate students, and my one-on-one experiences with tutees, I have witnessed the commitment to improving tutees' writing skills. Unfortunately at the time, I, like many people, was too busy and could not even fathom finding the time to seriously consider their request to host this conference.

It was one day, while reading through an older issue of *The Writing Center Journal*, I came across an article entitled, "Blind: Talking About the New Racism" by Victor Villanueva that I heard the call. I realized that an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) could offer a unique cultural perspective to the SWCA Conference and that North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A&T) would be honored to host the conference. In addition, we could address and offer solutions to the challenges that writing centers are facing today. As a result, it is with pleasure that I announce that, for the first time ever, an HBCU will be hosting the upcoming 2009 SWCA Conference.

Writing centers have a responsibility to students and others who frequent the facility to improve their collegiate academic lives. It is commonly known that the public school system continues to struggle to adequately prepare students, particularly minority students, for college-level work. This fact thrusts writing centers onto the forefront of the battle lines to improve the retention rates of our college students. The mission of writing centers in the 21st century should be

to identify innovative strategies that embrace the cultural differences of diverse student populations, so that students are engaged and invested in improving their skills for academic success.

Culture and diversity between students and teachers are an ever changing and increasing phenomenon among college campuses across the nation. The writing centers at these same colleges and universities are impacted by this change as well. Where there once were rigid policies and pedagogies to which writing centers adhered, more and more schools are finding that these policies are slowly becoming antiquated. A cultural shift has taken place that demands that writing centers find ways to work successfully with their diverse student populations. Change is long overdue.

As the first historically black university to host the SWCA conference, we stand ready to ignite and inspire change with the SWCA 2009 Conference. The

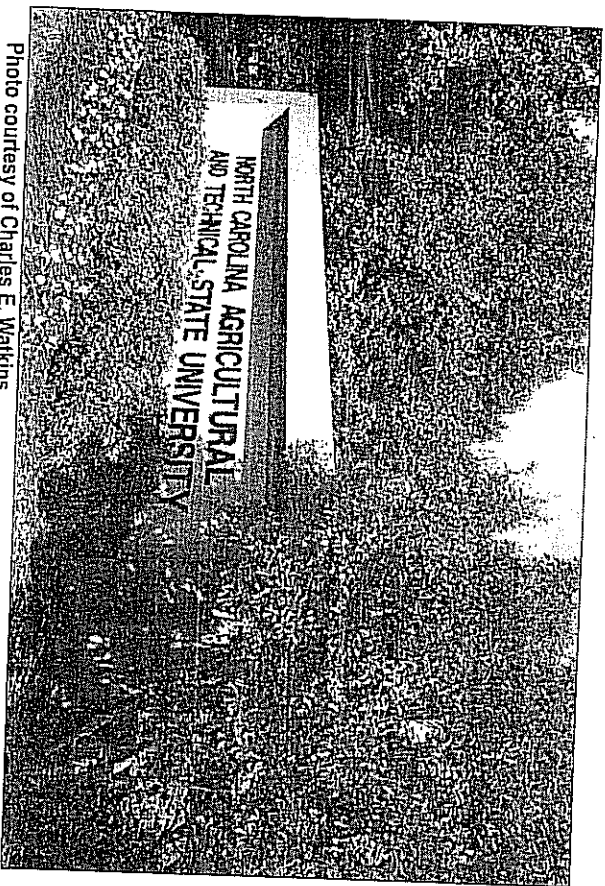


Photo courtesy of Charles E. Watkins

theme is "The Writing Center's Role in Student Success: 21st Century strategies for Empowerment Rooted in Culture and Diversity." Dr. Victor Villanueva has agreed to join us for this year's conference as our keynote speaker. Dr. Villanueva holds the title of Professor of English at Washington State University, is the editor of *Cross-Talk in Comp Theory*, as well as the highly praised author of *Bootstraps: From an American of Color*. The conference will be held in Greensboro, North Carolina from February 26th until the 28th. There will be six to seven concurrent sessions where presenters will have an opportunity to share their research through panel presentations, roundtable discussions, and poster presentations. On the morning of Thursday, the 26th, there will be a preconference workshop featuring discussions on New Technology. The Promethean ActivBoard in the Writing Center. Conference presentation sessions will begin Thursday afternoon and culminate into our opening plenary gala which is to be held at NC A&T and is scheduled to include culturally diverse genres of music, dancing, and spoken word. We are also

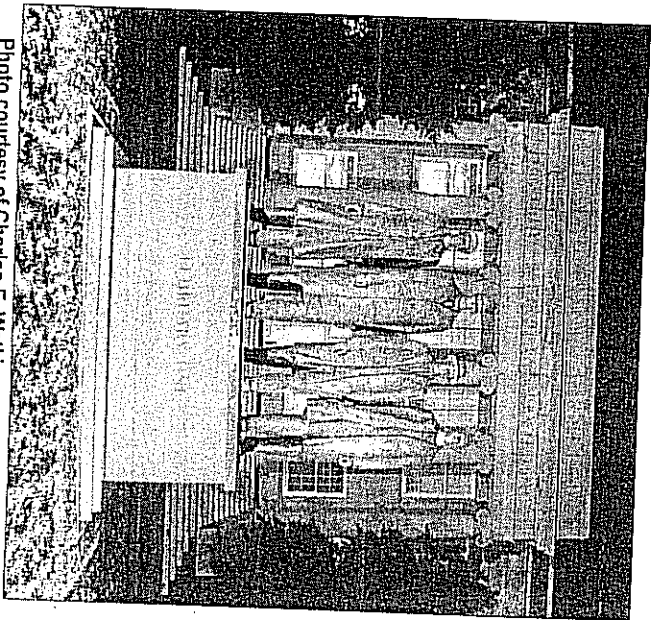


Photo courtesy of Charles E. Watkins

planning to incorporate a whole new element into the conference entitled "Shout It Out" Rap Session to invite open discussion involving writing centers on the evening of Friday, the 27th.

Our conference site will be at the Downtown Greensboro Marriott. The Marriott features 24,000 square feet of flexible meeting and banquet facilities, the largest in the downtown area. They offer 280 guestrooms with the new Marriott Pillow Top European Bed Package, which is only a highlight of the many lavish amenities offered. In addition, the downtown area allows conference participants the opportunity to explore historic Greensboro with a variety of conference participants cultural centers as well as shopping, all within walking distance of the hotel. Our goal is to provide conference attendees with the best possible SWCA experience and we are confident that the Downtown Greensboro Marriott and NC A&T will endow participants with a fulfilling experience that they will not only enjoy, but one that they will remember and value. For more information on this year's conference, please visit our website at <http://cas.ncat.edu/~swca>.

### SWCA Conference 2009

**Date:** February 26-28, 2009

**Location:** Greensboro, NC

**Theme:** The Writing Center's Role in Student Success:  
21st Century Strategies for Empowerment Rooted in  
Culture and Diversity

**Keynote Speaker:** Dr. Victor Villanueva

**Conference Chair:** Hope Jackson, NCA&T

**Conference Site:** Downtown Greensboro Marriott

**Web Site:** <http://cas.ncat.edu/~swca>

### SWCA Membership Application 2009-2010

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

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

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

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#### 2009-2010 Membership

Student \$12

Institutional Level I \$50

Faculty \$30

Institutional Level II \$100

# Compass Points

## Letting Go: Giving Our Students the Reins

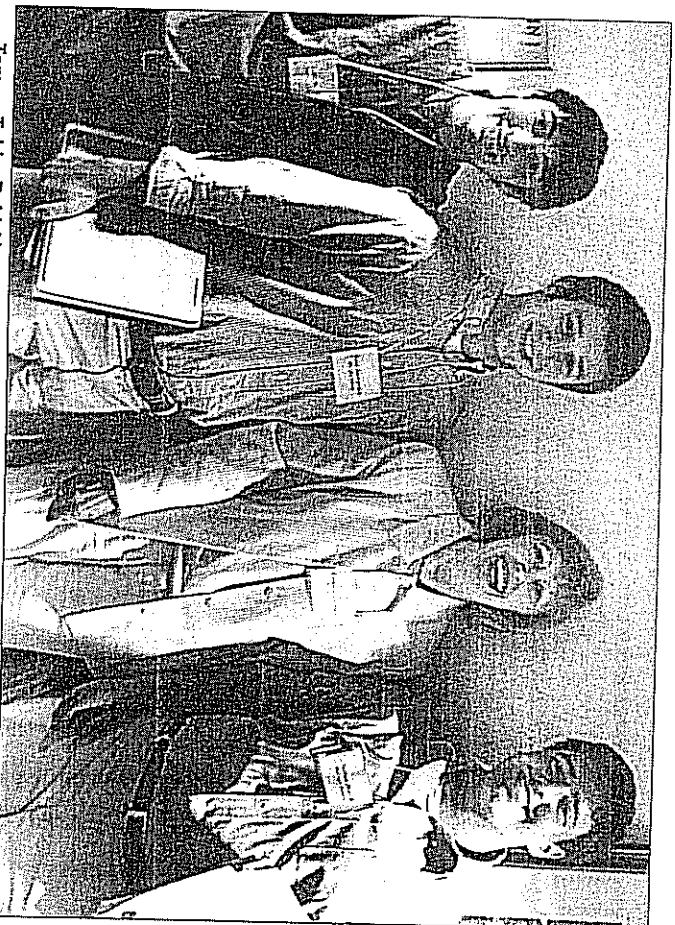
By Pamela B. Childers, The McCallie School

Last May I took my students to present at the International Writing Across the Curriculum Conference in Austin, Texas. What a dull opening sentence. You probably want to say, "So what's new about that?" Well, I mentioned in a previous column how difficult it is for secondary school writing center directors to take students to conferences because our students are minors, and there are so many liability issues if they stay overnight. So, how could I take only male high school students to a conference so far away? It was indeed a luxury of time more than place. The students, now 18 years old, had graduated two weeks before the conference, so I was not responsible for them except at the conference itself. However, I discovered that I did not need to be responsible for them even at the conference because of all the work they had done during the school year preparing for their presentations with an alumnus attending Stanford University and several university writing center directors. And, I felt comfortable knowing they would be able to get up and either make it on their own or not; I tried to convince myself that I would not run interference for them.

The boys did well, not only in their presentations but in their interactions with over 500 mostly university professors at the conference. They spoke of Vygotsky and Bloom, talked about their research study, and discussed keynote speaker Anne Beaufort's *College Writing and Beyond*. When one of the participants suggested that they publish their studies and also report their conclusions to our school, they did not look to me for permission but decided on their own to follow up on their presentation with the Stanford student taking the lead. They only asked me to report their findings this year, and I just presented that research to the English department. But what happened at the conference reinforced for me the need to prepare our students: give them the strong foundations in writing center theory and practice, and then let go. Just as we no longer lead students by the reins after their first horseback lesson, we must turn over those reins to them to ride, perhaps fall off, and get back on that horse. We have to trust that they will take over and continue riding down their individual paths. And, just as

important, they will learn from their falls, whether we are there to encourage them to get back on that horse or not.

What I discovered from this experience supported previous work with students in our writing center who have collaborated with me on professional articles or given presentations and workshops here on campus—if we give them a strong foundation, challenge them to "dig deeper," and discuss issues with them as if we are all writers and scholars, they will accept the responsibility. However, as the boys learned when we discussed Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, each reached that zone at different times and in different ways. Reid, for instance, had his own pace of learning but put it all together in two clear, concise, well-developed presentations focusing on writing in science. He read, absorbed, discussed theory and practice during the school year, and then silently figured out how he was going to approach his research. However, he had not finished his formal PowerPoint before graduation; instead, he initiated email exchanges and phone calls to reflect on his study and discuss how writing in senior science courses focused more on evaluation and synthesis; whereas underclass assignments emphasized comprehension, application and analysis.



Tommy Tobin, Reid Alexander, Pam Childers, Nolan Boyd

He concluded that writing progression from underclassman to senior allowed for more freedom in assignments that were open-ended and required abstract thinking that had been taught through earlier writing assignments.

In contrast, Nolan approached his research study of humanities courses with detail, precision, and strong organizational skills. He needed to know what his goal was, how he was going to proceed to reach that goal and what methodology he would use. He focused more on the purpose of assignments, skills involved, and most common assessment methods. They were two researchers each determining his own process for conducting research and his own way of presenting it to an audience of other researchers in the field of writing. My role was simple: give students the dates of the conference, collaborate on writing the proposal and abstract, guide them in setting up the process of conducting the research, question their analysis and conclusions, and help them create a consistent format for presenting their data. Once they had completed and revised their presentations (their training on the horse), we were now co-presenters. Afterwards, they were ready to ride off to University of Texas and Davidson University on their own.

But often we never get a follow-up on whether we have guided the students well. In this case, I had the luxury of observing the presentation of Tommy, who graduated from McCallie in 2006. Through email exchanges with the other boys, our copresenter Dilek Tokay of Sabanci University, and me, Tommy had determined his role in the presentation by considering the differences in high school and college writing. Tommy based his research on his own personal experiences with writing in courses at McCallie, the role of the writing center, and his research projects at Stanford as well. He concluded that secondary school "prepares one with the skills necessary to blossom in a collegiate context," mentioning self-directed study skills, developing a passion for learning, understanding institutional support, and gaining knowledge of the research process. By explaining the role of college with a research emphasis, extensive resources, and individual responsibility (less supervision), he then gave specific examples of his own writing opportunities and what he had learned about writing from them. Tommy proved that I could let go because he had taken the reins to continue to grow intellectually as a responsible leader in his research studies as well. He had taken the initiative at Stanford and came back to guide others on their own rides in new directions.

These are not isolated cases. This experience at the IWAC conference just reminded me that we sometimes forget how important our job is in preparing

our students and giving them responsibility to succeed and fail. In one session at the conference, two professors presented their program and introduced one of their first-year composition students who gave her own presentation. Her proud teacher interrupted her to say to the audience, "Did you notice how her responses follow Bloom's taxonomy?" The young woman politely responded, "I don't know who Bloom is but thank you." Her naiveté was refreshing, but I sat there thinking smugly to myself My guys know who Bloom is and what that means, and they just graduated from high school. Of course, a few hours later one of my students told a room full of college writing program administrators, "I don't know whether you are familiar with Bloom but . . ." I smiled and thought, Ah, he doesn't have a real sense of his audience yet, but he'll learn. The lesson I learned that day was that it was his presentation, and he had the reins; my job was to be quiet, not interrupt, sit back and enjoy watching his ride. ✨

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# Back to the Center A Profile of AASU's Writing Center: The Times Are A-Changin' But the Beat Goes On

By Deborah H. Reese,  
Armstrong Atlantic State University

Have you ever had a song stuck in your head? I'm experiencing such a thing right now. The song is the Talking Heads' "Once in a Lifetime," in which a central character reflects upon his life's path. While not perfectly suited to this retrospective, the song keeps going round in my mind. Perhaps, like me, you'll find a few of the lines relevant.

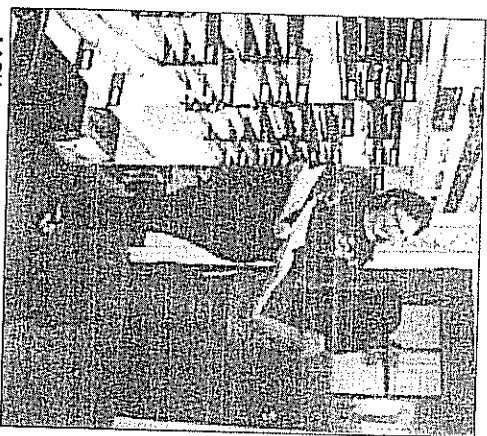
## "And you may ask yourself—well... how did I get here?"

The song's opening question helps me focus on the history of our writing center. The Department of Languages, Literature, and Dramatic Arts at Armstrong State College began offering tutorial services for basic writers in June 1981. Volunteer faculty and graduate students scheduled tutorials in an unused windowless office equipped with one table, eight chairs, and a bookcase with several donated grammar handbooks. Founder and initial director Richard



AASU tutors using Writing Center computers

Nordquist had big plans for the little place. Its mission would be to supply, in addition to remedial writing services, (a) "individualized and group instruction in English as a Second Language," (b) "tutoring for those students having difficulties in the English core courses," (c) "advice and assistance for students engaged in writing and



AASU tutors discuss resources

## "Letting the days go by"

As the Talking Heads' character acknowledges the passing of time, so do I reflect on the changes that have taken place here since the early 80s. As a member of The University System of Georgia, ASC has been renamed Armstrong Atlantic State University. LLDA has evolved into the Languages, Literature, and Philosophy Department. Semesters have replaced quarters. And the writing center has changed, both in its mission and its operations. The original mission has become one of promoting the development of a community of writers. We now resist the idea that our services exist only for remedial or ESL writers; instead, we want writers at all levels of proficiency to feel comfortable working in the center, and we welcome opportunities to offer feedback and support at every stage of the writing process. Our facility has expanded in keeping with our mission for, in contrast to the early days, the current center is staffed with twelve to sixteen compensated tutors, occupies four rooms, operates full time, and accommodates numerous individual and group tutorials. After you check out the "By the Numbers" inset and compare the numbers, I think you'll agree with me that the center strives to make the most of its time.

## "Same is it ever was"

In the Talking Heads' tune, the main character considers the equivocal nature of stasis, which sometimes indicates unhealthy stagnation and sometimes healthy stability. One thing that has stayed the same about our center is its physical location in Gamble Hall, home to LLP, International Studies, and Information Technology. The writing center is situated in the middle of the ground floor,

research projects," and (d) "advice and assistance for faculty members who are planning writing assignments." Within two years, the fledgling operation was formally recognized by college administrators as a writing center and quickly proved its worth. With a budget of less than three hundred dollars and a schedule of fewer than twenty hours per week, five unpaid tutors worked in a single room to provide over 230 tutorial sessions, most dealing with core composition assignments, Regents' exam preparation, and research assistance—during the center's first official academic quarter.

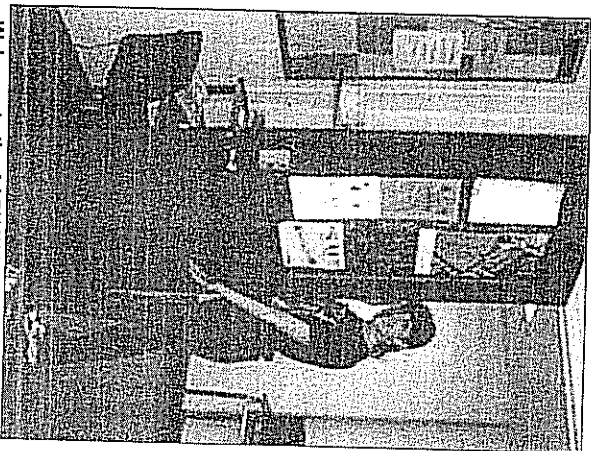


and the facility is accessed through a single door that has been painted royal blue so that students can easily find it. The center's location has increased its accessibility to its main group of clients—students taking English classes—and its strongest supporters—professors teaching English classes.

Let me briefly digress and describe our center, which is packed. Facing the main door is a massive walnut reception desk, where a tutor greets patrons.

Near the reception desk is additional seating, a whiteboard on which to record appointments, and a long bookcase filled with tutoring resources. The walls are lined with oversized bookcases, reference shelves, campus bulletin boards, a campus phone, an oversized dictionary stand, twelve computer desks, and a laser jet printer station. A path runs between these furnishings and six study cubicles, each with a round table surrounded by a few chairs and occupying the central area of the room. Two doors on the north wall connect this large room to a smaller open one with a sofa area, typewriter station, and thirteen additional computer desks. Opposing doors on the south wall connect the large room to a director's office and tutors' lounge. Large windows, six feet high and three feet wide, let in plenty of natural light. Ivy plants and student art soften the worn appearance of the horsehair carpet and swivel computer chairs, and visitors can enjoy the quips and poems posted on the tutor spotlight board.

The center is not in danger of becoming stagnant. The administration tells us that within five years, Gamble Hall will be renovated and a library annex built and that, after the dust settles, the center will be allocated two sites, a home base in Gamble and a satellite space in the library. The renovation-construction period and beyond will be difficult. Moving is always stressful, not to mention learning how best to administer a multi-center. Frankly, we're enjoying our current stability, knowing that the tides of change will soon sweep us somewhere else.



Welcome to the AASU Writing Center

### By the Numbers

Armstrong Atlantic State University: a state-supported, liberal arts institution of approximately 5,250 undergraduates and 1,550 graduates

**Director:** Deborah H. Reese, PhD (ten years)

**Consultants:** one graduate assistant, as well as ten to fifteen undergraduate tutors, from across the disciplines

**Student visits:** in 2007-2008, approximately 2,800 individual and group half-hour appointments, plus over 6,000 computer use sessions

**Operating schedule:** forty-six hours, six days per week

**Recruitment of consultants:** through faculty members campus-wide

### "What is that beautiful house?... Where does that highway go?... Am I right? Am I wrong?"

These are the kinds of questions that prompt patrons to visit our writing center. Working with a consultant—asking a fresh set of eyes, a fresh set of ears, for opinions and feedback—helps writers to build papers, phrase ideas, map thoughts, evaluate imagery, corroborate connections, and polish drafts. AASU's consultants are peer undergraduate tutors selected for the quality of their compositions, dependability, and collegiality. Newly hired tutors prepare for sessions by completing a rigorous training regimen that begins by introducing them to Stephen North's "The Idea of a Writing Center" and concludes with several intense grammar quizzes, and all tutors participate in regular weekly training sessions. Moreover, tutors promote the center and further its mission by, among other activities, hosting open houses, holding fundraisers, creating reference handouts, maintaining our website at <http://www.write.armstrong.edu>, and preparing a presentation for the SWCA's annual conference. Their end-goal is to help clients find the special satisfaction that only comes from writing and writing well. Such satisfaction is so worth the effort that we want our clients to experience it more than "once in a lifetime." ✨

# What's the Point? Notes on Doctors' Errors

By Peter M. Carriere

We who work with student papers expect errors. Furthermore, we tend to differentiate between student writing, which we expect to be full of errors, and the writing of professionals, which we expect to be error-free. It's a sad commentary on our own professionalism, I think. It turns out, though, that professionals make linguistic mistakes, too. And some of their mistakes surpass the most egregious errors of students.

A few years ago the wife of a colleague of mine, who happened to be a nurse, brought home a series of "Doctor's Notes on Patient's [sic] Charts: (Actual Notes Unedited)." If you think student errors are knee-slappers, you'll fall off your chair at some of these! Oh, those unguarded moments!

So here we go.

How about the doctor who observed a "large brown stool ambulating in the hall"? What in the world could this doctor have been trying to say? Is "ambulating" the problem, or "stool"? I'm guessing "stool," since the kind of stool we sit on--errr, the kind we use as a chair--could indeed "ambulate" down the hall, whereas the other kind... well, never mind.



Peter Carriere

Here's a note that provides absolute evidence of life after death: "The patient refused an autopsy." Isn't it a marvel how, even in hurried off-the-cuff notes we can solve the monumental mysteries of the universe if it hadn't been for the diligent soul who collected these gems, we would still be wondering about life after death.

Another note along the same lines reports that "the patient has no past history of suicides." Which is good to know, because if he did, Buddhism might get a leg up on Christianity.

This unfortunate MD could not make up his mind: "The skin was moist and dry." Well, which is it? Moist? Or dry? Please! We want to know. Please tells us. Is it moist, or dry? It can't be both. Which is it!!!!

Here's a similar note: "Occasional, constant, infrequent headaches." And here's another: "Patient was alert and unresponsive." Couldn't they just choose one? ONE! ONE! CHOOSE ONE!!!!

I hope this next entry does not suggest a truly sad case of physical abnormality: "Rectal exam revealed a normal size thyroid." Really? I wonder what else is revealed? And what in the world does the throat look like, for heaven's sake?

At least this next note suggests that the patient is going to be fine: "She was numb from her toes down." That's great! She's basically numb-free! I hope she was promptly discharged.

Context can be everything, of course. Think hospital and two doctors communicating, and the next note is kind of okay. Otherwise... well, here it is: "Between you and me, we ought to be able to get this lady pregnant."

Those elusive discourse communities! How they set us up for ridicule. Here's a note in a similar vein: think hospital, think hospital: "The pelvic examination will be done later on the floor."

Here's a genuine usage error that's much more serious than any my students have ever made: "Exam of genitalia reveals that he is circus sized." It's amazing what transformations take place under the big top.

Beware of lab tests. I, for one, never realized that lab tests have been created to deal with human relationships until I read this one: "The lab test indicated abnormal lover function." Really now! Do we need a lab test for abnormal lover function. I really and truly believe I could discern it on my own. And what's next? A lab test for jealousy, joy, boredom?

Choice can be everything, as this note suggests: "The patient was to have a bowel resection. However, he took a job as a stockbroker instead." I'm glad I've never had to choose between these two procedures!

"What's the Point?" continued on page 13

# Southwestern Writing Center Association Awards

By Jill Frey, Presbyterian College

The Southwestern Writing Center Association is accepting nominations for the 2009 Achievement Award and Tutor Award. These awards are presented annually to outstanding members of the SWCA community, and each winner will receive a plaque and \$250 at the SWCA conference in Greensboro, NC, February 26-28, 2009.

Nominees must be currently working in a writing center in the SWCA region and be a member of the organization. The Achievement Award recognizes the outstanding work of a writing center director or supervisor to SWCA, a particular center, and the writing center community at large. The Tutor Award recognizes leadership, commitment, and overall excellence of a student (graduate or undergraduate) or staff member working in an SWCA writing center.

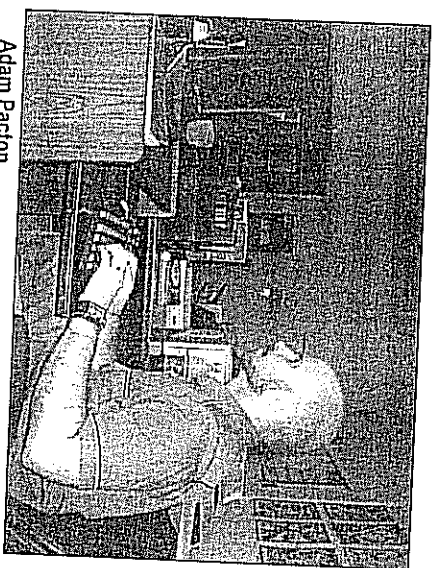
Writing center directors, administrators, staff members, or tutors may nominate a colleague for either award by forwarding the name, award, institution, address, phone, and email of the nominee to Jill Frey, Awards Committee Chair, by 1 November 2008 at [jimfrey@presby.edu](mailto:jimfrey@presby.edu). Self-nominations are also accepted. The nominee will be asked to submit an application packet by 1 December 2008. ✎

## SWCA Mission Statement

The Southwestern Writing Center Association (SWCA) was founded in 1981 to advance literacy, to further the theoretical, practical, and political concerns of writing center professionals; and to serve as a forum for the writing concerns of students, faculty, staff, and writing professionals from both academic and nonacademic communities in the Southwestern region of the United States. A member of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), an NCTE Assembly, the SWCA includes in its designated region North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Puerto Rico, and the American Virgin Islands. Membership in the SWCA is open to public and private secondary schools, community colleges, colleges and universities, and to individuals and institutions from beyond the Southwestern region. Adopted by the SWCA Executive Board 31 May 2003.

"Bringing Socrates" continued from page 3

this method obviates editing. Since tutees are asked to find the errors (with some minor prompting), tutors will not simply circle or correct grammatical mistakes—the pen stays in the tutee's hand. In short, even with grammar issues, the Socratic method forces tutors to consistently operate within the limited authority that their positions as peer consultants presuppose. Cheered by my success in explaining the Socratic method and countering objections, I decided to implement the method in my sessions and encourage other tutors to do the same.



Adam Paction

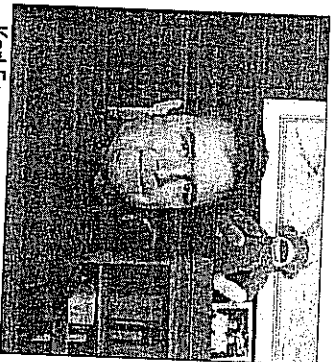
I expected recalcitrance and the eventual abandonment of the method when I first asked tutors to use it—there were only a few weeks left in the semester, and I was sure that most tutors would be unwilling to change how they ran sessions so late in the game. I also expected frustration from students as they brought in term papers and expected quick-fixes. Predictably, most of the tutors chose not to change so close to the end of the term. To my surprise and delight, however, in those instances where the method was consistently applied, tutors and tutees were both happy with the outcomes of their sessions. Those of us who applied the method had an objective, clear-cut means of staying true to our positions as peer consultants. More important, students were acquiring a greater sense of ownership with their work. If a student is forced to confront his or her work dialogically and answer his or her own questions, then he or she becomes the ostensible seat of authority in a tutoring session—the tutor is no longer a surrogate teacher, but merely a prompter. The confidence that this inspires, and the feeling of growth that these students feel, speak volumes for the value and efficacy of this method.

As I write this, I continue to refine my use of the Socratic method in my summer tutoring sessions. While consistent application of the method can be frustrating at times (for tutors and tutees), the pay-offs for everyone involved are well worth the short-term inconveniences. For the first time, I feel comfortable and assured in my role as peer consultant, and my tutees feel greater responsibility for, and pride in, their work. ✎

# Popcorn and Newsreels: Just Words II

By Karl Fornes, University of South Carolina Aiken

I was going to be on television. This time, though, I wouldn't be in the background of the Buffalo International Airport frantically waving a "Norwood Nation" placard as my Buffalo Bills boarded a plane for Tampa Bay and what would become Super Bowl destiny. That was 1990. Kid stuff. This time, well, it was still local news, but this time I would be the focus, just me and the reporter talking seriously about plagiarism and the internet. I was now a scholar, a public intellectual.



Karl Fornes

Years ago, I was working into the evening in the writing center when I received a phone call from our university's director of public information. A television news crew was on campus looking for someone to talk about Turnitin.com, a new online plagiarism detection service that has since become rather popular. The vice chancellor for academic affairs was out of town and recommended that they speak with me because I had reviewed the service several months earlier, when it was plagiarism.org. Hesitant at first, I warmed up to the idea quickly. I was to be on the WJBF NewsChannel 6 11 p.m. evening broadcast strutting my stuff about this whole technology and plagiarism thing. I studied this; I had extended conversations with colleagues about this; I presented at conferences about this. I was ready to roll!

I met the reporter, Chip Creamer, in the writing center and, with the camera rolling, we discussed at length the complexities of plagiarism, intellectual property, academic voice, negotiating source material, the internet and knowledge, the intricacies of detection software, etc. At one point, Chip, by now a personal friend, asked specifically about Turnitin.com. I explained that I wasn't absolutely sure but I thought the software used a web crawler, also known as a spider, to identify and match text. After twenty minutes or so of my talking and Chip's constant nodding, he indicated that the crew had enough material, shook my hand, and told me to watch at 11 p.m.

He didn't need to remind me. I was excited to be on television for something other than flailing wildly behind a sportscaster. I was actually going to sound smart and engage in the sort of discussion I do for a living. I called my parents and promised a videotape and called my friends to tell them to tune in. Jennifer and I popped some corn, cracked a beverage, slapped a tape in the VCR, started recording, and settled in for some news.

My story opened the local news segment. Chip began with a missive about how students are plagiarizing more and the internet is to blame. Then, he talked to people who said that students are plagiarizing more and the internet is to blame. Then, he talked to school administrators who said that students are plagiarizing more and the internet is to blame. Then, he told us in no uncertain terms that students are plagiarizing more and the internet is to blame. I watched patiently with my popcorn, knowing my discussion was going to complicate this whole matter in just a few seconds.

The camera cut to Chip standing in the writing center, and there I was, standing smartly by a computer terminal. Chip made a turn toward me as I began my scholarly yet somehow spontaneous discussion of plagiarism and its associated complexities when something went horribly wrong. My mouth was moving but Chip was talking. Chip had edited my masterpiece of articulation with a voice-over of him introducing Turnitin.com and its many wonders. Then, just as suddenly, the video clipped away to me in front of a computer terminal, my arm wagging pointlessly at a screen behind and muttering my only words of the broadcast: "They put spiders on the web."

And it was over. The phone was still ringing as I closed the bedroom door, too weak to listen to my friends' good-natured jibes.

Since then, I have had some trouble with the direction of my seething hatred. Should it be Mr. Creamer, the local reporter who I have not heard or seen since, or Turnitin.com, a company that has since grown into a corporation called iParadigms that preys on plagiarism paranoia at the expense of students and teaching? Frankly, I'm still leaning to Mr. Creamer, but, for our purposes, I will discuss Turnitin.com here.

So, try as I might to be fair and polite and mature, I have directed my hatred (or, for my mom's sake, my "intense dislike") to Turnitin.com. Others have articulated better than I can some of the problems associated with plagiarism detection software: the student intellectual property issues, the troubling lack of student authority, the "guilty-until-proven-innocent" implication, etc. (CCCC-IP,

Carbone) Sure. I have a problem with all that stuff. Ultimately, though, what I intensely dislike about Turnitin.com is its use of technology to mediate the central relationship of the writing classroom--the relationship between teacher and student and text. Turnitin.com, by its very nature, interferes with that relationship. What's more, it approaches complicated issues such as plagiarism and ownership and reduces those issues in a way that denies student authority. What's more, I dislike them intensely even after they offered me money. Yep. Despite my review, our campus eventually purchased a Turnitin.com license. The account I created included my email address and, this May, the company's vice president of marketing invited me to apply for a "grant" to cover my expenses at the Conference on College Composition and Communication if I develop a paper "related to the use of any Turnitin.com services" (Pavejsil). Of course, Turnitin.com would decide whether or not I received the grant, after they reviewed the paper proposal. An Inside Higher Ed article quotes Turnitin.com's vice president for marketing as saying the grant offers were sent to professors because at some conferences people "just hear the negative" (Jaschik).

I started drafting a proposal, but I stopped myself. After all, they put spiders on the web. 

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

Cures are not always preferable, it seems. This note suggests that continuing with the problem might have been a better thing to have done: "On the 2nd day the knee was better and on the 3rd it disappeared completely." Please, please, please! Can I have my knee back? What did you do with it? Have you checked that closet over there?


I don't know about you, but I know what the problem with this patient was: "Patient has left his white blood cells at another hospital." Just one lapse of memory and you wind up in a hospital needing an immediate blood transfusion!

Some doctors never seem to generate true rapport with their patients. Here's a note from one: "The patient has been depressed ever since she began seeing me in 1993." You'd think the patient would have transferred to another doctor by now, so she only has herself to blame.

Of course, doctors deal with life and death situations often, so they can be forgiven for not being linguistically alert. Nevertheless, I think they may take their responsibilities a bit too seriously--at least that's what this note implies: "Discharge status: Alive but without permission." I'm glad the patient is still alive, permission or not!

There are some things doctors really don't need to know, especially when patients are innocently answering questions about their past health problems. Unlike this lady, we need to be alert to personal probing: "She stated that she had been constipated for most of her life, until she got a divorce." So that's the cure! I've always wondered.

When in doubt about correct medical procedures, revert to home remedies like this doctor did: "Patient was seen in consultation by Dr. \_\_\_\_\_, who felt we should sit on the abdomen and I agree."

Okay, so is this writing important? Were these notes significant and necessary? I think so. Why, then were they not more carefully scrutinized for errors? And why do we take it upon ourselves to dredge our students' papers for errors when we should be reading for content? What was important in the doctors' notes was content, not correctness. Because if we don't read for content, what's the point? 

# President's Letter

## Time for Reading: Getting to Know Our Students and Ourselves through Books

By Beth Burmester,  
Georgia State University

This semester, as most fall semesters, I am teaching Composition Pedagogy to first semester graduate students. To begin the semester, I asked my students to write a sentence about what they like best about "the first day," and I intended this writing as both an icebreaker and a framework to give them ideas about how to teach their own first day of class. Stephanie Horton wrote the following: "I like taking my first read-through the syllabus and dipping my toes into the pool of ideas; I like seeing what everybody looks like, who they are, where they come from and why they are here; and I really like going to the bookstore and adding to my already ridiculously excessive library, and then plunging into the reading!" Her words inspire me with their enthusiasm for beginnings, with the anticipation of developing relationships with others—through personal presence and by responding to texts—and with the obvious admission of the pleasure of reading. (And in the summery days of August and September, I relish the swimming metaphor she invokes.)

I also ask my students to keep "time diaries," of how their school days divide into public and private time, school time, and other required daily activities (Nathan 32). Responding to Anne Ellen Geller's article "Tick-Tock, Next," they draw two versions of a "Time Pie," first showing "fungible time" and then imagining "epochal time." For the fungible representation, they fill in a blank circle with how they spend a typical day, using what Jane Tompkins identifies as, "time divided into segments into which activities can be fit" (204). According to Elaine Showalter, "Novels about professors are set in academic time, which is organized and compartmentalized according to various grids and calendars, vacations and rituals" (7), which we found is true in everyday academic life for



Beth Burmester

students, too. "A focus on people," psychologist Robert Levine tells us, "is often at odds with a tempo dictated by schedules and the time on the clock" (qtd. in Geller 9). The loss of social connections and relationships is a clear disadvantage for over-scheduled students and faculty, but even more, this kind of institutional time too frequently leaves out any time for self-reflection, or self-initiated learning outside existing commitments. And it certainly omits the chance to share experiences and talk through them with others. In writing centers, this might be most obvious when the schedules of some staff members never overlap, or tutors have no time between or after sessions to talk about what they do with each other.

The second circle my students draw, then invites them to use "epochal time"—illustrating how they would spend an ideal day without worrying about time allotments, deadlines, or "fitting" in everything they think they have to do. Most of the students added "writing for myself" and "pleasure reading" as pieces of their epochal time pies. All of them added larger sections devoted to spending time together with friends and family. Keeping these results in mind, as well as Stephanie's vision for beginnings, I felt a strong desire to construct an autumnal opportunity for our SWCA community to share a piece of epochal time and suggest a reading list that might inspire conversations among students and writing center directors across campuses and across our region. Thus I offer here a stack of books that present both pleasure reading and a chance to explore our teaching practices and writing practices vicariously through fiction and ethnography. It's no secret that we learn through stories: by hearing stories and by being storytellers. Making discoveries about ourselves and others through reading, and then talking those ideas and impressions into being is central to critical thinking and becoming a part of a community. The best reading lists incorporate old favorites with recent discoveries, and by being read together offer new insights and juxtapositions that might not otherwise rise to the surface. I have selected the following six texts, grouped into pairs, as a starting point. I hope that throughout the semester and this academic year, each of you will contribute more titles to the list and share the threads of conversations that reading together creates.

I have to start with my undisputed favorite book, Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* (1989), which in addition to being a memoir and literacy narrative, has marvelous stories of one-on-one teaching across a variety of educational settings, but most notably the writing center that Rose established in the early 1980s at UCLA. It is a compelling read for the students' lives it describes as well as the experiences illustrating theory and practice for teaching writing in public education. I pair this with an ethnography by Wall Street Journal reporter Ron Suskind, *A Hope in the Unseen* (1998), follows Cedric Jennings,

the valdetricorian of his inner-city high school in D.C., from his junior year through college admissions and his freshman year at Brown University. Despite the odds, he encounters a number of individuals who guide him toward success. (In fact, he went on to graduate with a major in Education and a minor in Applied Math, and received his Masters of Education from Harvard in 2002. In 2004, he was working on a second masters degree in Sociology at the University of Michigan—an educational path quite similar to that chosen earlier by Mike Rose.) Cedric is an “under-prepared” college student, and the book poignantly shows his awareness of how he compares with other students, as well as his strategies to succeed. Both books create a rich foundation for empathy and identification with the frustrations and complex lives of undergraduates outside the classroom or writing center, as well as insight into best teaching approaches.

Another ethnography, though vastly different in its approach to understanding first year students, comes from an Anthropology professor who uses her sabbatical year to study alongside the students she usually stands in front of. Writing under the pen name Rebekah Nathan, Professor Cathy Small teaches at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, and her study *My Freshman Year* (2005) offers observations and analysis of who freshmen are, and what they find most important during the 2002 academic year. Her most intriguing, and problematic, findings are that university-wide attempts at valuing difference and creating community are not working. ZZ Packer’s brilliant short story, “Drinking Coffee Elsewhere” (2000), illustrates the privileging of private lives over public ones, and the failures of community and diversity that Nathan documented, but moves it to Yale University. The story reveals the significance of relationships, and the difficulty of surviving that first year, with unforgettable characters in Dina and Heidi. Ultimately, as *The New York Times* book review by Jean Thompson relates, the dramatic tension surrounds identity: “a struggle for the self to make its presence felt in the world.” For Dina, this is downright dangerous. Like Cedric, the stellar student in *A Hope in the Unseen*,” Dina finds herself without peers, but unlike Cedric, she resists fitting in, or buying in to the university’s institutional expectations. It’s a haunting and enigmatic story, and one that spurs lots of discussion every time I teach it.

Finally, I offer two stories that address plagiarism and teacher identities. May Sarton’s novel, *The Small Room* (1961), chronicles the first year of teaching for Lucy Winter, newly minted Ph.D. The novel captures the separate community workings of faculty, and of students, and is full of scenes built around conversations. Lucy conferences with students and rants about bad writing in her classroom. She is proud of her performance, and regrets things she said; she loves teaching, and wonders if she should never teach again. At the heart of the plot is her discovery of a prize student’s plagiarism, and the

subsequent fallout and consequences this brings about. All the characters are multi-faceted with their intelligence and emotions, making for a page-turning reading experience, with much to gain by exploring academic ethics, and the human realities of achievements and failures as they are perceived by students and administrators. How teachers’ lives connect or remain detached from what they teach is vividly explored in Richard Russo’s short story, “The Horseman.” Janet Moore is a teacher of composition, with heavy memories of herself as a graduate student. The story starts with her confronting a plagiarizing student, and then follows her journey to an epiphany about herself as a writer and teacher. Her intellectual relationship with a professor in her graduate education, one she rejected at the time but comes to fully appreciate in the course of this trying day, provides the fulcrum by which she is able to evaluate her life and her teaching. Janet and Lucy share self-doubts about their teaching, yet by talking with others, come to see the art of teaching in terms of how it makes them more fully human.

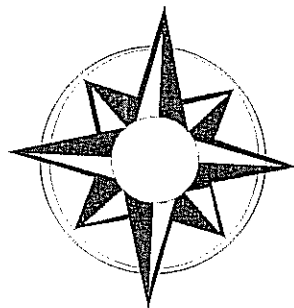
All of these readings emphasize the importance of one-to-one teaching moments and talking with others, which form the center of writing center philosophy. I hope this reading list—and a welcoming cup of coffee, tea, or hot chocolate—will provide similarly edifying moments for all of you. ✨

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