

# Southern Discourse

Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



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# Southern Discourse

Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



March 1998

Volume 1, No. 1



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

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# A Note from the Editor: Apologies to Isaac Newton



## Christine Cozzens, Agnes Scott College

When I edited my first issue of *SD* in March 1998 and wrote my first “Note,” I was also the outgoing president of the SWCA. Lest I be suspected of totalitarian tendencies, in my “President’s Letter” of that issue I assured the membership that future issues of the newsletter would “fully reflect the broader membership of the SWCA.” I hope that has been the case—it has certainly been my goal as editor. In this my last issue, I have indulged myself by also contributing an article for the first time, a history of the newsletter/publication/journal that I now pass on with great confidence and contentment to Sara Littlejohn and her team at UNC Greensboro.

This issue departs from the traditions and subject matter of the past seventeen years by exploring and celebrating the history not only of *SD*, but of the SWCA and its founders and supporters through the years. Gary Olson, Tom Waldrep, Loretta Cobb, and Peggy Jolly were all there at the very first meeting on February 7, 1981 and are here in these pages, telling their stories. Pat Bizzaro, Jenna Wright, Bonnie Devet, Phillip Gardner, Kirsten Benson and Glenda Conway came along shortly thereafter, contributing their ideas and energy to the organization and now their stories to this issue. The next generation is represented by our longtime columnists Pete Carriere, Pamela Childers, and Karl Fornes; they conclude their *SD* legacies with retrospective essays.

I tried to locate a number of other SWCA stalwarts, hoping to get their contributions, but even in this age of email and Google, many were not locatable. Named or unnamed, they, too, are present in this history issue and in the story of this great and important organization. I want to end my last “Note” by thanking SWCA members and friends, past and present, who have enriched my professional and personal lives, supporting me as a writing center professional and as editor of *Southern Discourse*. As has been said so many times before, we stand on the shoulders of giants.

# “Mutual Support” Was Founding Value of the SWCA: *Southern Discourse* Interviews SWCA Founder Gary A. Olson

*Gary A. Olson has started rhetoric programs and writings centers at several institutions and written numerous books and articles on rhetoric, higher education, technology and rhetoric, and writing centers. He is currently president of Daemen College in Amherst, NY. In 1980 as a new assistant professor at the University of Alabama Tuscaloosa, Olson got the idea to put on a writing center conference and found an organization to go with it, the Southeastern Writing Center Association, founded in 1981. He was the first president of the SWCA and organized its first two annual conferences. *Southern Discourse* interviewed Gary in July 2013 about the early days of the SWCA.*

SD: Where did the idea for forming the SWCA come from?

GO: I finished my dissertation at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in 1980. The year that I was finishing—the end of 1979 or beginning of 1980—I attended the second conference of the first writing regional in the northeast, the first one in the country [what is now called the East Central Writing Centers Association, founded in 1979, see Kinkead 133]. I gave my very first paper at that conference. And I came back thinking to myself, as I was getting ready to take my first job at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, what a great service it was to have a regional conference, and there is no such thing in the south. Why don't I do this? At Alabama I approached my chair and said if I organized a conference and used the conference to set up an organization, would you give me just a little bit of funding, and she was more than willing to do that, because in those days colleges actually had money.

SD: How was the first conference organized?

G: I went about calling people and mailed a “call for papers” to center directors throughout the south. We really put together a great lineup of people for a nice intimate program. The first conference was held in February 1981. There were about fifty

or sixty people. It was composed of all plenary sessions. That's one of the reasons why it was intimate—everybody heard everybody's paper. It was one day with lunch in the middle. Everyone had a really good time.

SD: So how did the organization itself come into being?

GO: I remember the room where the first two conferences were: it was a nice modern kind of room in one of the nicer buildings on campus. It had tiers on three sides with long table desks and chairs. The fourth side had a podium. I remember standing there at the end of the conference and saying, “Hey before you all leave, I've got this idea, let me tell you about it. . . .”

I had talked to Tom Waldrep beforehand because I didn't want to be the only one out there, and he agreed it was a great idea. I said to the group that we could create an organization just like the one up north, and I asked everyone if they thought that my idea to have an organization and a conference every year and eventually a newsletter was a good one. The group really liked it. I said at the time, now we do have an alternative: rather than proclaim ourselves the southeastern writing center association, we could proclaim ourselves to be the national writing center association [the national organization did not come into being until 1982]. But the group thought that this was way too ambitious and that it was more appropriate to create the southeastern regional. Now, it turns out that proclaiming the national organization was probably the better thing to do, but we proclaimed ourselves the Southeastern Writing Center Association; we were the second of the regional associations to form after the group that is now called the ECWCA. We decided on the name SWCA at that first meeting. Let's do this, we said. It was all very informal but collegial.



Courtesy of Gary A. Olson

The group assembled in Tuscaloosa decided to name me president. We had volunteers for the other offices, which they also agreed on. Tom Waldrep was vice president. I think we had a secretary and a treasurer. The executive board and the organization itself grew out of the conference. We all got to know each other very well over the next two years, and so the beginning of the writing center association was a very tight knit group. Everybody liked one another, and we really felt that we had mutual support. That was the beginnings of it.

SD: So you organized the first two conferences, both in Tuscaloosa?

GO: The very next year we had the second annual conference at Tuscaloosa, also in February. We really pulled in some very good people from other states. We had some good people in those two years: Stephen North, Tillie (Eggers) Warnock, Peggy Jolly, Tom Waldrep, Tom Nash, Loretta Cobb. We published proceedings of the conferences, and each of the members got a copy. Some of their papers ended up in the book I did a few years later.

I said in the beginning I'd do the conference for the first two years—we didn't know if there would be other schools that would support conferences. And we agreed that after the first two years, the conference would move around if other schools would support it.

SD: After being president of the SWCA for two years and managing those first two conferences, how did your role in the organization develop?

GO: At that second conference, I said to the group, I don't believe in being president of anything for life. I would like to pass it on to someone else. I nominated Tom Waldrep, who was very active from the beginning. When I first told him about my idea, he was one of the very most enthusiastic; he was a real supporter from day one. At the second conference I suggested that the group make him president—he was the perfect person to do it—and I offered to serve one year as vice president for continuity, and then I would fade out to make room for other people. They agreed.

I also said I would do a little in-house newsletter. And we did, for three years we produced a little newsletter. We called it the "SWCA Newsletter." It was a little mim-

eographed thing and had news items about some of the writing center activities going on around the region. The early newsletter was on bright yellow paper, a stapled thing of several pages. We had a homemade logo; it was not very attractive—sort of a bold S, W, C, A. This was before desktop computers. Most of it was typed with true cut and paste. No computers. Mostly print. The newsletter published ideas and news about what the centers were doing, what was going on with individuals, lots of ideas. We kept in touch through that and through occasional phone calls. Everything else was done by formal letter. The proceedings were duplicated on a high-speed copier and stapled with a tape binding to cover the staples. They weren't bad looking! They had a cover made of good cover stock with the title page reproduced on the front cover.

SD: Looking back, what was the importance of forming a regional writing center organization at that time?

GO: The early SWCA was very intimate group, and it really helped what I wanted to do, which was to professionalize writing center work. Writing center people were always third class citizens, they were associated with remediation, and they weren't thought of as scholarly or involved in scholarly activities. I wanted to change all that, because this was the time when the composition movement was just starting to come into its own, and writing centers were kind of a subset of that; even some of the composition people didn't think of writing centers in the same light. So I really wanted to help push to a new level of respectability, and there was a bunch of us who wanted to do that.

That was a few years after the Writing Lab Newsletter started (1977) and in and around the time when the Writing Center Journal was founded (1980). There was a lot of new positive energy about writing centers. Thom Hawkins's book [Improving Writing Skills. New Directions for College Learning Assistance, 1981] had come out; my book [Writing Centers: Theory and Administration, 1984] came out; Muriel Harris's book [Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference 1986] was coming out. Other regional associations had started following ours in the south. More and more books started getting published about writing center activities. From that point onward, what I had envisioned really did happen. Writing centers really did come into their own. Writing centers were taking on a whole new face. The Writing Center Journal gave us a forum for regular scholarship, and the new books that started coming gave us a level of

In the preface to the first Proceedings of the Southeastern Writing Center Conference, founder and editor Gary Olson wrote,

"If the First Annual Southeastern Writing Center Conference is any indication, the newly founded Southeastern Writing Center Association will grow to be strong organization. Repeatedly since the conference, people have congratulated me on the high quality of the papers presented at the meeting. The typical comment has been: 'Never have I heard such a high proportion of excellent papers in one sitting.' Well, congratulations are not due to me, but to the authors of the eleven papers presented at the conference."

professionalism that writing centers did not have prior to that time.

SD: What were some of the challenges the SWCA faced in its early days?

GO: The main challenge was the low esteem that the rest of the academic world had for writing. One of the reasons why the SWCA was so successful so quickly was that we all supported one another, we all liked one another, we understood each other, we gave each other support, and we helped reinforce one another in believing that what

In the preface to the second Proceedings of the Southeastern Writing Center Conference, Olson wrote,

“Clearly, the Southeastern Writing Center Association is growing to be a strong organization with national representation. The second annual conference, held on February 6, 1982, featured presenters from nine states. The paper topics were as diverse as the types of writing centers these speakers represent.”

we were doing was not in vain. And we traded information. I remember that at that first conference we set up tables, and everybody put out their advertising materials, tutorial forms, anything and everything that they had, so that we could share them. Some were quite interesting and innovative. This way we got to benefit from each other. We copied each other and in certain ways tried to outdo one another—in a good

way. That mutual support was so important. Another challenge was trying to get over seeing ourselves only as a service, and instead, trying to see ourselves as scholars.

SD: What influence did founding the SWCA have on your career?

GO: I immediately was considered to be productive by normal university standards because I was only in my first year and I had put together a conference, published the proceedings, the newsletter, and shortly thereafter, the book. So it catapulted me in a certain way faster than I expected. That’s not the reason why I wanted to do it; I wanted to do it—hold a conference, get the organization going—because I loved the idea of what was going on up north and knew that is was a good thing to do. And I had a sense that we had to professionalize in order to survive. As you know, writing center people have always been expendable, and you’re less expendable if you can demonstrate that you’re doing scholarship and not just student support.

I’m very proud of what has happened. The SWCA has really come along, I was honored to have the scholarship (Gary A. Olson SWCA Conference Scholarship) named

after me. I’m very supportive of that. Let me put it this way, the organization has done everything I could have ever wanted and more. Now we have a sophisticated conference, we have scholarship, and we even have tutors coming and giving talks. I couldn’t be more pleased to see how well everything has turned out.



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# SWCA and Professional Development in the Late Eighties

Patrick Bizzaro, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Any evidence that 1987 and 1988, in SWCA years, ever existed was promptly lost in late 1987. That leaves the memories of many of us who can't recall where we put our cell phones as the only existing source of information about the year I served as president of SWCA. This is obviously problematic, so I have sought help elsewhere.

I have asked for a little bit of help from my wife, Resa Crane Bizzaro, whose memory is sharp as ever, and I luckily stumbled across a copy of the inaugural issue of *Focuses*, a publication supported tangibly and in principle by the SWCA and voted upon during a meeting in Atlanta in 1986. I want to assert here my belief that the existence of *Focuses* marked a significant moment in the development and forward-thinking of those of us working in writing centers during the early years. We certainly needed a boost in our morale.

Resa helps me recall a dinner party in Charleston where we left the hotel with about ten people but, due to the conversation on the way to Vincenzo's focusing chiefly on the conditions of our work lives, six people dropped out to go back for room service and solitude. This was a significant moment for me as a writing center advocate, because it forced me to consider writing center directorship as a viable career in the mid eighties. Young folks I have worked with over the years who have chosen to do the work of writing center directors will not recall the dismal times when writing centers were closets with handouts on shelves. My first writing center was such a place. But things changed during the eighties for writing center studies, much as they did for composition studies. English departments became more accepting of composition and its support programs, and some even came to see that the future of English studies is linked to the future of writing programs which writing center directors around the world have helped to develop and support.

The issue as we understood it at dinner that night—that is, the four of us remaining and drinking our Chianti a little too fast and nervously—was a lack of respect to writing center directors due to inadequate professionalization of the field. The organization itself was a wonderful start and, because of the hard work of my predecessors as president, the association had developed its *Selected Papers*, which David Roberts and

William Wolff preserved for us by publishing them as ERIC documents. I believe the work of SWCA in achieving a level of professional respectability during the nineteen eighties enabled some people to make tenure and others to at least argue for status as tenure track in the nineties.

A major effort at professionalizing writing center studies during my one-year term as president of SWCA was the association's support of a journal, *Focuses*, to be edited by William Wolff and housed at his home institution, Appalachian State University. The group of us who voted in favor of the journal hoped it would further establish writing center studies as a discipline in English departments and that the journal would fill a gap by more clearly connecting in some tangible way writing center studies to first-year writing.



Patrick Bizzaro (left) received a Fulbright to help the University of the Free State develop a writing center. Pictured with Prof. Jonathan Jansen, Rector of UFS, and Resa Crane Bizzaro.

Wolff wisely subtitled the magazine as "A Journal Linking Composition Programs and Writing-Center Practice." Volume 1, Number 1 (Spring 1988), which I want to briefly address in this short essay, bravely focused on "Rhetoric and Writing in the Nineties" and sought the expertise of Janice M. Lauer, Winifred Bryan Horner, Richard L. Graves, and James C. Raymond in predicting what composition programs might stress in the new decade, how writing might be taught, and how writing centers might come to support that teaching. In the ever-consumed space I have for this essay, let me focus briefly and perhaps incompletely on essays in that inaugural issue by Lauer and Horner. I want to argue for the historical significance of *Focuses* and the vision of its editor, Wolff, in asking renowned stars in composition studies to anticipate what might occur next in the field and how the writing center might contribute to that evolution.


The establishment of a new discipline in any academic field follows a pretty well known path. As we have seen with composition, technical writing, and even creative writing, disciplines are contextualized by scholars to demonstrate their likenesses to

other existing subdisciplines. As composition studies did in the sixties, Wolff sought to connect writing center work with rhetoric. This strategy was successful not only because of the respectability of rhetoric in writing studies as a foundation for teaching but also because the essayists writing for *Focuses* in the mid eighties were well-known figures in composition studies and their participation in a journal devoted to writing center work legitimized that work. This was an excellent decision by Wolff, if a decision not all of us understood at the time.

The strategy employed by both Lauer and Horner, then, begins in the rhetorical tradition, applies principles espoused by Plato and Aristotle to writing instruction, and then argues that writing centers might likewise employ these long-respected theories in efforts to support and even further instruction in writing.

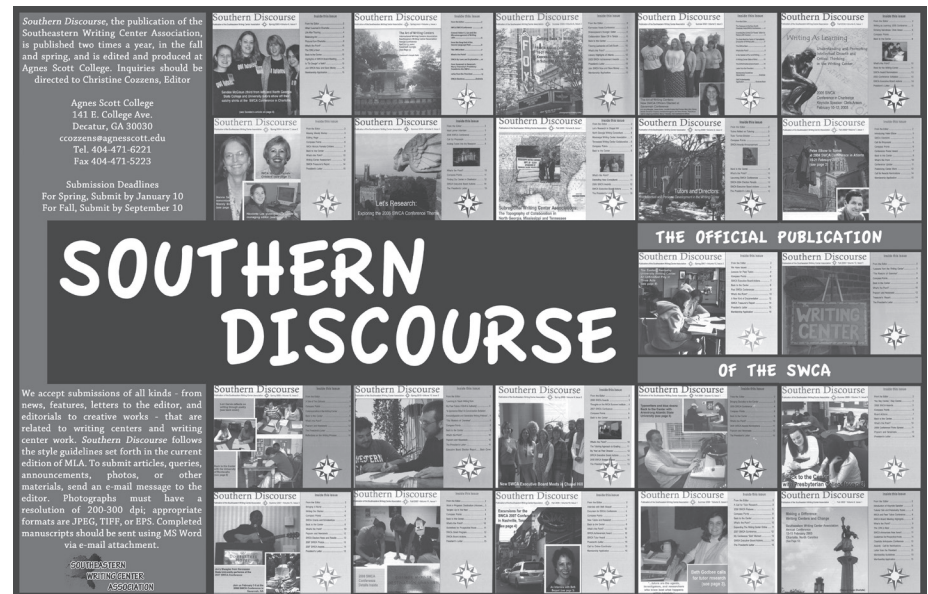
In "Instructional Practices: Toward an Integration," Lauer advocates integrating four pedagogies (roughly akin to those identified by Fulkerson in "Four Philosophies of Composition") to develop "a more stimulating and supportive context in which students can learn to write and write to learn" (3). One of these pedagogies, "teaching writing as an art," did indeed point to the future of composition studies by predicting a creative writing model for teaching composition, a view for which former writing center director Wendy Bishop is best known.

Employing a similar train of thought, Horner offers an insightful discussion of Platonic dialectic in "Dialectic as Invention: Dialogue in the Writing Center." She studies dialectic as a practice useful to writers and teachers in "responding to papers [and] in the one-to-one conferences in the writing center" (11). If not directly indebted to Horner, innovative methods of response such as parallel text response (Bizzaro 1993) and sideshadowing (Welch 1998) employ some version of dialectic in establishing shared discourse relations between students and teachers.

Memories mostly reduced now into an unfocused blur, I do recall with joy my time at SWCA with my friends and colleagues Dave Roberts, Bill Wolff, Tom Waldrep, Janet Fisher, Loretta Cobb, and the late Rick Straub. The professional growth of writing center studies at the critical moment briefly described here is due in large part to the vision of my friends from so long ago. 

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# A Brief Look at SWCA's First Decade

**Loretta Cobb, University of Montevallo (Emerita)**

How grateful I was that you, gentle readers, would care about the SWCA history. It can be sweet for older people to know that as they clean out their desks, often feeling somewhat useless and forgotten at that moment.

What would I have to say after all these years? Riding from Alabama to Maine with my fifteen year old granddaughter and her friend in the back seat, wired with headphones and cell phones. They made pix and sent texts that made them barely separated from their friends who were just an ear away. My progeny tells me smugly and often that she doesn't read as she reads the smart phone glued to her hand. Her mother doesn't answer the phone. She texts. But they love me. I know because we still laugh and sing with the radio and scratch each other's backs. And all of us can write and we keep journals, so everything in communication hasn't changed.



Courtesy of Loretta Cobb

In 1975, I started a tutoring-study skills center at the University of Montevallo that developed into a full time writing center in 1979. I felt completely alone except for the Writing Lab Newsletter. Nobody in my English department felt the way I did about the new program. Though there were those who supported the center, there was not a soul who saw the world of academe from my vantage point. One day, however, a notice came in the mail that Gary Olson was calling for papers for the University of Alabama's (UA) first conference for writing center directors in the southeast. I sent my first paper with fear and trepidation. It was accepted. I carried six or eight tutors so that I could have my travel paid and stayed for the overnight event. I remember feeling that the program was like a banquet where every dish was prepared for me. Peggy Jolly presented, as did Tom Waldrep, who offered to host a conference at the University of South Carolina in the future. We decided to form SWCA with fees of \$1 and hold the second conference at UA again. I was elected treasurer and continued for ten years, which gives me a certain continuity on the board that others didn't really have.

Characters that come to mind are conference directors and officers like Renee Harper, Dabney Hart, Angela Williams, Nancy Fischer, Jim Knox, Janet Fisher, Eric Hobson, Ray Wallace, Ann Higgins, Barry Brunetti, Wilkie Leath, Dave Roberts, Bill Wolff, Tracy Baker, Willa Wolcott, and Tom McLendon. Twila Yates Papay and John Burrows were often accompanied by their spouses who were so supportive they should have been made honorary members. We started out frugally and managed to keep dues low, though we had to raise them eventually.

Gary was a serious, studious leader with charm who got us started and published a book that was a help to us all, *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*. Tom Waldrep also published a number of things early on, including the proceedings of our third conference, which he hosted at the University of South Carolina. Waldrep had charisma and energy. He was just what we needed as our second president. No way was Tom going to do a conference without silver trays laden with grapes, brie, and perfectly chilled wine. I still can see and taste it. Also, we were beginning to give awards and attract excellent speakers. Was that the year Tom got us in free for James Dickey's 60th birthday reading, followed by a belly dancing performance? That evening was a high point for me. I wish we had connected more with creative writing events. In those early years, I think we saw ourselves primarily networking as directors, but more and more we began to bring tutors and other staff as well. I saw that it helped my staff in the same rejuvenating way it helped me to gather and share information and materials. I still remember being shocked in Tuscaloosa to discover that I was doing so much right. But going to a literary reading or to the theater in Atlanta to see the latest play of August Wilson was an extra bonus of enrichment.

As we grew, the board squabbled too much over the bylaws and various publications, it seemed to me. Someone even threatened to bring his lawyer to a meeting. It was heated, passionate at times. I hope the minutes are on record in Louisville. I still have lots of correspondence I'm sending this spring as well as publications. During 1988, with Pat Bizzaro as president, there is a good written record of some of the problems that beset the board. One concern that many of us had was that the new membership would perceive of the board as distant, unavailable. During most times provided for social interaction, we were called to meetings.

My incoming mail folder for the board that year is not nearly as full. Other board members seemed reluctant to handle our conflicts in writing. Not a problem for me, however. I even organized a retreat at a lake cabin in the middle of nowhere and suggested we attend to our take care of our increasing agenda. Too many people were unable to attend to make it worth the time of those who did. I am glad to know that the board has met for planning sessions, etc. since then.

Bizzaro attempted to pinpoint, in a September, 1989 memo, our most pressing matters



and have the board respond in writing. He listed them as follows.

- 1.State representation
- 2.Including among the vice-president's duties coordination of state reps and serving as parliamentarian
- 3.Improving our ties to the National Writing Center Association
- 4.Scrutinizing our publications
- 5.Lowering our annual fees
- 6.Establishing a tax-exempt status
- 7.Reviewing our bylaws
- 8.Enlarging our membership

He also included a list of what others had asked about:

- 1.Minutes from spring meeting
- 2.Membership lists
- 3.Newsletter
- 4.Why we have so many publications
- 5.Dates for spring 1989 meeting
- 6.Nominees for offices
- 7.Nominees for speaker at spring 1989 meeting
- 8.Nominees for award winner for spring 1989 meeting

Pat ended that memo: "It isn't really impossible to do business through the mail. There was a time people actually did business that way." As I ran across that line last night, I wondered what our grandchildren would think—those representatives of the future who take care of a lot of business with their cell phones. Speaking of youth, I can't help but be moved that Pat turned forty-one on December 30 that year and reported almost a month later, "I continue to be 41 in spite of my complaints." Were we all that young? Ever? Perhaps, Bizarro's best suggestion was that the vice-president compile a notebook outlining duties and expectations for the president so that he or she doesn't spend the early months trying to figure out what's going on. I don't remember if that ever materialized.

I also found a copy of a letter of Pat's to David Roberts' university president commending Roberts as a fine president under whose leadership we doubled in size. Throughout my files, I had notes of encouragement and support from other presidents and conference directors. I think every leader tried hard to bring SWCA forward. Particularly, I remember Janet Fisher, our first female president, making calls to keep us all informed. Somehow, we reached our tenth birthday. I was astounded to receive the organization's Award for Outstanding Achievement that year, and I'll never forget the sweetness and sincerity with which Bill Wolff presented it to me. SWCA, in many ways, was like a family. We were so different, but we were all determined to form an organization to encourage scholarship and dedication to professional behavior. What it meant to me, per-

sonally, was a network of hard-working teachers like me who wanted primarily to help our students. Along the way, however, I began to see that it is also important to learn from your colleagues who see the wider picture, who know how to communicate with administrators, to survive in academic circles that move beyond our immediate ones.

Perhaps those conflicts were low points, but some might see them as high points, growing pains. Certainly, the board meetings were made up of dedicated people who were willing to give up mornings before things started, lunch breaks, cocktail hours, etc. to come to agreement about professional matters. One of the things we bounced around awhile was what to name this newsletter, and that investment of time has surely served us well. The title and the excellent editing have made us proud now a quarter of a century.

Not bad. Christine Cozzens was just getting started when I retired. In fact, I believe she was one of those new members we worried about alienating with our "busy-ness." One of my peer tutors and I rode to Williamsburg with Cozzens and her Agnes Scott tutors for one of my last SWCA conferences. Who better to leave a torch to?



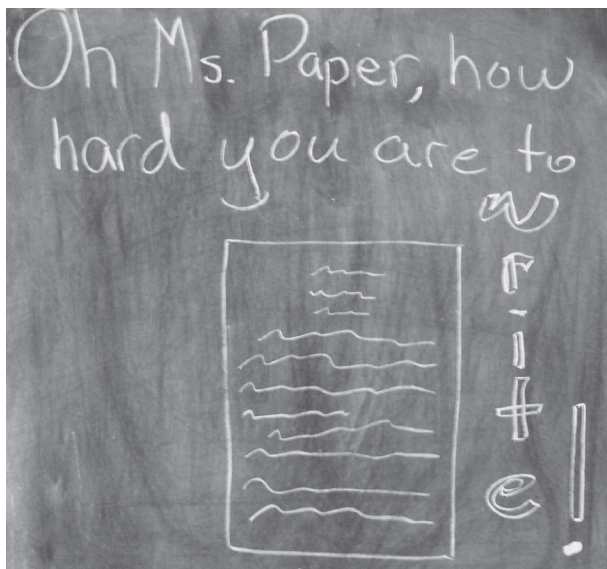
Courtesy of Loretta Cobb

A special quality of SWCA, beyond its dedication to scholarship and excellence, is and has been a kind of southern hospitality that I watched grow from year to year. Would I dare submit this to a feminist editor who has only lived in the South half her life if I weren't deadly serious? From that first frugal repast in Tuscaloosa on a cold Saturday in February where the oak trees hover like matriarchs even on winter days, there was a warmth in the welcome extended to us. Each year, it seemed we found more elegant settings: Columbia, Charleston, Atlanta, Panama City's Bay Point resort, Mobile, Georgetown, Knoxville, Williamsburg, Winter Park. After my retirement, I was lured to Myrtle Beach where Peggy Jolly and I enjoyed seeing snow on the beach before we got snowed in at the Atlanta airport. At a Savannah meeting, I stayed in a beach house on Tybee Island with the University of Montevallo's present director Glenda Conway and her consultants. Always, at every meeting, there was a sense

of camaraderie and a touch of elegance that equaled the excellence of the program. I, for one, think that's a good thing to take back home. Many's the time I called a new friend I had met at SWCA to ask about reporting attendance policies or new confidentiality laws that seemed for a while to multiply daily. Often the women who directed writing centers in the 1980s benefitted from personal chats about balancing careers and families as well. We became a close group.

By the mid-80s, I had developed some stress-related illness like high blood pressure, and I noticed that a number of my regional counterparts suffered similar problems like TMJ. Barry Maid was doing some interesting research with the Myers Briggs Personality Indicator and its effect on the writing process. I hope someone has looked into the kind of personalities who are drawn to this field. I noticed a change as computers became more important and men became more involved during the late 1980s. I wonder if that trend toward the more practical, less maternal director has continued as more and more founders are replaced by successors.

I've been so pleased with the fine work that Glenda Conway has done at the University of Montevallo. She has incorporated more creative writing into her program and has brought great interest and enthusiasm to her composition classes. Her credentials, as well as her hard work, have brought respect to the program. In her hands, the Harbert Writing Center is thriving. Also, Glenda keeps me informed about the progress SWCA has made, which often makes me smile like a proud parent or even grandparent. Life is good. Don't get lost in the middle; it's squabby. And, by the way, check out my collection of short stories, *The Ocean was Salt*. I'm really proud of it as a retirement project. ✨



## Honorable Scallywags and Pirates

### Phillip Gardner, Francis Marion University

Several years ago Tobias Wolff visited our university. During a question-answer session, a student asked how members of Wolff's family responded to his memoir *This Boy's Life*. "In our memories, each of us is the main character," he said, meaning that we must concede that our point of view is a narrow one, only one piece of a complex story. I suspect readers of this issue's retrospective will find validation for Wolff's claim.



Courtesy of Phillip Gardner

As a fledgling director, my introduction to SWCA proved that Francis Marion University's (FMU) writing center was privileged by a receptive faculty and administration. This did not mean we were well funded. Like other directors, I never had money to adequately pay students or provide first rate technology or create an attractive setting. Scrounging for furniture and appropriating artwork when nobody was looking were unwritten requirements of the job. But the testimonials of indifference and even hostility by SWCA conference presenters were something of a shock to me. From the start our center was embraced by its English Department and valued by the university community. So I suspect that my sense of history may not be representative of the broader history.

The dozen or so years between the mid '80s and the late '90s were exciting, if chaotic, years for SWCA, a coming of age period; at least that is how I see it now. Its energy was derived in part from the political and social context of the times. A rising tide of feminism was the central force. The majority of writing center directors and tutors were and still are women, and core writing center thought and practice manifests principles and values associated with the highest ideals of feminism. The case can be made, I believe, that writing centers are among the finest examples of women's work in teaching and learning. In those days, women, most of whom were not tenured or tenure-eligible, found identity, purpose and place in writing centers. For them, and of

course for their male colleagues, SWCA became a place for validation and a source of pride.

But because of the relative powerlessness that directors experienced, the focus of conference presentations at SWCA and elsewhere often emphasized and perpetuated a history of marginalization, exploitation, and prejudice, the result of which was a kind of circle-the-wagons mentality. Surely there were valid grounds for discontent. And in the evolution of organizations an us-against-them mindset may be required to create unity of purpose and resolve and to weave the fabric of identity and security. But the problem with the resulting grand narrative is that it does not in the end create a useable history. How we feel is not a compelling argument for what we do in the competition for resources or the desire for recognition.

If there were a bumper sticker for the leadership of SWCA during this period, it might read like this: WE ARE BUILDING THIS PLANE AS WE FLY IT. This is an observation, not a criticism. Folks who gravitated to writing center work thirty years ago were not particularly conformist personalities. As individuals we were not “organization oriented.” In our daily lives, self-reliance and perseverance were our allies. Indeed, a degree of revolutionary zeal was well suited for a director and a subversive nature often resulted in essential funding and adequate space allocation. Independent spirits prevailed.

The qualities that made us good directors should have disqualified most of us as organizational officers. But then who would do the job? With a few exceptions, our ambitions were focused on local needs, our students, our faculty, our deans and presidents, not on SWCA. Everybody I knew, with the possible exception of Tom Waldrep—who seemed always to have executive status and executive budget (a sort of genius there)—was overworked. So there was a lot of turnover at the leadership level, with one exception: Christine Cozzens, for whom there should be a twenty-foot bronze statue. There would have been no SWCA without Christine. If a hurricane needs an eye, an island of calm, Christine was ours.

The truth is that SWCA became the most vibrant writing center association in the country, the envy of many; but the memory I retain most from my years among leadership is of the laughs we shared over drinks at the end of the annual conference—a group of honorable scallywags and pirates who somehow made this plane fly.

In the late '90s I left SWCA and the writing center, but they didn't leave me. I left for three good reasons. First, our center had outgrown me. We were seeing record numbers of students. Our new nursing faculty were eager to incorporate the center into their plans for a first-rate program. Our director of campus computers offered me space and budget for a satellite in the computer center for one-to-one tutoring.

Orientation folks and college life teachers lined up for our services. I couldn't keep up with the advances in technology. Our university's needs were answered when we hired Jennifer Kunka, star of Purdue's renowned writing center and the best candidate in the country.

Some people are born long distance runners, others sprinters. I am a born sprinter. And I left because I was tired. I couldn't then and can't now pace myself. My leaving was a good thing.

And I wanted to write. Imagine that. Most days, I feel that I am the happiest and luckiest man in America. In my professional life I have enjoyed three careers, as a classroom teacher, a writing center director and member of SWCA, and now as a writer. So I left the writing center. But it didn't leave me.

Working one-to-one with students taught me how to teach. Its pedagogy became

the light by which I perceive teaching, my beacon for classroom methods. That pedagogy is easy to define if not easy to achieve and comes from the thoughts we all have shared as we take a seat beside an emerging writer: “I may have only twenty minutes with this student, someone I may never see again. What can I give him/her that will contribute to the making of a writer, something that works at both the micro and the macro levels, something simple?” Here is one example: “In authentic writing, the subject belongs to the writer, but the content belongs to the reader—someone who wants or needs to know what you know.” Here is another: “We all have the right to speak, but we have to earn the right to be listened to.”



Courtesy of Phillip Gardner

I carry the writing center with me every time I enter a classroom.

Thus writing center history is a living history for me. I will retire within the next five years. I would like to publish a couple of books of fiction in those years. But I

**“Honorable Scallywags” continued on page 13**

# Compass Points: A Legend in Her Own Right

**Pamela B. Childers, The McCallie School (Emerita)**

After over a decade, this column will be the last “Compass Points” to appear in *Southern Discourse*. Therefore, I would like to take time to reflect on some thoughts that may have been hidden between the lines in previous columns. Some of you may say, “Pam, you have never hidden your feelings on issues.” Okay, but I want to make sure that I am not just hinting at my point this time. Each of us, in all directions of the compass, tries to live up to our potential. Most of us spend our lifetime continuing to reach for that goal and do not live long enough to do so. That is not a bad thing because that makes us lifelong learners who are constantly striving to be our best at whatever we wish to achieve—encouraging students to become responsible learners, volunteering to help others in a larger community, sharing what we have learned with colleagues, writing that article or book that will make a difference, collaborating with others, taking risks with our own learning, or mentoring and inspiring others to set and achieve higher goals for themselves. Some reach all of those achievements, and we do not often get to tell that person “thank you” before they have left us. So, I would like to reflect on some of my experiences with such a person.

In 2002, I attended the IWCA conference hosted by SWCA in Savannah, Georgia, and noticed a blond, curly head that popped up above a circle of female students. Who could be engaging these enthusiastic young women so intently? This was my first sighting of Christine Cozzens. Of course, this same kind of scene has continued at every conference that Christine attends, especially the SWCA ones, and often it is a circle of other writing center directors surrounding Christine, not just her own students or former students. It did not take me long to realize that Christine was mentoring current writing center tutors and conference presenters to be future writers and presenters, journalists, educators, editors, writing center directors, and leaders. But Christine also prides herself on doing what many of us do as editors of professional journals—we encourage revision until the manuscript is the best quality it can possibly be. In Christine’s words, “There is no greater honor, no more important work than helping writers say what they want to say in the most effective and powerful

way possible.” (2) We all need to remember what a privilege it is for us to do what we do and train others to do it as well, whether we are working with writers across the curriculum or in our specific classrooms.

When I was elected to the SWCA executive board, Christine was one of the first to welcome me. I remember emailing Christine to see if Sonja Bagby and I could collaboratively write a column for *Southern Discourse* called “Compass Points: Collaboration in All Directions.” She appropriately asked if I had any experience writing articles, then encouraged us to begin the column once she saw my list of previous



Pamela B. Childers

publications. Then again, when Sonja had to discontinue writing with me because I was on her dissertation committee, Christine enthusiastically assured me I could continue the column on my own. Over the last decade, I have occasionally had to be reminded of deadlines but often also received emails saying that she enjoyed reading my column after I had submitted it. She cared about secondary school writing centers, not just the postsecondary ones.

Most important, it has been an honor for me to have this opportunity to publish a column regularly in a journal that has maintained its high quality and consistent respect from the

writing center community internationally. Since 1998 when Christine established *Southern Discourse* as the official publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association, she and her dozens and dozens of student editors and tutors at Agnes Scott have been meeting deadlines and working with all of us writers to make sure our work is its best.

I have more recollections of Christine that have made her contributions to SWCA so important. In fact, the SWCA Christine Cozzens Research and Initiative Grant was established in her honor in 2012 for a good reason. Whether arranging the SWCA executive board retreat at Agnes Scott, critiquing her own students’ rehearsals of their presentations, offering professional development opportunities for writing center directors or future directors, encouraging writers to contribute to *Southern Discourse*, leading sessions at SWCA conferences, or volunteering for SWCA committees or conference projects, Christine Cozzens has emulated professionalism and service to all (tutors, educators, authors, and writing center directors alike). However, I have not mentioned her involvement and commitment to other professional organizations

internationally and her professional publications in the fields of literature, writing, and travel, to name a few.

Personally, I will feel as if a part of me will be missing after over ten years of writing this column with Christine's encouragement. So, I want to say "thank you," Christine, as you enjoy your sabbatical working on yet another project that excites you intellectually and personally, knowing that many of us wish you the best and look forward to reading your next articles in *The New York Times* or a professional journal.



### "Honorable Scallywags" continued from page 11

still find myself thinking, if I were young I'd work toward redefining writing center pedagogy and practice in terms of problem-based learning, because real writing for real readers is problem solving. Moreover, PBL is widely known and respected, it can serve as a bridge between writing centers and outsiders who don't understand what we do—and there's grant money there. I'd work on an article advocating the politics of writing centers not in terms of us-versus-them but in terms of coalition politics, where we seek out common interests all across the university landscape, an approach that promotes the idea of "healthy antagonism," meaning we stand our ground and acknowledge that others will do the same, working among equals for the sake of the greater good without compromising our most deeply held values, but instead aligning ourselves with others whose values we share. There are other writing center ideas I'd explore. But there isn't time. And if writing center history teaches us anything it teaches us that there is never enough time..

So here I express my indebtedness to my writing center colleagues, those who build the plane as they fly it, those who sweat and curse; those who are gifted with the improvisational genius to create and fulfill teachable moments as they engage emerging writers; those who build and sustain an organizational framework for the sharing of ideas and methods. Those scallywags and pirates whose treasure is kindness, generosity, and friendship.

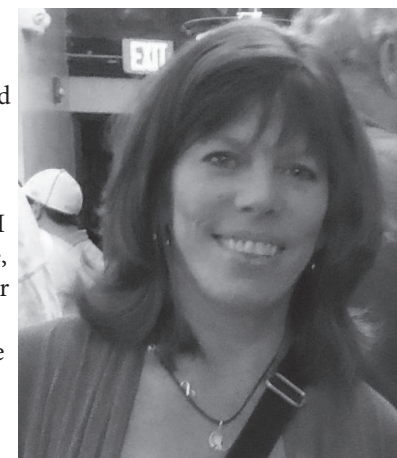


## Entrance to a Professional Community

**Kirsten F. Benson, The University of Tennessee**

When, exactly, does a person start to feel like a "professional" in his or her career? For every person that sense probably differs and may even be difficult to connect to a particular moment in time. For me, it's easy to recall, and to pinpoint: it happened when I got involved with the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA).

Writing centers have been part of my life since I began graduate school; when I was a master's student I just happened to be asked to work in ours—at that time, a small operation that shared space with classes, stored supplies in beaten-up cabinets that some department no longer considered usable...many of us still remember those days! As soon as I started working there, I loved it. Loved to talk with students one-to-one, loved the process of meeting with a student over the course of a term, loved seeing her or him actually grow as a writer and come to care more about writing just by talking. It was powerful; I was hooked. So, I continued to work there and after a time became the director. The job was time-consuming, of course, and there never seemed enough time to think as much as I wanted to about the big picture of what we were doing as a center and where we were going. Of course I read articles and aimed to implement the emerging theories—yet I felt somewhat isolated, a bit alone. Our department was more about literary studies than writing studies, so there just weren't many colleagues with whom I could talk about writing, administration, students, and learning.



Kirsten F. Benson

That sense of isolation ended when I went to my first SWCA conference. It happened to be right in my backyard, the 1989 conference in Knoxville, TN. When I learned it was there I was excited to attend, and I still remember walking through the halls of the convention center and being amazed at the number of people, all of whom had something to do with writing centers. I heard people voice concerns I shared, offer insights on administrative problems they'd encountered that mirrored my own, and

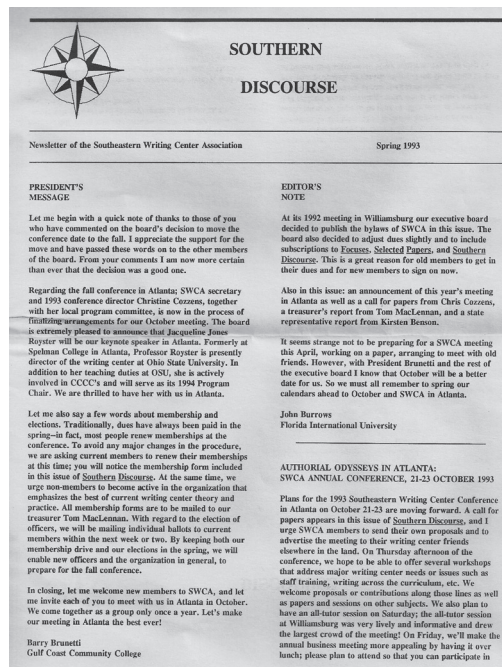
**"Entrance" continued on page 17**

# The Story of (a) *Southern Discourse*

Christine S. Cozzens, Agnes Scott College

*Southern Discourse* (SD), Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA), celebrates its seventeenth anniversary this year—or should I say the seventeenth anniversary of its rebirth. When as a new writing center director and resident of the south I discovered the existence of the SWCA in 1989, SD was the organization's newsletter, edited with great care by John Burrows of Florida International University. At the time, I admired the suggestive name and logo—a compass of the type known as star or rose. “Discourse” was an exciting but puzzling term to me, and in my new position and home, I wanted to know what a “*Southern Discourse*” would turn out to be.

By 1997 John had long retired from the organization, *Southern Discourse* had been defunct for some years, and I was about to complete a term as SWCA president. Looking for a way to remain active, I proposed reviving the newsletter with me in charge and with a broader editorial agenda. The SWCA board liked the idea, and *Southern Discourse: Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association* was reborn. I've been asked on several occasions to tell the story behind the revival and transformation of the newsletter, as other regional organizations consider moving in the same direction; this last issue under my editorship seems like the right place to do that. It's a story of collaboration and cooperation among the SWCA and its members, the administration and staff of Agnes Scott College, a graphic designer named Mary Zimnik, and a long list of undergraduate peer tutors who have worked hard to produce the publication three times a year. It's a story of beginning and experienced writers and everyone inbetween contributing their ideas, research, creativity, insights, photos, graphs, and words. It's a story of regional and local cooperation, engagement, conversation, and writing—a *Southern Discourse*.



At the beginning of this story in 1997, the first question I had to answer for myself and for the SWCA board was a simple one: where was the money for producing and mailing a newsletter going to come from? Those were difficult years for the SWCA, with membership down and little interest in running for board offices. The National Writing Center Association (now the International Writing Center Association or IWCA) was growing in strength and membership, and the future role of regional organizations, even longstanding ones like the southeastern group (founded in 1981), was not clear (Waldrep 10). The SWCA board reasoned that if the organization were going to survive, it would need a newsletter to build and communicate with membership. The board voted to provide a small budget and gave the venture their enthusiastic support. Figuring that Agnes Scott would react positively to having its name on a publication and to the valuable experiential learning the plan could offer to its undergraduates, I wrote a proposal that had the SWCA paying for printing and mailing and Agnes Scott providing and paying for labor: peer tutor hours devoted to production, secretarial time for maintaining a mailing list and other tasks, consulting from the staff of the communications office, and my time as editor as part of my regular salary. Our academic dean at the time, Ed Sheehy, could see the advantages for the college of the arrangement and agreed to the proposal, even throwing in a fax machine for my office. Though the budgets for both production and labor have expanded dramatically since then, that arrangement has remained intact to this day.

Now that the project was viable, what would be the role of the SWCA newsletter? What would it look like? Who would write for it? I didn't want to duplicate or compete with recognized national publications like *The Writing Lab Newsletter* (WLN). In a small field such as ours, it is important for publications to define their niche and fill a specific need so that each one remains distinctive, affordable, and worth reading. The new publication would of course focus on writing center news and information of interest in the southeastern region, including executive board actions and elections. We wanted the publication to serve the SWCA membership but also to appeal to a more national audience, thereby giving our regional organization greater visibility. So in consultation with the board, I decided to include research and creative writing and to solicit short articles—moves that would, we hoped, distinguish SD. To this mix we added an appeal to previously unpublished writers, particularly tutors, and a willingness to help them launch their work.

As I started to plan the content for the new publication, I consulted with Mickey Harris of WLN, who proved to be unfailingly generous in her encouragement and advice. Mickey made me feel that the project was doable and that with patience, all my questions would find answers. She welcomed me as a fellow editor and even let me borrow language from WLN for SD's policy on reproduction for educational use. I also talked

with Mary Zimnik from Agnes Scott's office of communications who gave me a crash course in publishing, good design advice that still guides us today, and one particularly wonderful idea: she suggested that we include photographs, something no other writing center publication was doing at the time. Laura Brandon, writing center tutor and artist, came up with a basic design for SD using desktop publishing software and reproduction by photocopying. Since the design would necessarily be fairly simple, she advised using specialty paper to give the newsletter a more professional look. We revived the elegant compass logo from the earlier SD, and Laura integrated it in the overall design. Susan Dougherty from our office of faculty services at Agnes Scott volunteered to maintain the mailing list and help with other clerical duties. An SD team was beginning to emerge. The first issue came out in the spring of 1998.

The publication and the organization that sponsored it grew together. In 2001 at the urging of Twila Yates Papay (Rollins College), the board approved changing the title from "Newsletter" to "Publication" to signify SD's growing stature. Thanks to efforts by board members like Phillip Gardner (Francis Marion University), who encouraged young writing center staff to join the SWCA and run for office and Marcy Trianosky (Hollins University), who as president led state-by-state recruiting efforts, the SWCA was growing, and membership dues and conference profits made it possible for us to consider creating a more professional-looking publication. Mary Zimnik developed a new design with a striking horizontal format that looked less like desktop publishing and more like a real journal. We adopted better software, changed from photocopying to printing, moved to duotone, and chose a rotating "Nantucket" palette of four colors, one for each volume on a four year cycle: blue, green, gold, and purple. With the Internet and electronic communication on the rise, we wanted to create a journal that people would pick up and read. In the spring of 2002, we rolled out the new design.

After volunteering for the job of reviving the newsletter in 1997, I had many anxious moments as I wondered how to fill an eight- or eventually sixteen- and later twenty-four-page publication three times a year? Of course, I would write a brief editor's note for each issue, modeled on Mickey's delightful "From the Editor" column in WLN. That would fill only a few column inches, however. I had remembered John Burrows

begging the SWCA board to write copy for him and sometimes printing the organization's bylaws or other lists when he needed to fill a page. My experiences writing for newspapers and magazines over the years had taught me something of the insatiable editorial hunger for copy, even in a periodical with only three issues a year. So from WLN I borrowed the idea of having regular columns: the editor's note from me, one from the current SWCA president, and perhaps one or two more. The Spring 1999 issue sent out a call for columnists:

*Southern Discourse* is ready to welcome a columnist or two or three who want to stir up their own thinking on some aspect of writing center work through regular contributions to these pages. If you are interested in the job, send in a proposal over the summer: a brief description of what the column would cover, a list of possible topics, and a sample column. Swear in blood that you'll meet the deadlines (just kidding about the blood). (Cozzens 2)

This plea turned up several promising ideas, including an original proposal by Peter M. Carriere from Georgia College and State University on "the strange and tragical historie of punctuation" (Carriere 5). Pete's much loved column *What's the Point?* has appeared in SD ever since, delighting and informing audiences and providing me with steady, high quality copy to feed the hungry beast. Pete explains the title of his column:

The use of the word punctuation to mean clarifying a piece of writing by inserting various marks between words is a fairly recent development. Even before Chaucer it was called pointing, and as late as 1899, *Notes & Queries* declared that abbreviations should be indicated by "a full point." The word point survives today in exclamation point, and in numbers like 2.5, in which the period is read "point." Hence the title of this column is a play on words between the pop culture phrase, "What's the point?" and the long-standing use of the word point to mean punctuation. (5)

While not strictly about writing centers, the column "brightens" the lives of those who write and teach writing, as I told Pete when I enthusiastically accepted his offer

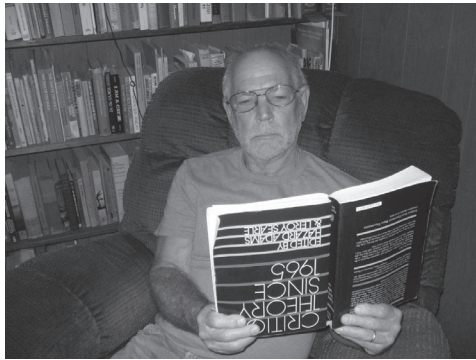
"The Story of (a) *Southern Discourse*" continued on page 22



# What's the Point: The Point of What's the Point

Peter M. Carriere, Georgia College and State University

I think it was some time before the Turn of the Century (hmmmmmm, maybe I should have said fifteen years ago) that I responded to a request from Christine Cozzens for column possibilities. It was a fortuitous moment for me when I suggested a column on “the Straunge and Tragycal Historie of Punctuation.” I had already done enough research on the connection between grammar and punctuation to know that some wonderfully bizarre attempts had been made to make sense out of written language



Peter M. Carriere

using marks, so I knew there was stuff out there. I just didn't know how much! People sometimes ask me, “Where do you find all that stuff?” Actually I don't have to look far. In a recent article I made the point that trying to control a fluid, nonmaterial medium like language with rigid rules would be like trying to control the weather with a guidebook!

My initial research came from a book by a husband-and-wife team: T. L.

Husband and M. F. A. Husband. I'm a bit suspicious about “M.F.A.” Husband, but setting aside the brilliance of the last name (even the wife is a Husband), this research, done for a graduate linguistics class, contained enough information to keep me going for a few issues.

Early on I had to explain my title and periodically reiterate my explanation: up until the last hundred years, punctuating texts was typically referred to as pointing. People would point their texts. The word “point” originates in the idea of a dot or point placed in texts, originally to mean a pause. Our current period, meaning the end of an utterance, is a continuation of that concept. Since this dot or “point” resembled a tiny hole in the manuscript, it could be considered a puncture, which is the origin of our word “punctuation.” The title “What's the Point” uses the word “point” as a double entendre: 1, what's the use?; and 2, what is the grammar or punctuation circumstance?

I think I have a natural inclination for humor, perhaps even a talent. Unfortunately,

it's a talent rarely acknowledged by the academic community, so I've never received academic accolades for it even though people enjoy it. Or maybe it's a natural result of the study of English. I remember walking across the University of Nebraska campus one day with a younger colleague and remarking, “Jim, have you ever noticed that people who major in English are a bit weird?” Whereupon Jim replied, “You think we're weird, Pete. You ought to see the people over in classics!” Jim had majored in classics before abandoning it for English, and I now believe he was speaking from experience. Even more revealing, the chair of the classics department, would roller-blade up and down Andrews Hall. One time I saw him roller-blading down the sidewalk on his way to campus.

Gradually, after several articles, patterns for future articles began to emerge. One thing was the mildly satirical nature of the humor. Satire sometimes requires the use of a persona, a kind of ghost writer of the essay, who in this case is not me. This persona makes observations about students I would never think of. Here is one from an essay on a set of exercise lessons intended to promote better acquisition of grammar by Estelle Hunter, Ph.B.: “when you make the sound of “ee,” stretch your mouth back toward your ears as far as you can. . . .” Here is my persona's reaction: “now I draw the line here!! No, no no!!! We should never give students this kind of lip and tongue advice!! Absolutely not. Even writing about it I'm embarrassed!!”

As the persona developed, so did the pattern of the content. Some of the articles discussed the novelty, disappearance, origin, history, misuse of, or bizarre comments on various punctuation marks. Some marks had disappeared as far as their use to punctuate texts: the section, the dagger, the virgule, the hand, and the crotchet. But even marks still prominent today were defined sometimes in bizarre ways. Take the comma, for instance. Ben Jonson defined it as “a mean breathing.” And a book with a fetching title (*Of the Orthographie and Congruitie of the Britan Tongue*) that appeared in about 1617 had this definition: “the comma . . . is pronounced with a short sob.” My persona suggested that if we apply this definition to an ordinary sentence, we get a rather ludicrous result: “She was pretty (sob!) perky (sob!) and vivacious!” I can't imagine injecting sobs into an oral performance of a text. Can you? Perhaps the virgule disappeared because of Orozco Y Berra's definition of it, repeated in the OED: the virgule represents “the verb to blow or to hum.” My persona observed that “what we have obviously lost with the marriage of punctuation to grammar is the incalculable entertainment value of punctuating our reading with mean breathings, sobs, puffs, and hums—just how can these losses be replaced?”


As the persona grew a personality, the content began to divide itself into subcategories. Having exhausted punctuation marks I turned next to discussions and definitions of grammatical terms like “verb,” “noun” “sentence,” and the like. The word “verb” proved to be pregnant with possibilities. The OED quoted this line from a production of Gil



Blas: “the verb-grinder engendered in his noddle a most ingenious device.” Acknowledging that his students had been “superior verb grinders,” too, my persona suggested that his students had proven themselves to be “accomplished noun-grinders, adjective grinders, preposition-grinders, adverb grinders—in short grinders of just about everything to do with written expression.” Then there were the words that used “verb” as a root: “verbigerate” (to conduct, carry on, or noise abroad), to “verbify” (convert non-verbs to verbs), “verbid” (lacking the power to create sentences), and “verbicide” (the perversion of a word from its proper meaning).

The title “What’s the Point” uses the word “point” as a double entendre: 1, what’s the use?; and 2, what is the grammar or punctuation circumstance?

My last topic category was simply miscellaneous observations on bizarre, odd, unusual comments made throughout history about grammar and punctuation in general—of which there were a great many, from classical Greek and Roman writers to some contemporary ones. A Victorian pointer named Alexander Jamieson observed that “a ludicrous writer is one who insists upon ludicrous subjects with the professed purpose to make his readers laugh.” But what did he know? He certainly never read “What’s the Point!” And his collection of “idiotisms” is crumbling away in a library! A quoted passage from 1914 in the OED served up another gem: “several of the men punctuated the first of the songs with boos and poohs to represent the drum.” My persona could not resist observing that “today, ‘boos’ do not under any circumstances represent drums, and a ‘pooh’ at a songfest would be a social mistake equivalent to a category 3 hurricane!”

I could go on and on, but it’s been great fun doing these “perspicacious” little gems. And I have learned something, something infinitely valuable: I know now what the point is. Yes! I really know what’s the point. But I could never reveal it, no sir, not on your life. It’s too personal, too close to the ultimate order of things. And anyway, what’s the point? 


### “Entrance” continued from page 13

suggest innovative approaches to working with students. Yet more important, I felt connection. I felt warmth, good will, and generosity from the people there. And that did it; I knew this was an organization that not only could help me as a busy director find good solutions and new ideas, but one where I could feel a part of something, a part of a group of like-minded people. SWCA was the door, and I stepped in.

To be honest, I don’t remember now exactly how I got involved as an officer. I was a state representative for Tennessee first and recall creating lists and mailing labels for all the writing centers that I could find in the state. Somewhere between doing that and attending conferences I got to know those who were already officers, was asked to be vice-president, and then became president in 1993.

Those were lean times, shoestring budget times for writing centers, but exciting ones. The SWCA worked hard as a group to ensure that writing centers achieved greater visibility and recognition for the crucial role they play in helping students develop as writers. When we met as the executive board, I recall us reviewing our organizational budget with a fine-tooth comb: what do we have money for? How can we get more members to join? *Focuses*, a wonderful journal associated with SWCA, was always on our minds, and we were all grateful to hear Bill Wolff give his report; we were lucky to have his leadership in creating and shepherding the journal and for the fact that he fought tenaciously to get serious scholarship published.

I knew this was an organization that not only could help me as a busy director find good solutions and new ideas, but one where I could feel a part of something, a part of a group of like-minded people.

There are of course more stories, but now it seems to me that the details themselves are less interesting than the underlying thing that was developing—that a group of people were coming together, year after year, to talk about their centers, to talk with each other about writing and writers, and to devote their tremendous energy towards their professions and towards each other. That sense of connection, of belonging, is not only at the heart of what writing centers promote for the students who come to them—it was also what those long-ago years of the SWCA fostered among the people who joined and who benefited from this quirky, wonderful, and welcoming group. 

# Popcorn and Newsreels: Letters to the Editor

**Karl Fornes, University of South Carolina, Aiken**

I'm a big fan of letters to the editor. I read them each morning with breakfast, and, good or bad, the letters remind me of the community in which we live, its diversity of opinion, and on occasion, its wackiness. Recently, I came across some letters to the editor of the *New York Times*:

April 16, 2002

To the Editor:

I noticed Christine S. Cozzens' recent meditations on my homeland. I am familiar with her work and would like to add some observations.

First, her columns include a couple inaccuracies. First, when describing Achill Island, she notes that the views are "worth lingering over, whether draped in sea mists or brilliant in a wash of sun" ("Exploring Ireland's Achill Island"). Similarly, describing winter in West Cork's Roaringwater Bay, she explains that "a furious hailstorm is likely to be followed by a flood of sunshine and blue skies" ("West Cork's Wild Peninsula's"). Of course, these are the only two references in nine columns devoted to my home, but that does not excuse one glaring error—the sun never shines over Ireland. We must either make our own sunshine or steal it from the filthy curs who stole it from us.

Nonetheless, I was pleased to see that her "imaginative powers" allow her "to grasp the positive qualities" of the December gales along the coast of Achill Island ("Escaping to Ireland for Christmas"), a place I know well and have grown quite fond of. Her fortitude is to be commended. In fact, her knowledge of the area may make her an ideal candidate for my crew. Two things--first, she must cut her hair lest it get caught in the riggings, and second, how is she with a broadsword?

In blood,

Grace O'Malley aka "The Sea Queen of Connacht"

January 15, 2011

To the Editor:

I read with disgust Christine S. Cozzens' "Bedding Down Above the Pub." In its own words, this lackluster column is meant to torture the reader with a "low-budget, three-week automobile tour of England that was to include plenty of real ale." It may have been a "low-budget" tour, but the reader receives a no-budget effort. First, I'm glad Ms. Cozzens enjoyed our "real ale" because the insipid prose she regurgitates onto paper lacks any real flavor or imagination. In fact, the piece's disjointed structure reads like a touristic yank at the tail end of a three-week bender slouched over the bar muttering incoherencies between swills.

Moreover, travel reviews must, above all, be accurate. Ms. Cozzens describes the fare at the Black Horse Hotel in Grassington as "excellent bar food." However, in well-respected tripadvisor.com user johnhart07's review entitled "terrible food and attitude off staff stay away," he clearly points out "When we ordered the food was medioaker and was proble microwaved." Who is one to believe?

Sincerely,

Nigel Middlesex Snottenfinger, IIII

August 15, 1995

To the Editor:

Thank you for Christine S. Cozzens's "Where the Mississippi Begins" (July 30, 1995). Interestingly enough, I was married and moved from Minnesota to the South in July 1995, eventually starting my job as writing center director at the University of South Carolina Aiken on August 1, two days after the article's publication. I guess I relate to Cozzens's son's exclamation "when I touch this water I'm touching the Gulf of Mexico"—I followed the Mississippi downstream, in a way.

More important, the piece reveals a sense of wonder while simultaneously sharing careful research and a concern for accuracy. I suspect that attitude manifests itself in pretty much everything Cozzens does, whether it be teaching classes, directing a writing and speaking center, editing a regional journal, leading a study abroad trip, or whatever.



Karl Fornes

If I'm lucky, perhaps we'll meet. Maybe we'll exchange niceties at a professional meeting in Augusta, Georgia before sitting down for a more lengthy talk in a sun-splashed courtyard in Macon. Perhaps we'll work together for several years on the board of a vibrant regional organization that brings people from southeastern schools together to exchange scholarship and develop community. I can imagine that I might thirst for those annual conferences and come to consider them among my most cherished experiences, both professionally and personally. Who knows, we might even meet over lunch at a conference in Nashville where we will discuss regular column in the publication she edits, an exercise that will help me develop as a writer. Eventually, I suspect that I would come to admire her enthusiastic leadership and dedication to an organization to which so many owe so much.

If only I might be so fortunate.

With sincere gratitude,

Karl Fornes 

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# Thirteen Ways of Looking at My SWCA History

Glenda Conway, University of Montevallo

I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes...  
Wallace Stevens

1. I was welcomed from the start. My first SWCA Conference was the 1996 Myrtle Beach Conference cosponsored by Francis Marion and Armstrong Atlantic. All the other directors were happy to meet me and ready to talk writing center talk. Wendy Bishop was the keynote speaker. Her presentation was titled "You Can Take the Girl out of the Writing Center, But You Can't Take the Writing Center out of the Girl." It was a narrative about how much she enjoyed her writing center work during the start of her career; however, she had moved into a non-writing center administrative position and continued to find the lessons of the writing center part of her work.



Courtesy of Susan Martin

2. I need to look at my vitae in order to remember the name of the presentation I gave at Myrtle Beach. However, I clearly remember the presentation given by the consultants (then called "tutors") who attended with me. It was titled "Tutoring in the Eye of the Storm." It portrayed the writing center as a haven of calm amid the personal and academic stresses of college. The session was excellent, and I was immensely proud.

3. In subsequent years, consultants from my center have traveled with me to Charleston, South Carolina; to Chapel Hill, North Carolina; to Augusta, Georgia; to Richmond, Kentucky; to Auburn and to Tuscaloosa, Alabama and to many more cities to give presentations on their writing center research and experiences. Most were first-time conference presenters. Most have continued to present at conferences and continue to make me proud.

4. On the last night of the Myrtle Beach conference, there was a prose and poetry reading. It took place in a conference room that had an oceanside floor-to-ceiling glass wall. A major winter storm hurled sheets of rain against the glass that night, while we in the dimly lit room listened to heart-wrenching poems and stories from Ken Autrey, Philip Gardner, and others. For me, it was a night of perfect happiness.

5. Ten years after attending my first SWCA conference, I became the organization's president. My first awareness of what was great about being SWCA's President came at the opening plenary session of the first conference after my election, when I realized that I was in the privileged position of getting to welcome new attendees. I did not have a welcome speech prepared; I simply spoke from my heart about how glad I was to see everyone and how much SWCA meant to me personally and professionally.

6. I learned that traveling with students can bring heavy drama. During my first few SWCA conferences, I shared rooms (and on one occasion a beach house) with consultants. Many of my memories from those conferences include strained nerves and tears. At one of SWCA's Savannah conferences (the one during which my consultants and I stayed in a beach house), a fracture that began during the six-hour drive from Montevallo divided them into two contingents, both of which complained to me about feeling snubbed by the other. On the second day of the conference, after the end of the last session, the situation erupted into an announcement to me that the two groups did not want to eat dinner together. I was sitting in the hotel lobby, stunned and disappointed about everything that had gone wrong, and paralyzed about what I should do. Karl Fornes, director of the writing center at the University of South Carolina at Aiken and SWCA's longtime treasurer, asked me what was wrong. I burst into tears.

7. I learned for the most part to leave the students to their own devices in order to hang out with the other directors. That evening when I cried in the hotel lobby, Karl invited me to go to dinner at The Pink House with him and several other directors. He said I did not need to get involved at all with my consultants' feud, and that I should enjoy a nice dinner with good company instead. During the dinner, someone else told me that directors should never stay in rooms with their consultants. We need and deserve the privacy.

8. The beach house idea had been mine. As SWCA Secretary, I had stayed in the very same beach house during the previous summer with the other board members. We were on a board retreat to talk about our organizational identity and to plan the upcoming conference. Our retreat had been a wonderful gathering of writing center people with sincere concerns about "who" SWCA was and what the organization should be doing. We cooked and ate local seafood and talked late into the night in that beach house. I thought that the beach house had special powers.

9. The question of SWCA's identity continued to concern the board over the years I was part of it. We were always confident about the excellence of *Southern Discourse* and our annual conference. But what else were we doing? And what else should we be doing? Through these discussions came the SWCA Achievement Awards, the Cozens Research Grants, funding dedicated to conference scholarships, and support for statewide network mini-conferences.

10. Every conference I attended gave me solutions and usable information that I could take home with me. After Myrtle Beach, I proposed a tutor training practicum at my school After Charleston, I added primary research to the practicum requirements. I learned to think with more balance about the hot issues of our field, such as required writing center visits, directive and non-directive approaches, relations with faculty, and naming.

11. Over time, I dropped the College Composition and Communication conference and even the International Writing Center Association conference. The SWCA conference has remained a constant highlight of my school year; I've missed only one since Myrtle Beach.

12. My first SWCA presentation was titled "Reporting Writing Center Sessions to Faculty: Pedagogical and Ethical Considerations." A revised version of that presentation was published in Writing Lab Newsletter in 1998. I'm glad I looked back at my vitae.

13. I have come to love traveling to SWCA conferences with my consultants and to embrace their deep experiencing of their academic and personal lives. One of my favorite life memories occurred during the last ten miles of the drive home from the 2012 conference in Richmond, Kentucky. There were eight of us in an SUV. Someone had the brilliance to insert a CD that included Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody." Immediately, all of us were singing along. The dramas and the divisions that had occurred during the trip suddenly no longer weighed upon us. We ended the trip by singing in unison, and that is what really matters.



# Once Again, “Thoughts from Tennessee”: A Tribute

Jenna Stoker Wright, University of Tennessee at Martin

My first introduction to the Southeastern Writing Center Association (SWCA) was in 1987, when I was a term hire teaching first-year composition classes and co-coordinating the Hortense Parrish Writing Center with Anna Clark at the University of Tennessee at Martin.

The vice chancellor for academic affairs at the time, Dr. Milton Simmons, approached me about the possibility of attending a writing center (although we called ours a “lab” at the time) conference in Florida later that academic year. I must admit that Florida was one of the magic words in the offer, but the draw of attending a conference that would help me better understand the job I had at hand was also significant in my decision. That conference was the beginning of a life-changing experience in my profession.

I don’t remember any of the presentations at that first conference I attended, but I do remember an inviting conference environment with beneficial information, exciting new ideas, and a network for learning and support. Also, I remember meeting a group of writing center professionals who welcomed me into the SWCA fold. I had a home in the writing center world where for the next twenty years I would find confirmation and encouragement for the outreach of writing centers.

In 1989, SWCA was making an all-out effort to encourage involvement from writing center staff in all states within the region, and I became the area state coordinator for SWCA, corresponding by snail mail with writing centers in Tennessee, Kentucky, and



Courtesy of Jenna Stoker Wright

surrounding states. At the 1989 SWCA conference in Knoxville, I met Christine Cozzens, who would become a cherished colleague in the writing center world and would later visit our campus to lead a writing center staff training retreat. Also, in Knoxville, I made my first SWCA presentation, copresenting “Publicizing the English Writing Lab at UT-Martin.” By 1992, the “lab” had become a “center,” and at SWCA in Birmingham, I presented “The Writing Center of the 1990’s: Innovations in Reaching the Community of Writers on Today’s College Campuses.” Then in 1993, after the writing center budget at UT Martin had been cut and hours of service reduced, at SWCA in Atlanta, I presented “Writing Centers: Surviving the Financial ‘Crunch’ of the 90’s.” The outcry from our campus community had been so loud that writing center hours of service were increased within a matter of weeks after their cut, and I was at SWCA to share what we had learned in that financial crunch.

I had the privilege to serve from 1991—1992 as an at-large member of the SWCA Executive Board and from 1993—1996 as secretary of SWCA. In 1991, I wrote a short piece for *Southern Discourse* entitled “Thoughts from Tennessee,” and that early title generated the title of these reflections. During the early years of my involvement in SWCA, I worked with many writing center directors from across the Southeast—Barry Brunetti, Kirsten Benson, Loretta Cobb, Bill Wolff, Angela Williams, and Christine Cozzens, to name a few. All of this early SWCA involvement was taking place just as I was being hired as regular faculty. Thus, funding to attend SWCA conferences and executive board meetings was readily available through my university, and I was eager to learn what writing center colleagues had to share. Recently, I found some early SWCA executive board memos from Barry Brunetti. Shared items of interest in June 1991, included establishing a “one-time slot” in the 1992 South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference, organizing and working with state representatives, praising the Birmingham SWCA conference, publishing the SWCA newsletter, supporting the important work of *Focuses* (a journal linking composition studies and writing center practice to rhetoric that was founded and edited by Bill Wolff from Appalachian State University), and addressing a controversy over whether SWCA Executive Board members had to be working in a writing center to qualify for a board position (Brunetti, Barry. Memo to SWCA Executive Board. June 1991).

Although the UT Martin Hortense Parrish Writing Center tutors and primary coordinator do attend and present, it has been several years since I have attended an SWCA conference. Creative writing and chairing a department have claimed much of the time that was for writing center responsibilities; however, the opportunities for learning, for leadership, for networking, and for collegiality that I found in SWCA have been pivotal in my academic career, and I appreciate this opportunity to pay tribute to the SWCA organization and its outstanding professionals. ✨

### “The Story of (a) *Southern Discourse*” continued from page 15

(Carriere 5). I have always been willing to stretch SD’s mission to accommodate good material.

The column idea proved to be a lifesaver for *Southern Discourse*, keeping us afloat with interesting articles over the years and offering talented writers a regular gig. Early on James Inman (University of South Florida) and Donna Sewall (Valdosta State University) wrote a column about online writing labs called The OWLs Nest. Soon Pam Childers (The McCallie School) pitched in with Compass Points about collaboration and writing centers. Our most recent addition is Karl Fornes’s (University of South Carolina, Aiken) Popcorn and Newsreels, which focuses on writing and popular culture. In 2003, Bonnie Devet (College of Charleston) came up with the idea of profiling a writing center from the region in each issue. That column, Back to the Center, has become a mainstay, bringing us new writers and helping all of us get acquainted with each other’s centers and the unique cultures that surround them. With an annual treasurer’s report and short articles covering board actions, I have a steady stream of good copy coming in with plenty of room for one-off articles.

But even with all these plans and contributions, the title of one of my editor’s notes and the theme of many was “*Southern Discourse* Needs Writers” (Cozzens 2).

From the beginning, I wanted to set an editorial style or tone that would contribute to SD’s distinctive character. The newspaper and magazine editors, I had worked with had not always been exactly nurturing. Their business-like attitude had been an abrupt change from the more encouraging “let’s work on this” approach of my more enlightened undergraduate and graduate writing teachers. As a developing writer, I certainly needed the feedback but often wondered why these conversations with editors were not more helpful. *Southern Discourse* would aspire to create a more positive atmosphere for those who submitted work, while still maintaining high standards. It has been our policy from the beginning to work with writers whose articles have potential but need cutting, shaping, editing, additional research or sources, or even more drastic revising. When pieces came in that exceeded the space available, I asked the writers to make the cuts to preserve their work’s integrity. I edited for consistency and sometimes for clarity, but if the edits amounted to more than minor changes, the writer was consulted. When work came in past the deadline, though, the production schedule eliminated the opportunity for such exchanges.

While I solicited and accepted or rejected articles and carried out the copyediting, the production of SD truly lay in the hands of undergraduate tutors who worked in the writing center at Agnes Scott. Several tutors took on this work each year, which

included layout, photography, and some writing; the pay rate was the same as for tutoring and came from the same budget. When I made the initial agreement with the college, I argued that producing a publication was relevant to work in any academic discipline and would give students valuable training in writing, design, and collaborative production they could use in a variety of careers. From submission, to editing, to layout, everything was done electronically—even from the beginning, though I scanned a lot of printed photos in those days. The assistant editors, as we called the tutors, created a template for each issue. As I edited the pieces, I forwarded them via email, and they started the layout process. When they had a draft ready, we sat down together and looked at a dummy version: this was the first paper copy. The tutors were usually so good at their job that we tended to make only minor changes at this stage. We used to submit a disk to the printer, Graphic Solutions Group, but for some years now we have simply uploaded the document file to the printer’s Web site. They would send us an electronic (PDF) version and a hard copy or galley to review for final corrections or changes. We used to stick address labels on every issue and mail them at our campus post office, but the printer took over the mailing for us, so once the final draft was approved, SD was out of our hands and on its way to readers.

In this last issue under my editorship as in the past, the student editors are *Southern Discourse*. They bring to their work creativity, passion, and a deep, personal understanding of what goes on in writing centers. They learn valuable lessons about producing a publication, meeting deadlines, editing, and layout, but they also give each of these areas their distinctive imprint. In the Spring 2004 issue, Nicolette Lee wrote about the special pride she took in putting each issue together:

While I didn’t have the pressure of writing or editing the text, I am the one who usually decides how the reader perceives it. I’m the layout person. My job is really an introverted writing tutor’s guilty pleasure. I read all of the great—and by then nearly flawless—articles and decide how they look on paper. I can draw your eye to an interesting article or a breathtaking picture, and I don’t have to put my name in the upper right (or left) hand corner. If this issue looks horrendous, you probably wouldn’t know whom to blame, but if it’s great, I’ll make sure to show everyone what a great job I did. See? I have it made. (5)

Nicolette, like her fellow editors, held the look and accuracy of every issue to high standards. Some of SD’s best features and ideas have come from these dedicated undergraduates working behind the scenes. Over the years, many of them have found their experiences to be useful in getting into graduate school or finding jobs. One tutor was told by the law school she attended that it was her SD experience that caught their eye. She went on to edit a law journal. Several student editors got jobs in publishing in part because of their editing and layout experience with SD.

*Southern Discourse* was never a static entity: it evolved through the years in relation to the parent organization's needs, to the changing field of writing center studies, and to trends in communications. Once again modeling ourselves after WLN, we eventually put all of our back issues online at the SWCA Web site. Until the last five years or so, we didn't always have enough submissions to choose from, and once I even had to make a plea to board members to help me fill some blank pages. Growth in the organization and our encouragement of unpublished writers, especially tutors, to submit, have helped solve that problem. We have made some progress in becoming a more national publication: complimentary copies go to all current IWCA board members, for example; non-SWCA members can subscribe; and we try to have a presence at national conferences and to invite articles from beyond the region. In 2006 we expanded our appeal to tutors to emphasize tutor research in an issue that included Beth Godbee's important article "Beyond Lore: A Call for Tutor Research." As Beth noted, "tutors must share their insights more widely and systematically with writing center audiences. . . . tutors are the agents, investigators, and researchers who know best what happens within tutorials" (3). Today, a good number of submissions come from tutors who, encouraged by their directors, are taking the first steps in their publishing careers. Thanks to these changes and the accomplishments of our staff and writers, SD has become better known in the writing center community. Requests for permission to cite and reproduce articles are starting to come in. For financial as well as intellectual reasons, strengthening our national presence and relevance is an important future goal.

While producing *Southern Discourse* added to everyone's work loads and represents a significant expense for the SWCA, there was and is real satisfaction in working collaboratively with others to create a publication and make good writing and good ideas available to a wide audience through the print medium. Everyone who participated in the production of the publication seems to have had a stake in it and worked hard to make each issue successful. From the beginning, we tried to set up and maintain a collaborative arrangement in which everyone—the SWCA membership and board, the college, the student editors, the printer, the writing center community—benefitted from the ongoing process and received credit and recognition for their part in it.

Defining our mission carefully and realistically and redefining it as needed have helped us survive and thrive. The SWCA and SD have grown together, each making the other more visible and more relevant to writing center work, together ensuring that there is a southern voice in the national and international discourse on writing centers.



## Notes

1. Starting in 1982, for three years SWCA founder Gary A. Olson edited the very first newsletter for the organization, called simply SWCA Newsletter.
2. John Burrows—rhetorician, scholar, poet, and *Southern Discourse* editor—died in 2006.
3. Thanks to Harry Denny of St. John's University for suggesting that I write this article.
4. Zimnik, Mary. Studio-MZ. [www.studiomz.com](http://www.studiomz.com).
5. Graphic Solutions Group. <http://www.graphicsolutionsgroup.com/>. Nina Hollis shepherded SD through the printing process at GSG for many years.
6. Many thanks to the student editors of SD over the years: Laura Brandon, Lee Hayes, Caroline Murnane, Hillary Harshman, Nicolette Lee, Cailin Copan-Kelly, Mollie Barnes, Maggie Greaves, Gingle Lee, Savannah Sharp, Hayley Gallagher, Joanna Hair, Jeanine Pounds, Leah Kuenzi, Su Myat Thu, Anna Cabe, Keely Lewis, and Sofia Barrera.
7. Southeastern Writing Center Association. <http://www.iwca-swca.org/Past-Issues-of-Southern-Discourse.html>.
8. The SWCA pays for *Southern Discourse* entirely with membership dues, a practice that spurs recruiting. See <http://www.iwca-swca.org/Membership.html> for the current membership categories and fees.

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# The Writing Lab at UAB Birmingham and the SWCA

**Peggy Jolly, University of Alabama, Birmingham (Emerita)**

On January 5, 1977, I was appointed as director of remediation in the English department at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The position was funded by the Vice-President's office as part of a pilot project to develop a comprehensive program to meet the academic needs of at-risk students. The charge was a broad, ill-defined one simultaneously being tackled on a number of other campuses. While working on our individual programs, the principles of these regional initiatives shared ideas and information that gradually led to successful support interventions for our students. In a remarkably short four years, our work culminated in the formalization of The First Annual South-eastern Conference of Writing Lab Directors, hosted by Gary Olson, University of Alabama, at its inaugural meeting in Tuscaloosa on February 7, 1981.

When I was named director, UAB was a relatively new, having been established as an independent campus little more than a decade before. Contrasted with many universities, UAB attracted nontraditional populations who tended to be older, were frequently part time attendees, and had additional obligations such as employment and families. UAB's early applicants were primarily local, often first-generation college students, educated in the public school system, with a median age of 25. Approximately one-third were conditionally admitted with deficient ACT scores in the sub-tests of English, reading, and math. This "academically at-risk" cohort was the group targeted in the vice president's pilot project.

Having taught as an adjunct in the English department provided insight not only into the variety of problems many students were experiencing, but also into the dearth of resources available to meet their needs. An informal tutorial center staffed by four graduate assistants, housed in a small room in the department, addressed questions about coursework. Faculty provided out-of-class assistance during scheduled office hours. Students in first and second-level composition courses were tested on the first day of class and then separated into classes that reflected "higher/lower" test scores.

While an admirable attempt to meet the needs of at-risk students, these remedies were inadequate. The graduate students were untrained tutors who worked on an ad hoc basis; furthermore, their specialty was literature rather than composition. Faculty assistance was limited by time constraints since the majority of the composition faculty was adjuncts who taught multiple courses at UAB, often supplemented by teaching at neighboring colleges. With class sizes of twenty-eight students, they did not have time to meet all their students' needs. Finally, dividing composition courses on the basis of a first-day test proved ineffective. Since enrollment was self-selective, there was no discernible abilities pattern for class periods. A grammar rather than a writing test was used to indicate language weaknesses, and students were often misplaced.

My first move was a practical one: I transformed the informal tutorial center into a prominent physical presence within the English department to note its purpose and hung up a sign designating it as The Writing Lab. I chose this moniker, rather than the more popularly used Writing Center, to emphasize our alliance with the university's medical center reputation for research and repair. I also tinkered with the notion of having all tutors wear lab coats to reinforce our theme; fortunately, better sense prevailed, and I settled for the symbolism of one lone lab coat hanging prominently on a rack by the entrance door.

Establishing a physical location was followed by a blizzard of publicity announcing that we were open for business. I then learned more about the structure of resource centers and effective delivery of supplemental instruction. It seemed that three things were needed to make the project a success: structure, instruction, and funding. In February of 1977, I met with Marcella Griffin, UCLA, and John Monro, Miles College, to discuss these problems. They generously shared ideas, emphasizing the initial need to generate a high profile of services to be offered to meet a range of needs. The notion of marketing the entity in such a way that it would come to be seen as valuable, if not indispensable, would secure support to ensure sustainability.

Taking their advice, I targeted three groups as the first to address: composition courses; general at-risk student populations; and foreign nationals in the medical center. For the composition courses, we took a two-prong approach. First, we established a system for scheduling individual, half-hour tutorial sessions.



Since our small staff of tutors could not meet the needs of all students on a private basis, we also scheduled “general interest” group sessions multiple times during the week. The session topics related to either course assignments from the departmental syllabus or areas of common complaints from instructors. Additionally, tutors would visit classes to make individualized presentations if faculty members preferred that format. General at-risk students were invited to attend a series of “How to Survive in College” seminars that addressed areas such as note taking, reading comprehension, time management, and study skills. They proved valuable in recruiting new students who subsequently came to the writing center for individualized instruction on writing for courses beyond the first-year composition level.

The third targeted area, the foreign nationals, proved to be a veritable gold mine. Since UAB’s reputation rested on its internationally renowned medical school and research centers, many of their students and faculty were not native-English speakers. As the university offered no second-language instruction, the writing center intervened by devising a series of “Practicum for Foreign Born” seminars that targeted academic, professional, and social language use. These proved popular not only with the faculty and students, but they also were expanded to include interested family members who wished to improve their language skills.

Within a relatively short time, Griffin’s and Monro’s predictions came to pass. Weekly reports indicated high usage of our facilities, the faculty clamored for more attention than we were able to provide, and the medical school wanted us to expand our offerings to their constituents. We were happy to do that—provided the funds to expand our staff, printing costs, and other needs were forthcoming. They were. Most significantly, the vice-president’s office decided to upgrade the remedial program status from pilot to line item. After a national search, in May of 1977, I was named as permanent director.

The year following the designation of permanent status, the remedial program concentrated on expansion. We established close ties with the university’s Special Studies Program, an entity that offered on-demand, non-traditional courses to both students and community members. With them, we expanded our original seminar series to include “Grammar for Office Personnel,” “Language for Lawyers,” “Language for Bankers,” etc. The English department secured additional space for the writing center’s expansion to include a center

for reading instruction. We doubled our tutorial staff by employing adjuncts, hiring a director of reading, and an assistant director of The Writing Lab. We worked closely with the freshman English program, instituting an “exit-exam” for all composition courses, preparing and grading the exam, and offering specific instruction for each part of the exam. Passing the exit exam became a requirement for successful completion of the course.

After our positive response during that initial year, Alan Perlis, chair of English, presented us with a formidable challenge: he wanted our writing center singled out for national recognition. To accomplish this, Peter O’Neil, (chair of math), Robert Bauman, UAB, (chair of physics), and I cowrote a Title III proposal to the Department of Education requesting three years of funding for our various academic support programs. Although Title III funding is generally allowed only for start-up programs with limited resources, we successfully made a case that our demographics fit their model. The quid pro quo of Title III funding is that the university must agree to pick up the funding after the governmental grant ends. In our case, the writing center was funded at a rate of \$35k annually for three years, with the university’s assurance that they would continue that level of funding afterwards. In addition to this national recognition, important regional attention came our way. Loretta Cobb, Montevallo University, and Terry Barr, Montevallo University, visited our writing center to consider using it as a model for the one they planned to establish at their university.

The balance of 1979 focused on incorporating best practices within our operation. This included ongoing conversations with fellow writing center directors such as Gary Olson, University of Alabama, Tom Waldrep, South Carolina, Loretta Cobb, Montevallo University, as well as attending professional presentations at local and national conferences. We also solicited Educational Testing Service’s (ETS) guidance in devising test items appropriate for our various goals. Finally, we continued to emphasize excellence within the tutorial staff itself, providing training for both graduate students and adjuncts before they were allowed to tutor and evaluating their effectiveness. By the end of the year, a short two years since its inception as a pilot project, The Writing Lab was a well-established, fully functional entity.

The end of 1979, though, also brought a potential halt to my vision for The Writing Lab when Perlis, my chair, asked me to accept the position of Director


of Freshman English. While flattered, I was reluctant to jeopardize the future security of The Writing Lab, particularly given the time-sensitive concerns of the on-going Title III grant, curricular and test development, and staff training. We negotiated an agreement for a colleague, Bill Baxter, UAB, and me to co-direct the composition program while I retained administrative direction of The Writing Lab. Nancy Price, UAB, who had served as my assistant director for the previous year, was named Interim Director to oversee day-to-day operations.

This dual-appointment continued throughout 1980. As Price bore the burden of scheduling, curricular development, and supervision, I concentrated on budgetary and networking matters. She and I collaborated on forging a closer relationship between the composition program and The Writing Lab. Another colleague, Robert Collins, and I proposed a set of remedial courses that covered both reading and writing. The proposals were approved by the school's curriculum committee and became a requirement for students whose ACT scores in the respective sub-tests were lower than 20. Concurrently, students enrolled in either of the courses were mandated to complete a set number of tutorial sessions in The Writing Lab as part of their course grades. The interdependence of the developmental program and The Writing Lab was further supported by upper administration that expanded the university's testing office to offer reading and writing tests to students who applied for admission with missing or out-of-date ACT scores. The Registrar's office implemented a new coding system for recording grades for the developmental courses that effectively had become a graduation requirement. The evolution of the project from a pilot program to a condition of graduation required the sustained efforts and commitment of numerous areas of the university. By this time, The Writing Lab's reputation and its widening range of implications for undergraduate education were well established within our region and had become a model for others interested in developing such an operation.

When Gary Olson hosted the 1981 meeting of The First Annual Southeastern Conference of Writing Lab Directors, our collective direction was firmly set. The fifty or so attendees were a combination of principles either working in established writing centers or interested in learning how to develop one. A range of topics related to the development and administration of writing centers was covered; my presentation focused on securing funding. The enthusiasm generated by the meeting and the information shared proved a solid basis for the continuation of existing and establishment of new writing centers across our region.

Although later in the year I formally relinquished my direction of The Writing Lab to concentrate on the other programs, I knew that I left it as a permanent fixture well supported by both the faculty and administration. As I watched its evolution over the years, I was proud to see its changes: The Writing Lab became the Writing Center which eventually became The English Resource Center. Its physical location moved from its initial three rooms (joined by glass walls that I just had to have after seeing those used for security at Jacksonville Atlantic University) to a suite of rooms on the first floor of Sterne Library. Its supplies increased from the original group of tables, chair, and texts to individual tutorial pods supplemented with a bank of computers and printers. Its mission expanded from serving the needs of students enrolled in English courses to include those with writing projects in all courses across the university.

Years later, a group of those who had attended Olson's, inaugural writing center conference gathered in Myrtle Beach to recount memories of our early efforts and successes with our individual writing centers. Old friendships were rekindled, horror stories were whispered, but most evident was our pride in having made a positive difference in the lives of so many students.

Looking back, my career at UAB can neatly be bookended by my association with The Writing Lab. Back in 1977 the vice president offered me an opportunity that was both a challenge and a pleasure. The university as a whole and the English department in particular consistently cheered me on with support. The larger academic community applauded our accomplishments. Finally, on December 1, 2012, the university hosted a retirement party for me in the faculty lounge—the latest incarnation of The Writing Lab. 

# Memories...the Way We Were: A SWCA Founder Looks Back at the First Meeting and More (Reprinted from *Southern Discourse*, 3:1 Fall 1999)

**Tom Waldrep, Medical University of Charleston**

Twenty years ago this month I was sitting in my office in the writing center at the University of South Carolina when the secretary buzzed me to say I had a call from Dr. Gary Olson, the writing center director at the University of Alabama in



Courtesy of Tom Waldrep

Tuscaloosa. Since Alabama was my home state and the University my alma mater, I eagerly took the call. Dr. Olson introduced himself and began telling me of his ideas to have a southeastern writing center meeting, maybe one where writing center directors could come together and talk about our place in the academy, share ideas and expertise, tell each other “what works for me,” and begin a network in our region that would be supportive of each one’s efforts. “Will you come and be one of the speakers?” he asked.

I was hesitant. First of all, I had only been in my position as writing center director since July 1. What did I know about the writing center’s place in the academy? My place? Did I have any ideas worth sharing? What did work for me, what didn’t? I told Gary I would think about this and call him back. I told my graduate students who staffed the center about this proposal. Of course, they thought not only should there be a meeting, but also that all of us should attend. I asked what could I say. What are we doing that others are not? What ideas and expertise could we offer other writing centers in the southeast? They promised to brainstorm. “We’ll help you with this; call Olson and tell him you’ll do it.” I did.

Olson organized the meeting and on February 7, 1981, the meeting was held at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Speakers included Karen Spear from the

University of Utah, Linda Bannister from the University of Arkansas, Tilly Eggers (Warnock) from the University of Wyoming, Loretta Cobb from Montevallo State University.

Some excerpts from the text of my address, yellow, worn, frayed, pulled from my files, follow.

Today our colleagues are calling for “writing across the curriculum. . . .” Recently in the writing center at the university of South Carolina I sat with a senior student in our honors college whose history professor had told him, “Young man, if you don’t learn to write a sentence before this semester is over, I’m going to fail you.” This student, baffled, dismayed and distraught, had sought help in the writing center to learn sentence development. Is this an uncommon incident? Probably not. Just recently I told my dean at USC that we could not continue to graduate students supposedly trained to be teachers, engineers, nurses, accountants, etc. who cannot speak the language, much less read or write it. I had gathered my statistics before talking to him and found that during the fall semester the staff members and I had seen 842 students in one-to-one tutorials and 422 students in workshops, a large number of whom we were preparing for the screening exam, an exit test for the seniors in the College of Education. When I learned that forty-five percent of all the seniors failed this examination in the first administration, that ninety percent of this forty five percent failed the writing section of the exam, and that it was these students who in a few weeks would be applying to teach in the elementary and secondary schools of South Carolina, I realized it was time for action.

Every teacher must be a teacher of writing, and all teachers from kindergarten to graduate school should accept the challenge to teach literacy. We, as college instructors, have blamed the high school teachers, and the high school teachers have blamed the elementary teachers, and the elementary teachers have blamed the parents, and the parents have blamed the home life and television. And we, as freshmen English instructors, have asked the freshmen directors, who have asked the department chairpersons, who in turn have asked the deans and vice-presidents, who in turn have asked the omniscient body—the state legislature—who supposedly can solve all problems - to solve the literacy problem. This body readily gives to all the solution: accountability through competencies. And as someone else has said, competency is somehow always equated to a test score. This is not the answer. Mandated standards will not teach students to be literate. Mandated standards will not do the task for us.

The 1980s is a time to face this realization head-on. We, as educators, as humanitarians, must . . . look closely at the successful student, whether he is in our classes presently or a dropout of the sixties and seventies. We must study and prepare a method that will make this person literate. We must implement holistic writing programs that stress both the basic and efficient uses of language. Such a program will provide the service we all want our writing centers to provide—and that service is literacy for all. . . . Being literate is being able to use language efficiently and effectively. Holistic literacy, as Winston Weathers has so aptly points out, is a cultural and spiritual quest: toward verbal health, completeness, fulfillment. It is taking hold of the word, the whole word: it is the mutability of language, the flow. . . . holistic literacy: an act of tolerance, sympathy, compassion, stepping closer to hear, making the best of it all, turning on lights, adjusting the lens, bending . . . the moral and ethical orientation; not afraid to fail; being gentle with imperfection; repeating ourselves again and again.



Courtesy of the University of Alabama Blog

And the writing center must concern itself with all of this. . . . The writing center must offer a pragmatic articulation with the secondary public and private schools and two-year community and technical colleges in the state. The writing center must provide: aid for the students deficient in composition skills; aid for minority and disadvantaged students. . . . But the writing center must be more than a remedial service station, a band-aid station for papers due tomorrow. It must be more than the old developmental labs of the past where a peer tutor handed a student an English 3200 and told him to do the frames in this programmed text. The writing center, to provide real, worthwhile service, must reach back to the lower schools and into the community to get at some of the sources of writing problems we see in our freshmen English classes. . . .

Writing centers can provide off-campus and in-the-center teaching sessions and assistance for all levels of classes and teachers—in the university and throughout the state—through consultations, presentations, in-service programs, speeches, panels, workshops, and minicourses. . . .

The writing center needs not only to reach back but to reach beyond to the numerous citizens who are functionally illiterate. . . .

Extending the writing center beyond the remedial or developmental English program, beyond the student population to the community is work. It takes organization and preparation. It takes effervescent enthusiasm that fosters spontaneous creativity; such enthusiasm will hopefully spread throughout your whole department, the whole university, into the community. We know it can; we have seen this happen in Carolina. Our goal is holistic literacy: communication from one mind to another. And as Winston Weathers has said, “All. . . involves our will, our good intention, our wanting it to happen. And, of course, our craftsmanship, our skill, our technique, our rhetoric, our style.” Holistic literacy will require energy: intellectual, spiritual, and social. Do we have it?

Thus, the Southeastern Writing Center Association was born on February 7, 1981. One year later many of the same group returned to Tuscaloosa to hold the second annual meeting. Gary Olson served as conference director and president of the organization for the first two years. Following Olson, I assumed the leadership role and served as conference director and president in 1983 and 1984, moving the meeting to Columbia, SC to my university. In the following years, annual meetings were held in Charleston and Mobile, Birmingham and Atlanta, Washington D.C. and Knoxville, and a number of other southeastern cities.

The Southeastern Writing Center Association was up and coming. It had instituted in 1986 (in Mobile) the Annual Achievement Award given “in recognition of outstanding professional service to the community of specialists who direct and staff writing centers.” The organization honored me with that first award, and in 1987 it was given to Art Young from Clemson University. In 1988 the award went to Joe Trimmer from Ball State University.

I am delighted that at the 2000 meeting in February the award will be reinstated with a cash prize and a plaque. I cherish the plaque, which hangs in my office today as a reminder of writing centers’ place in the academy and my own place and history with this organization, to which I truly give credit for so much of my own professional growth and strength.

Come to Savannah in February. Start building your own memories or continue your



# Memories of SWCA Conferences Past

**Bonnie Devet, College of Charleston**

It's here. The morning E-mail has brought a call for proposals from the Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference, a notice I have anticipated annually since 1988 when I presented at my first SWCA conference, just prior to becoming the writing lab director at the College of Charleston. SWCA conferences are always memorable....for different reasons—for the content, naturally—but also for the surprises that wedge the conference into one's memory.

Sometimes, that memory is fiery, meteorological, and poignant as was the case at the February 1996, SWCA conference in Myrtle Beach, S.C. On the first night, the conference hotel experienced a fire, with all guests ordered to evacuate. Having brought four peer consultants with me to the conference, I was, well, vastly worried about these sons and daughters. I ordered all of them down the hotel stairs to the lobby and out the front doors while burly firefighters with ropes and hoses and extinguishers rushed past us. One of the peer consultants, in order to lighten the tension, said she had remembered to rescue the transparencies needed for our conference presentation, and, jokingly, explained that with the headlights of the parked cars and the fire trucks, we could easily do the presentation right there in the parking lot. One can count on peer consultants to find a way to accomplish anything.

More surprises awaited, though. A day into the conference, local weather mavens forecasted a massive ice storm would barrel down on us. Myrtle Beach—the sun and fun capital of the world—is not equipped to handle icy, slippery roads. For safety, the conference ended early, with participants racing the storm to arrive home. The conference had begun in fire and ended in ice.

This conference was memorable for more than a sly reference to Robert Frost. It was the last time I would have the pleasure of seeing and hearing one of the composition gurus and main supporters of writing centers. Wendy Bishop, the keynote speaker, began her career in centers, but when she expanded her interests to the entire field of

composition, she never forgot her early days as a writing center specialist. She would pass away only few years later, in 2003. So, some conferences settle into the memory for their extremes and, unfortunately, for their sadness. Sometimes, the conference memory is professionally satisfying. At the 1993 meeting in Decatur, Georgia, I was fortunate enough to introduce southeastern writing centers to the concept of certification. My presentation explained that the College of Charleston Writing Lab was certifying its tutors by participating in the then not-well-known College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), which sets national standards for tutor training at three levels of regular, advanced, and master. This presentation having been so well received, the SWCA organizers asked me to repeat it later in the conference for those not able to attend the first session. While I am sure other centers were already working towards certification, it was fulfilling to know that my session helped—a little—to spur on interest in certifying tutors.

Sometimes, a conference memory reflects one of our prime goals as directors: developing and fostering our consultants. At the 2005 SWCA meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, not only did I have a chance to co-present with a peer consultant but I was there to see Marie Morgann (Political Science major) receive the SWCA's Outstanding Peer Tutor Award because of her efforts in helping students and developing the lab's services. Such recognition validates the hard work of consultants and directors alike.



Courtesy of the College of Charleston

Sometimes, a conference memory contains small touches, touches revealing the atmosphere of the conferences and our centers. The Marriott Hotel (Savannah, Georgia)—the setting for several SWCA meetings—is smack on the Savannah River; I can recall sitting in sessions, dreamily looking through the hotel's vista-revealing windows to witness the ever-flowing river—no more than a pencil-throw away—with its container-laden vessels and tourist pirate ships gliding by. Would that all centers could operate so smoothly. Or in Charlotte, N.C., at the February, 2003, conference, a writing center colleague from Istanbul, Turkey, had flown sixteen hours and 5,623 miles (9049 kilometers) just to attend this SWCA meeting because, as she explained, “The southeastern folks are so friendly and warm.” She had brought a box of Turkish delight (dates, pistachios, hazelnuts) to pass around, “Sweets to the sweet,” as Hamlet might say, and certainly part of the friendliness and sharing so symbolic of all centers. At the same SWCA conference, another symbol arose. An Elvis Presley impersonator, who was part of an engagement

party being held in the hotel, was performing in a nearby ballroom, churning out a lyric from Burning Love: “My brain is flaming... I don’t know which way to go.” How many of our writing center clients have felt the same as they have wrestled with term papers and lab reports? SWCA conferences do, indeed, generate symbols.



Courtesy of Bonnie Devet

And, sometimes, the memory is cultural gratifying. At the joint meeting of SWCA and the International National Writing Center Association in Savannah, Georgia, April, 2002, a peer consultant and I had the pleasure of co-presenting with our British writing center counterparts Margo Blythman, Susan Orr, and Celia Bishop, from the London Institute (now London College of Communication). Our session “peered across the pond” in order to compare the British and

American perceptions about using students as tutors. The American peer consultant confessed that she had expected the Brits to show up at our panel in flowing Oxfordian academic gowns, spouting pearls of wisdom from Shakespeare. So, for her, it was an eye-opener to meet the British writing center professionals, just ordinary folks with different views about why the British higher education system may not use peers as tutors. Through such encounters, peer consultants grow, and the SWCA is part of that cultural growth.

It must be admitted, that over time, most conferences blend into one another, creating one long flow where the conference goer has endured overly crowded airplane flights, has caught way-too-expensive taxis to the hosting hotels, has hunted up conference registration desks in obscure, dark corners of hotels, has donned name tags that never stick, and has scanned conference programs for familiar names. At other moments, however, conferences are less burdensome, furnishing memories that are unusually poignant, professionally fulfilling, unexpectedly symbolic, and culturally meaningful and, now, well remembered.



## **Southeastern Writing Center Association 2015 Conference**

*Identities in Consultation:  
Diversity in the South  
and Beyond*

**Date: February 6-8, 2015**

**Location: Lipscomb University**

**Conference Chair: Stacia Watkins, Lipscomb University**



Agnes Scott College tutoring staff

# Letter from the President

**Laura Benton,**  
**Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute**

SWCA Friends:

In my time as SWCA President, what stands out most is the people I've had the pleasure of meeting, working with, and learning from. It didn't take becoming part of SWCA for me to know that amazing people do writing center work, but being involved with SWCA has confirmed that every writing center administrator and consultant I have met is actively committed to learning, and that's pretty darn exciting.

In my five years on the board, I have worked alongside some of the most dedicated people I know, gained a deep understanding of and appreciation for our organization, made lifelong friends, and met many writing center rock stars—one of whom is leaving the board after having serving 25 years.

I'm proud to know and work beside Christine Cozzens. Christine is more than an editor; she is a mentor, an advocate, and a SWCA legend. Her words are wise and certain, and they've changed my way of thinking about the field of writing centers, about the purpose of our organization, about what belonging and supporting should look like.

When Christine decided to resurrect *Southern Discourse* in 1997, I was writing my first five paragraph essay. But Christine was a visionary. She undertook the overwhelming task of revivifying SWCA's newsletter. She committed to filling a void and remained a consistent force in the writing center world for decades. She grew the newsletter into a professional publication. She offered writers a voice. She encouraged various genres. She published student writing. She presented images, taking us inside centers and showing the faces of administrators, tutors, and writers throughout the southeast. Even if we didn't attend the annual conference, Christine brought the writing center world into our centers, offices, dorms, and homes. Through SD, she fought against the lonesome feel-



ing of being the only one on our campus who does writing center work and, with each issue, connected us to the larger whole of writing center amazingness. She connected us to the outside world before internet and email were as common as shoes and socks. Christine made sure *Southern Discourse* spoke to a wide audience. She found camaraderie in SWCA and made it her goal to offer just that to everyone through SD. In the March 1998 (Volume 1, Issue 1) newsletter, Christine wrote her own president's letter. She was in the same position I am in today: writing her last president's letter and reflecting on the spirit of the organization. Christine wrote, "Although my term as president is about to end, I will continue as newsletter editor, and with your help I am looking forward to making the newsletter a vital part of the organization once again." Christine has undoubtedly accomplished this goal.

I've never known SWCA without *Southern Discourse* or, for that matter, without Christine. I'm humbled to have been a very small part of Christine's legacy, to have worked along the longest standing SWCA board member and the courageous, forward-thinking *Southern Discourse* editor.

I'm honored to be involved with people who value writing, who fight for their centers, who help others, who ask questions and conduct research to progress our field, and who dedicate their lives to understanding and improving writing. Thank you for all you do and for letting me be a part of it.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laura Benton". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

## SWCA Mission Statement

The Southeastern 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 Southeastern 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 directors and staff of writing centers and others interested in writing centers from public and private secondary schools, community colleges, colleges and universities, and to individuals and institutions from beyond the Southeastern region.

Adopted by the SWCA Executive Board 31 May 2003.

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## Special Issue: SWCA and *Southern Discourse* History

This special issue includes articles by and about SWCA founders, as well as stories and reflections from some of the organization's longtime members and officers, and a history of *Southern Discourse*.

We hope that you enjoy this unique collection and that you will write about your own SWCA experiences for the SWCA website and future issues!