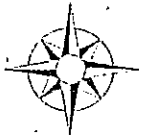


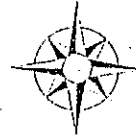
SOUTHERN DISCOURSE

Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



October 1998

Fall Edition



SWCA Plans 19th Annual Conference

Palm trees. Historical architecture. Gourmet food. Writing centers?

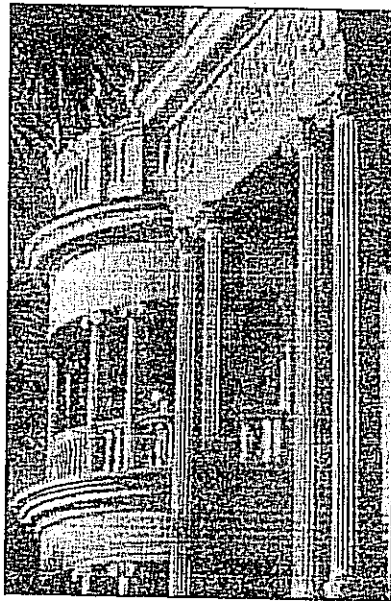
This year, the 19th annual conference of the Southeastern Writing Center Association will be held at the Sheraton Charleston Hotel in Charleston, South Carolina. From February 3-6, SWCA members will gather to present their thoughts on this year's theme, "Conversations about Teaching and Writing: Where Are We after Two Decades?"

Tom Waldrep, director of the Writing Center of the Medical University of South Carolina, is planning the 1999 conference. Waldrep, who helped co-found the SWCA with Gary Olson in fall of 1980, served as president from 1983-1984. According to Waldrep, "We are moving towards seeing writing centers in specific disciplines," including law, business, medicine, and technology. Writing centers' continued emphasis on writing across the curriculum has enabled this shift, as disciplines recognize the importance of writing and respond by funding their own specialized writing centers. In twenty years, writing centers have also improved their reputations "from remedial stations to legitimate writing centers." These significant changes inspire the theme of this year's conference, which will provide an opportunity to share ideas about the direction of writing centers as the twentieth century comes to an end. Proposals for presentations should be faxed or mailed by November 15, 1998. (See the form in this issue.)

Because the conference ends on Friday, February 6, visitors to the city may choose to stay for the weekend to enjoy the historically and culturally rich city of Charleston. Taking a walking tour of antebellum homes (some of which are haunted!) or visiting one of Charleston's many museums can acquaint a tourist with the city's heritage. Of course, no visit would be complete without sampling Charleston's culinary delicacies, from she-crab soup to fried green tomatoes.

The Sheraton Charleston's location overlooking the harbor promises a small taste of Charleston even to those conference-goers who cannot stay for the entire weekend. Hope to see y'all there!

Lee Hayes
Agnes Scott College



A Charleston porch displays its unique architecture.
Photo courtesy of the Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau.

SWCA Officers

President:
Twila Yates Papay
Rollins College
tpapay@rollins.edu

Vice-president:
Phillip Gardner
Francis Marion University

Secretary:
Peggy Ellington
Wesleyan College
Peggy_Ellington@post.wesleyan-college.edu

Treasurer:
Tom MacLennan
University of North Carolina, Wilmington
maclelland@uncwil.edu

Members-at-large:
Beth Young
University of Central Florida
byoung@mail.ucf.edu

Karl Fomes
University of South Carolina, Aiken
karlf@usca.usca.sc.edu

Selected Papers Editor:
Steve Braye
Elon College
brayes@numen.elon.edu

Southern Discourse Editor:
Christine Cozzens
Agnes Scott College
ccozzens@agnesscott.edu

1999 Conference Director
Tom Waldrep
Medical College of Charleston

The Road We Traveled By: Journeys to Writing Center Professions

Ah, fall semester, "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness." Most of us in the business of college teaching see the season as anything but mellow. As the articles in this issue suggest, fall is a time of great fruitfulness for us as we reap the benefits of last year's staff meeting decisions, conference borrowings, and summer brainstorming. Special thanks to this issue's contributors, who managed to write and send in articles amid the furious activity of the first weeks of school.

As I read through the contributions for this issue, I marveled at the bounty of the harvest, the result of cross-pollination and the generous sharing of ideas and practices that is characteristic of the field of teaching writing, but even more so of writing centers. The fruitfulness in our region is evidenced in Jo Koster Tarvers' survey of what's new and renewed in SWCA writing centers this year. In the spirit of a season that remembers "the songs of spring" as it lingers in "the maturing sun," Sonja Bagby and Kirsten Benson describe program components that orient incoming staff members and refresh the outlook of experienced tutors and directors. Twila Yates Papay reminds us of the connections, personal and professional, that knit together writing-center practice.

To those of you new to the business of writing centers, you are joining a true community of scholars who welcome knowledge, share willingly, and pursue their subject with dedication and thoughtfulness. As Lee Hayes points out in her article on the upcoming conference in Charleston, many new challenges lie ahead in our work; gathering to help each other move forward insures continued growth and another season of fruitfulness and change.

Later this month I've been asked to give a talk for a graduate course at Emory on how I got to be where I am today. While my story of indecision and missteps leading to a relatively happy ending is not particularly unusual, neither is it one I often get a chance to tell. I'm thrilled that I have a chance to develop the coherence I

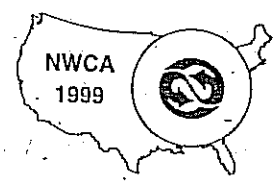
know lies within the hodgepodge of my experience. I'm guessing that when I talk about the rocky path to figuring out that I was good at teaching writing and wanted to do it more than anything else, I'll be retelling a saga familiar to many of you.

I'd like to invite submissions of about 600 words for the winter issue of *Southern Discourse* on just this subject: how you put your career together. What path did you take—or invent—to becoming a writing teacher or a writing center professional?

If you are interested in becoming a regular contributor, please get in touch with me. The new *Southern Discourse* is still in its infancy, and I am looking for writers and contributions of all kinds to help it grow and "fill all fruit with ripeness to the core."

Christine Cozzens
Agnes Scott College

Fourth National Writing Centers Association Conference



Bloomington, Indiana, April 15-17, 1999

Writing Center 2000: Meeting the Challenges of the New Century

Featured Speakers: Muriel Harris and Edward M. White

Held in conjunction with the conference of the East Central Writing Centers Association and intended for tutors, writing center administrators, and teachers of writing from across the disciplines, the conference will focus on defining the evolving missions of writing centers, reconciling theory and practice, and considering writing centers' effects on the culture of writing in their institutions.

Those interested in attending or in presenting at the conference should contact Ray Smith, Director, Campus Writing Program, Franklin Hall 008, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405. Phone (812) 855-4928; e-mail nwca99@indiana.edu; Web <http://www.indiana.edu/~nwca99/>.

Send all submissions to *Southern Discourse* to

Christine Cozzens, Editor
Department of English
Agnes Scott College Box 710
141 E. College Ave.
Decatur, GA 30030-3797
cuzzens@agnesscott.edu
phone: 404-471-6221
fax: 404-471-5223

Editorial Assistant: Lee Hayes
Publication Design: Laura Brandon

Southern Discourse is published three times a year in the fall, winter, and spring

Writing Center Tests Mentoring Program

In our writing center as in most, the beginning of the school year always brings many new tutors, fresh perspectives, and fresh challenges for our training program. Most of our new graduate student tutors, who work 4.5 hours per week in the center as part of their funding, come in new to the area, new to our graduate program, new to our writing center, and some new to tutoring. Right away they must become familiar with our policies and procedures, not to mention begin tutoring as quickly as possible, since we always start off running. (We had 405 visits to the center in the first week of this semester, and last year we had over 14,000 visits.) The tutors participate in a regular training program over the year, of course, but still I worried that it wasn't moving quickly enough, in some respects, to meet the need of getting tutors ready. And, since they are conscientious people, the new tutors also worried about not being ready, about not knowing what to do.

To help relieve the anxieties, increase all of our tutors' exposure to a variety of tutoring practices, and expand the opportunities for new and experienced tutors to get to know each other and to talk about their practices, this year we are implementing a mentor program. At its heart the concept is very simple: experienced tutors serve as mentors and are paired up with new tutors.

During each hour an experienced tutor is assigned to one (or in some cases two) first-year tutor(s). As time and the level of activity in the writing center permit, assigned pairs work together, observing one another's tutorials (the first-year tutor observes his or her mentor, and the mentor observes the first-year tutor) and just talking with each other about tutoring. At the beginning of the year, the first-year tutors ordinarily do most of the observing and decide when they feel comfortable enough to be ob-

served. As soon as possible following an observation session, both tutors process together what happened in the tutorial. At least once a month, all tutors write an informal Reflection on Practice in which they examine their experiences and what they have learned from one another.

We learned from pilot-testing this program in the spring that some considerations should be discussed prior to observing tutorials. Members of each mentoring pair should create arrangements between themselves as to when to observe and when to be observed, how to invite each other in to observe or be observed, how to request permission from the student to have an observer present, when to interrupt the person leading the tutorial, and when to discuss what happened in a session.

In past years we have tried simply to encourage experienced and first-year tutors to work and talk together. Some hesitance on both sides limited the effectiveness of this approach: some new tutors didn't want to "bother" the experienced tutors with what they feared might be insignificant questions, and some experienced tutors didn't want to presume that the new people didn't know certain things or to "intrude" by offering help. These issues of entree should be eliminated under this more formal mentor system, in which it is expected that both members of the mentoring pairs will talk about their tutoring. We anticipate that both the new and the experienced tutors will get to know one another better and will benefit from observing each other work. We think this program will help our new tutors learn more quickly the art of tutoring that our experienced tutors practice so well.

If any one else is engaging in a mentor program, I'd love to hear about it! E-mail me at kbenson@ulkux.utcc.utk.edu

Kirsten F. Benson
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Message

Well, I'm moving toward an addiction to *Buffy the Vampire-Slayer*, and it's all Phil Gardner's fault. When I announced last spring at the SWCA meeting in Macon that I was chairing a search for a teaching fellow here at Rollins, Phil told a colleague about the position. As the colleague sounded every bit as talented and committed as we might expect of Phil's friends, he got the job. But he hadn't been here for two weeks before he brought me the first *Buffy* video. My students and I share a new fascination. Thanks, Phil, I think.

What I'm talking about is connections, those we make through SWCA, those we make through the writing center. Last week I went to the wedding of two former peer writing consultants. "Ah," you sigh, "a writing center romance." Actually, they were at Rollins at different times. But I did introduce them, and just now they feel they owe me so much that one of them is developing my website.

Of course, there's no such thing as "owing" when it comes to the writing center, and I never start a year without pondering all the collaborative practices that brought us to this place, this understanding, this way of doing and being. Especially in the fall, our centers echo with the voices of past peer consultants as we train the newcomers in what the old ones taught us. In my classes, I realize how much of my teaching has emerged from writing center pedagogy. And so, new adaptations — like my plans for carrying peer tutoring to Africa in the spring, and the good work we'll be sharing in Charleston this spring.

Welcome back to a new year, a new set of questions, new possibilities. And certainly new

connections, as that next generation of students discovers just how powerful their voices may grow through their work in the writing center.

Twila Yates Papay
Rollins College

Team Building Online in the Writing Center

In the spring of 1996, when I first took over the job as writing center coordinator, I gathered a very bright group of English students and told them, "We want to open a real writing center, and I need your help."

I gave them the *Bedford Guide*, written by Leigh Ryan, some old issues of *the Writing Lab Newsletter*, Jeff Brooks' "Minimalist Tutoring" article, *The St. Martin's Source Book for Writing Tutors*, and copies of Wcenter listserv discussions, and we spent the summer reading, planning, and talking. We came back together in August to formulate our mission statement, our policies, our principles of peer tutoring. I admit, I couldn't have opened the writing center without these bright young minds. That collaboration was the most rewarding professional experience so far in my career. We had a team. Then, after two years, that team left, graduated, went away. I had to build a new team. Could I do it again?

I had established a listserv (an online discussion group) mostly to post announcements, schedule changes, reminders, and news. One day, after reading twenty tutoring journals and feeling the burden of all those tutors depending on my advice, I said, "Let's just put our tutoring diaries online, and each person should respond to two other people (minimum) per week." We set down guidelines of "netiquette," and we made sure all our comments were supportive if not always in

agreement with the person to whom we responded.

I knew that I liked listservs and online tutoring for their anonymity and for the comfort of having time to respond thoughtfully to others' questions and ideas. And I love Wcenter for all the knowledgeable advice I receive from my mentors and peers in writing centers. But I never could have anticipated the incredible response or gauged the team-building merits of our little listserv.

In the last six months, we have found many advantages to having an internal listserv. A tutoring listserv in our center

- focuses our tutor meetings. Since we get many things discussed and decided online, we can use meetings for role playing and other tutor-training strategies that need warm bodies to be successful.
- increases communication between tutors. Since many of my tutors never work together, never even see each other except at meetings, they can talk over tutoring theory and practice online.
- allows tutors to disagree with each other in a nonconfrontational way. Tutors might be loathe to say, "I would have handled that problem in a different way" in person, but online, we use netiquette and our own common-team-building sense to suggest or share alternative tutoring strategies.
- opens discussions that might not have been so deeply explored face to face. There are few lull times in the center, and with such a large team I never felt that we fully dealt with ideas raised or settled problems to everyone's satisfaction. Many of my tutors are introverts—people who never speak up in class; they are satisfied to listen. Online these quiet tutors

raise issues and explore concerns with such insight and depth that they have raised the level of our discussions of writing center philosophy and added depth of thought to the development of our policies.

- allows tutors a private place to "vent" and to receive encouragement from other tutors. Instead of simply writing to me, tutors share with their peers tutoring triumphs and disappointments. We have built up quite a cheering and commiseration department online, and some of the burden of being the person who hears all the problems falls from the director's shoulders.
- promotes openness and closer contact among tutors and makes it easier for them to ask for help. When tutors do run into a problem, they remember that someone discussed that same concern online last week, so they can go to that person for help.
- ensures that more experienced tutors are quietly able to mentor newer tutors without developing constraining hierarchies.
- has formed life-long relationships. All the tutors have talked, fought, cried, yelled on our listserv. They became online pen pals. So when we get together, the friendships are already formed and developed—we have a team.

Of course this happened online, you might say. Or you might wonder exactly how it did happen. I am not completely sure I know, but as with pen pals and online tutoring, the pressures or constraints that limit "real world" collaboration seem far away. My tutors have benefited immeasurably by copying the successful Wcenter formula in our own center.

Sonja S. Bagby and Tara W. Githens
State University of West Georgia

Something Old, Something New, Something's Always Changing

Every fall brings new tutors, new clients, and new ideas to writing centers. In a number of centers in the SWCA region, these seasonal changes are bringing to life new opportunities and new partnerships.

At the University of Central Florida, the year brings several important new collaborations. According to Director Beth Rapp Young, the University Writing Center is working with an education professor on a research project that uses the Long-Dziuban personality analysis to figure out the "most common type(s) and devise strategies for improving our work with these students." Beth also points to a partnership with a graduate-psychology class that will do a "job analysis" for the UWC. Beth says, "These results will help us improve our performance appraisals for the staff, and the performance appraisals will help us document excellence for the university so that we can give raises!" With a new operations manual, a new online scheduler that will eventually interface with the student records database, and a new Record of Consultation form inspired by a model from Agnes Scott College, the UCF Writing Center is making everything old new again this fall.

Karl Fornes at the Writing Room at the University of South Carolina at Aiken was faced with two challenges this summer: a new facility that includes a work area, reception area, consulting area, and computers, and a simultaneous twenty percent cut in work-study funds. He told me, "In desperation, I invited the chancellor and all the vice chancellors to the Writing Room to discuss why our budget needed to be increased to its former level (at the very least). My invitation stemmed from a hunch that the upper-level administration, although very supportive of what we do, has very little idea what, exactly, the Writing Room actually does. The chancellor was especially impressed by the way the consultants were able to respond to some of the techni-

cal questions that inevitably arise around computers. As a result, he practically insisted that I work with Computer Services to help train their student writers."

Karl's collaboration resulted in the creation of a new position, "Technology and Writing Consultant," and new salary money to fund the position on a pilot basis. His budget was increased nearly \$10,000 for the year to pay for three or four of these student consultants, who will work a collective total of 36-44 hours a week. Thus USC-A got more staff with more training to run its new combined labs. A simple invitation opened big doors for the Writing Room.

"We are moving from a safe house for writers to a community center for all disciplines."

Sonja Bagby at the State University of West Georgia has also built new bridges for her center as the college moves to a Writing in the Disciplines orientation. Inspired by Judith Powers' and Jane Nelson's article "Rethinking Writing Center Strategies for Writers in the Disciplines" (WLN 20.1), her center has moved from the aegis of the English Department to that of the College of Arts and Sciences. Now the center is funded by the College, which also supplies two graduate assistants, as does the English Department.

"We are moving from a safe house for writers to a community center for all disciplines," Sonja told me. "We teach and study writing to learn and writing to communicate philosophy and practice. These ideas help us bridge the gap from our old English ideas and open our minds. We want writers and professors to know that the Writing Center is one place to discuss writing, but not the only place. So we're supplementing the change by offering more faculty-oriented workshops. . . . All in all, it's more work, but more challenge; we think these are really positive steps."

At Winthrop, we're expanding our efforts to develop an assessment program for our services. Last spring we conducted an exit survey of clients to determine what they thought of our services; our Office of University Assessment is now converting our forms into a statistically valid report so that we can use these results to improve our efforts. Following up on this, three of our consultants spent most of last spring designing surveys that will be sent to all students who used the center three or more times last spring. Now that the survey, too, has been vetted by the office of Assessment, we're ready to give it. This Frequent User Survey should tell us not only why students keep coming back to the Center, but what these regular clients see that we could do differently. This fall we will begin surveying faculty members whose students come to the center to see how they perceive our work. One of our tutors piloted the survey this summer by interviewing faculty who teach our writing-intensive courses; her results have already led to changes in our marketing strategy and additions to our handout offerings. So we're eager to see what a broader range of faculty have to tell us.

Bill Bisese at The Citadel reports that his center has stepped up its staff training efforts. The Citadel's 27 consultants attended an intensive 40 hour Staff Development Week program that not only included material on teaching grammar, punctuation, and writing process skills, but also sessions on cultural diversity, personality differences training, working with administrators, and the Socratic method. To top things off, the consultants went through an outdoor ropes course to cement personal relationships among the staff. Bill reports that the staff will be working on an e-mail hotline and more interactive materials for their web page based on these initial training activities.

As your year begins, we hope these ideas incite you to look in new directions, try new techniques,

and build new bridges. For more information on these projects, contact:

Beth Rapp Young, University of Central
Florida: byoung@pegasus.cc.ucf.edu
Karl Fornes, University of South Carolina at
Aiken: karlf@aiken.sc.edu
Sonja Bagby, State University of West
Georgia: sbagby@westga.edu
Jo Koster Tarvers, Winthrop University:
tarversj@winthrop.edu
Bill Bisese, The Citadel:
bisese@citadel.edu

Jo Koster Tarvers
Winthrop University

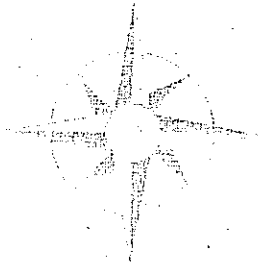
National Peer Tutoring Conference Planned for November

On November 6-8, nearly 200 peer tutors and directors representing 20 states and provinces will gather at SUNY-Plattsburgh. A program of 44 sessions will explore issues in tutor training, new programs and practices, theory and technology, collaborations, successful strategies, and special clients. Five schools will provide a Collaborative Keynote Multimedia Presentation, in which "peer consultants-of-yore" and current consultants will team up to celebrate the transformative effects of tutoring on their lives.

For registration information, contact Mary Dossim, SUNY-Plattsburgh. For program information, contact Twila Yates Papay, Rollins College.

Southern Discourse

Christine Cozzens, Editor
Department of English
Agnes Scott College, Box 710
141 E. College Ave.
Decatur, GA 30030-3797



Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 469
Decatur, GA

What's Inside Southern Discourse:

SWCA Plans 19th Annual Conference
page 1

The Road We Traveled By: Journeys to
Writing Center Professions
page 2

Writing Center Tests Mentoring
Program
page 3

SWCA President's Message
page 4

Team Building Online in the Writing
Center
page 4

Something Old, Something New,
Something's Always Changing
page 6

For engaging conversations about writing center practice in
your region, you can join

SWCATALK

the listserv of the
Southeastern Writing Center Association
based at Agnes Scott College.

To join, follow these instructions:

- ⊕ Send an e-mail message to: listserv@asc.agnesscott.edu
- ⊕ Leave the "Subject" line blank.
- ⊕ In the message body, type: `subscribe swcatalk`
- ⊕ Be sure to turn off your signature.
- ⊕ Make sure there are no additional spaces or characters in the message.

You will get an e-mail message welcoming you to the list. Once you have
joined, address all correspondence to

SWCATALK@asc.agnesscott.edu