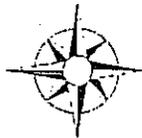


Southern Discourse

Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



Spring 1999

Volume 2, Issue 3



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Armstrong Atlantic State University To Host SWCA 2000 in Savannah, February 3-5: Writing Center Renaissance

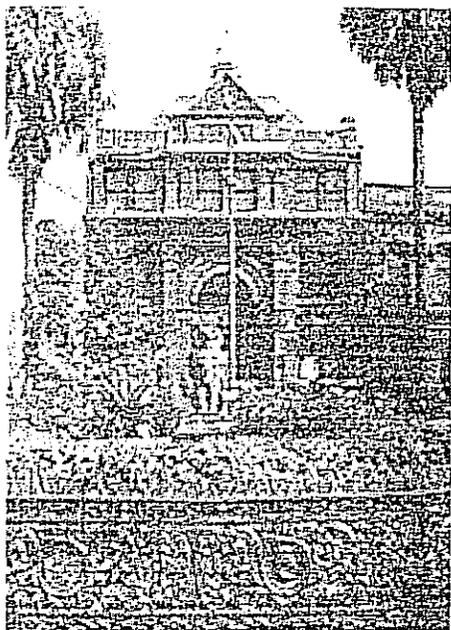
On the verge of the new millennium, we find ourselves in a period of transition, recalling similar transitions throughout history such as the Renaissance in Europe, when a reflective look at the past led not only to important rediscoveries but to great expansiveness as well. Embracing this Renaissance spirit might help us, as writing center professionals, revitalize our efforts: with a new era on the horizon, we have the opportunity to reassess our past achievements and to envision ourselves in the future.

The theme of the twentieth annual SWCA Conference, "Vision and Revision: A Renaissance Within the Writing Center," has grown out of a desire to explore the energizing

spirit emanating from centers across the country. The theme is designed to encourage a closer consideration of the following topics: the expanding influence of the writing center within the academy; the idea that pedagogies of the past can be revived and revised to meet present challenges; the notion that writing center professionals are Renaissance men and women; the center's relationship to writing across the curriculum, to English as a second language, and to innovations in technology. Proposals are, of course, not limited to these suggested areas.

Armstrong Atlantic State University welcomes the opportunity to host the conference in 2000, and Savannah's southern charm is sure to draw a large crowd of writing center tutors, administrators, and supporters. The meeting will take place on February 3-5 at the DeSoto Hilton located in historic downtown Savannah. The celebratory nature of the theme has been an inspiration in terms of planning the entertainment for the conference. AASU's jazz ensemble will spice things up during Thursday evening's cocktail reception, beginning at 8:30pm. On Friday, attendees can rendezvous for lunch at the famous Lady and Sons or at any number of restaurants lining the city's azalea-filled squares. Friday evening's banquet will give us a chance to break bread as a group, and following dinner, the AASU Masquers are scheduled to perform the one-act play, *Love Letters*. While the keynote speaker has yet to be

- continued on page 3 -



The Cotton Exchange, one of Savannah's many historic sites.
(Photo used by permission from Savannah Chamber of Commerce.)

Wanted: A Few Good Columnists

Never one to pass on an opportunity to promise time I don't have, I volunteered this year to write two regular columns, one on Ireland for the *Atlanta Celtic Quarterly*, and one on writing for the *Campus Connection*, a weekly newsletter published by Agnes Scott's public relations office. "Are you crazy?" my husband said when I told him I'd be writing fifteen or sixteen 800-1000 word articles during the year. A chill of fear gripped me as I contemplated my folly, but looking back over the year, I see that it was one of the best decisions I've ever made.

First of all, both columns offer me a forum for ideas and thoughts that don't fit anywhere else. Having traveled often to Ireland, taught courses on Irish literature and history, and read a ridiculous number of books on the subject, I'm in danger of being a bore on a whole range of issues connected to that country. The same is true for writing, which like most of you, I live and breathe. In the course of running a writing center for eleven years and handling a teaching load that is more than three quarters writing courses, I do have a lot to say about writing, if anyone is inclined to listen. The columns offer me the chance to have my say and to think more clearly and concretely about these two passions, a process that influences the rest of my thinking and my teaching in positive ways. Surprisingly, there are people out there who share these passions and who egg me on—I'm grateful for that.

And of course as all writers know, when I've chosen a subject to explore for a column, I truly discover it anew. I learn more about the subject, more about my own thoughts, and more about writing, as I try to find the right balance of ideas, diction, examples, rhetoric, anecdotes, and form to allow the subject to bloom on the screen or page. These regular writing gigs help keep my teaching of writing fresh. Sometimes I'll come to class stymied by a writing problem that I can share with the students or, once in a while, elated by a realization that might make sense to some of them. Having to come up with an original

article every few weeks reminds me of what it was like to be a student—the grind of it and the thrill of it. I've rediscovered the miracle that the more you write, the easier the process becomes, the more ideas you have, the more writing spawns writing.

Far from being oppressed by these commitments, I've learned to relish the routine. Like regular exercise, my column-writing routine makes me feel better in every way. Sure there have been a few late night panics, a few columns that I cheated on by rehashing earlier work, but even those gave me a satisfying sense of accomplishment. I cracked the problem. I turned nothing into something. I made the deadline.

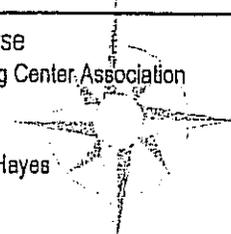
You know what's coming. *Southern Discourse* is ready to welcome a columnist or two or three who want to stir up their own thinking on some aspect of writing center work through regular contributions to these pages. If you are interested in the job, send in a proposal over the summer: a brief description 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).

I hope to launch at least one new column in the fall issue of *Southern Discourse*. Maybe it should be yours? Think about it.

Christine Cozzens
Agnes Scott College

Southern Discourse Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association

Editor: Christine Cozzens
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Publication Design: Laura Brandon



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A Journal with A View: SWCA To Develop a New Journal

Each of us knows the feeling of confronting a blank page. We're sometimes daunted and yet often excited about what will appear there. What will I say? How will I say it? Who will read it? What do I want to happen to readers? As we begin the creative process that will culminate in a new SWCA journal, we face the questions all writers encounter. How can we create something that is purposeful, relevant, and pleasing, something that reflects our collective identity, our collective voices, our shared critical and imaginative powers?

Before I'm done here, I'll offer a suggestion or two, but your ideas are what really count. How in your own creative process do *you* go about finding and expressing what goes in, what is left out? What from creative processes could you share that might contribute to our new journal? What do you feel are the essential questions?

In the spring 1995 issue of *Journal of Basic Writing* Lynn Bloom, in "A Name With A View," addresses the considerations of changing that journal's name. Our discussion of possibilities for a new SWCA journal, which I hope will take place through the medium of *Southern Discourse*, might begin with responses to her assertions. "A journal title," she writes, "should identify its subject area, and embody the spirit of the discipline." It should "distinguish its orientation to, and particular niche in, the broader field." And it "should accommodate, if not reflect, the current state of the art."

Look back at your work over the past year. What do you see in *your* work that reflects the spirit of writing center work as *you* see it? What in your work needs a voice? What in your work is unique to your center? To your tutors? To the students, faculty, and community you serve? What is it that most writing center folks *don't* know about what you do, or how you do it,

How to Submit Articles to *Southern Discourse*

Articles should be sent to the editor via email (in the body of the message), disk (MS Word preferred), or fax. Please note the following deadlines:

Fall 1999: October 1st Winter 2000: March 1st
Spring 2000: May 1st Fall 2000: October 1st

or why? What is your individual niche? Perhaps if we collect what is unique about each of us, we will see patterns of uniqueness. Or maybe we should begin by making a list, not of what we ought to put in a new journal, but of what absolutely can't be omitted.

If this all sounds like brainstorming to you, that's because it is. The more brains, the bigger the storm. I like it. I hope that you'll join the process. To do so, send your letters, notes, and suggestions to *Southern Discourse* in time for the Fall 1999 issue, or join the dialogue on SWCATALK, the listserv of the SWCA (see page 13 for details on how to sign on to SWCATALK.)

Let's try it. Let's see what we get.

Phillip Gardner, SWCA Vice-President
Francis Marion University

SWCA Conference

(continued from page 1)

selected, he or she will have our full attention over lunch in the Hilton's beautiful atrium.

The 2000 Conference will be a rejuvenating experience for us all. Look for the Call for Papers in your mailboxes by late May. Announcements should also begin showing up in journals this summer and again in the fall edition of *Southern Discourse*. For more information call 912-921-2330, or e-mail vandykch@mail.armstrong.edu.

Christina Van Dyke
Armstrong Atlantic State University

Into the Unknown: Navigating the Grammatical Backwaters of Writing Center Tutorials

At some point in the evolution of late twentieth-century American public education, the study of grammar was deemphasized, and a new generation appeared that heard nothing wrong in such phrases as "Me and him went to the store." Correct grammar usage, which was an important visual method of making written communication understandable to the reader during the age of print, became less imperative in the electronic age of telephones, television, and radio.

The result of this situation is predictable: Language users find that their own system of grammar, which functions well enough in the everyday oral-aural world of speech, often falls short of functionality when printed. The reification of abstract rules of language poses an interesting challenge to the writing center tutor, especially if that tutor lacks training in grammar. In a study of several weeks' worth of taped writing center tutorials at Western Carolina University, I found that grammar issues are dealt with in a variety of ways by tutors. Educated during a time when grammar was deemphasized in the public schools, most tutors lack the knowledge needed to specifically explain the rules of grammar. Even tutors who are well-versed in the proper terminology find their advice falling on deaf ears, for the student writers whom they are addressing normally don't have enough grammar vocabulary in their own mental lexicons to understand the lesson.

Educated during a time when grammar was deemphasized in the public schools, most tutors lack the knowledge needed to specifically explain the rules of grammar.

If those tutors who actually possess the proper vocabulary are unable to deal effectively with grammar issues, then the tutors who lack that vocabulary altogether often give information that appears if not downright confusing, at least not very helpful. Here are some examples.

(Abbreviations key: M, F=male, female; U, G=undergraduate, graduate; T, W=tutor, writer.)

GMT: (Reading) "People that grow up in different cultures often see things differently because of the certain individuals often see things more clearly than others. . ." (long pause).

MUW: "How'zat sound?"

GMT: "It seems like there's some.... Okay, like, this is a...this is a boy, this is a girl, and they're trying to hold hands. There's something there...m-missing in the middle that's helping them put their hands together. Ummm...that's a stupid example, but it's the first one right off the top of my head. We'll come back to that. What will we call that? I guess...transitional...in the middle of that sentence? We'll try to flesh that out later."

This tutor's use of metaphor is a good example of one rather creative way to deal with grammatical problems. Tutors who lack the proper vocabulary to directly address grammatical errors often dance around the problem so creatively that the issue never gets "[fleshed] out later."

Another style of grammar correction involves talking the issue out, both to see how it "sounds" and to discover the logic behind the rule:

MGT: (Reading) "I walked around to see if the group were finished eating." (Stops reading.) "The group was or the group were? Well, that's kind of weird 'cause it's a group of plural people, but I think we still talk...if you say a group, it's kind of a singular."

UMW: "Right. That sounds better—was."

MGT: "I think it is was. 'The group was.' It's kind of like saying, 'the team' or something. Like, 'The team was...done kicking the football'...or something."

Despite the strange efficiency of "plural people" to explain the problem at hand, the method of "talking it out" is not a very reliable system. If writers rely on "how it sounds," then the person who thinks that "Me and her went dancing" sounds correct will have no problem putting that form into print and will have been at least partially encouraged to do so by the example of her friendly writing center tutor.

If a writer relies on "how it sounds," then she will have no problem putting incorrect grammar into print, and will have been encouraged by her writing tutor.

Proposing a solution to grammatical issues in college writing is not as easy as pointing out the problems. More grammar training for tutors would help, although there is little time in the already short semester for such activity. Even with extra training, unless all students possess a vocabulary for talking about grammar, the tutors' lessons will continue to go unnoticed. A more productive approach would be to ask why grammar training was deemphasized in the first place and whether or not it can be resurrected. Until it is resurrected on a large scale in public education, both student writers and the writing center tutors who strive to help them will find their vocabulary largely inadequate to speak the language of grammar, and students' writing will continue to suffer from want of clarity and sophistication.

David R. Carithers
Western Carolina University

A Small College Writing Center Goes Online

Ever since discovering OWLS on the Internet, I have wanted to make a Web site for our writing center. I had learned a bit about Web page construction in a one-day technology workshop the May before the Presbyterian College Writing Center opened in the fall of 1998, but in the rush of training tutors and handling our first year's writing conferences, I had no time to work on a site. Finally, this spring, with the help of our dozen tutors and a faculty member who works part-time in the writing center, our Web site is online.

At our first staff meeting in January, I proposed the Web site project to our tutors. To get the group started, I bookmarked all the sites mentioned in "UnfURLed: 20 Writing Center Sites to Visit on the Information Highway" by Bruce Piggies from Eric Hobson's *Wiring the Writing Center*. I asked the tutors to explore and to take notes on what they would like to see on our site. This project had immediate positive effects: the tutors enjoyed the search and absorbed information about writing centers and tutoring.

As we discussed our audience and purpose for the Web site, we decided that our primary audience would be the students at Presbyterian College. We wanted a site that students could turn to for information about the writing center and a site available from any computer on campus for help on writing when we are closed. Keeping this audience in mind as we planned and worked on our site, we wanted to mention our library's resources, our center's books, and our faculty's ideas on writing for their courses.

Faculty would be our second most important audience. To offer the faculty ideas for using writing in their classes, we developed a page with writing-across-the-curriculum links and a page with the books our writing center and the library have about writing in the disciplines. We wanted faculty to use

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Liberatory Tutoring in the Writing Center: It's Not Just for Radicals

The first assigned text I read in my Ph.D. program was an excerpt from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that explained what Freire termed "the banking concept of education." Freire's description of the traditional teacher-student relationship as being analogous to the relationship between a person in possession of wealth and a receptacle for deposits was new to me. This newness existed in spite of the fact that I had received—and in fact I had resisted—a number of teachers' deposits during my many years as a student. Freire, as I learned through the editor's note accompanying the excerpt, was a radical Brazilian (still alive at that time) who taught "illiterate adults to read and write and...to think critically [in order to] take power over their own lives" (Bartholomae and Petrosky 347). His work had been seen as so threatening by his government that he lived in exile for sixteen years. Brazilian leaders, it did not surprise me to realize, had not wanted anyone encouraging citizens to ask questions, challenge norms, or propose changes.

As a teacher who prides herself on planting seeds of doubt (as opposed to seeds of certainty) in my students, I immediately liked Freire's disdain for banking-style education which, he believed, constructed "knowledge [as] a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing." Such a style of education, according to Freire, serves an "ideology of oppression" (58). Put in terms we're all likely to understand, banking-style education teaches students to wait to be told what they need to know and then wait to be told what to do with that knowledge. Quite simply, the banking method teaches students to grow into obedient workers who will follow instructions, defer to authority, and accept the status quo.

Liberatory education, on the other hand, is based on dialogue rather than on transfer of information. Its goal is to help students learn to think and live for

themselves. It does not assume that teachers are smarter or better in any way than their students. In the liberatory teacher-student relationship, according to Freire, "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches" (Freire 67). I can imagine that a strict economist might examine the liberatory relationship and express concern that the teacher is somehow "double-dipping." That is, if the teacher already is receiving a salary for her work in the classroom, would making that classroom time intellectually beneficial to herself be something akin to being paid twice? And by extension, if the students are the ones paying to receive their education, why should their class time be spent on negotiating knowledge? Shouldn't they simply be given the knowledge that they have paid for?

I recall a time during my teaching assistant years, when I was a twenty-three-year-old M. A. student trapped in a particularly dreadful semester during which it seemed that "everyone" was a business major and that "no one" liked freshman English. I was standing in the front of a windowless classroom before a group of weary students who were listening as I talked about the synthesis assignment sheet I had just given them. I was trying to sound like the knowledgeable English teacher I thought I should be, suggesting possible introduction strategies, organizational plans, and paragraph formats. Most students were dutifully taking notes, while some looked at me with impatience or boredom. When I finished offering my suggestions, I asked if anyone had questions. One young lady immediately raised her hand: "Ms. Conway," she said curly, "why don't you just tell us what you want us to do, and then we'll do it." I was stunned by her request, I think because it did seem valid to me. "I'm trying to tell you about different ways you can do this assignment," I attempted to explain, "but I don't have a model in my mind of a perfect paper that I want you to write." My inquisitor looked disgusted with me; I could

feel myself rise to the top of her worst teacher list. I felt like a failure. But I sensed that even if I had had a perfect paper model in my head, it would have been wrong to require my students to duplicate it.

Looking back at that terrible teaching moment, I now realize that the young lady who asked me to tell her what to do probably was accustomed to the banking style of being taught. And it seems that I must have believed, if only just a little, that I should have been using a banking style, despite simultaneously thinking that I was never going to be the best authority on how other people should write their papers. Still, I believe I thought my role in the classroom was to do what most of my teachers had done in the past. I thought I should be giving my students models, rules, formulas, and guidelines, materials that I usually had appropriated from textbooks and from other teachers' handouts. But all I really wanted from my student writers at that time was the same thing I want from them now: I want them to write about subjects and issues that mean something to them and to care enough to want them to mean something to me.

Liberatory education is based on dialogue rather than on transfer of information. Its goal is to help students learn to think and live for themselves.

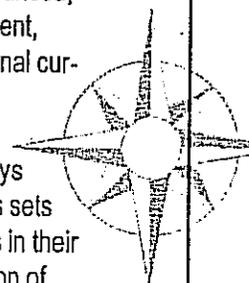
In my present position as the coordinator of a writing center at a small public liberal arts university, I regularly see and hear about students who want to be told what they need to do in order to make their papers "right" or "good" or "fixed." Students who come to writing centers seem to have widely varying ideas about what they should get in their sessions. Certainly, most would like their time in the writing center to pay off, generally in the form of a highly evaluated written product. This kind of thinking again puts us in the realm of an economic relationship, you might notice. Yet I have never met a writing center person whose stated sense of mission was to help students' papers get high grades. Rather, we strive to direct our efforts towards the students themselves. It seems to me that this kind of mission is in itself a basic mani-

festation of liberatory tutoring: simply the fact of a primary effort focused on reaching a nonquantifiable goal—improvement of students' written communication skills—suggests a liberatory philosophy.

I would guess that many writing center administrators can identify with the liberatory cause, since many of us through the years have felt pressed to declare our own liberations from the clutches of those academic forces that would have us be held exclusively responsible for teaching correct grammar to underprepared students. Many of us have read Stephen North's "The Idea of a Writing Center," a manifesto of sorts in which North issues a "declaration of independence" directed to teachers who promulgate erroneous views of why writing centers exist. "We are not," North announced, "here to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum. We are here to talk to writers" (30).

The fact that writing center work is almost always completely separate from students' classrooms sets us up to be able to make significant differences in their learning experiences. Muriel Harris's description of the writing center as a "haven" where there are no rules or penalties is in my mind a most honorable identity (27-8). As John and Tilly Warnock observe in their article on liberatory tutoring, students may enter writing center doorways seeking either what to them feels like major salvation ("I'm afraid I'm going to fail this course!") or simple proofreading ("I just need someone to check my paper"). And while most writing center personnel will do what they can to assist with the students' immediate concerns, the Warnocks continue, "it [would be] cruel to rescue those who will only be thrown back into the same waters again." What tutors and other writing assistants should do, the Warnocks argue, is help floundering students to become writers "who move themselves and the waters that sustain them" (19). This image of empowerment—that is, developing an ability not only to swim but also to control the waters around oneself—characterizes the best result of liberatory tutoring.

Freire, North, Harris, the Warnocks, and many others
- continued on page 10 -



Augusta State Trains Tutors to Work with Students with Learning Disabilities

At Augusta State University in Augusta, Georgia, we are making enormous progress in our program services for students with disabilities. ASU has long needed a learning disabilities tutorial program to provide additional support to our students. We are presently in the process of developing such a resource. The emphasis of this program will be tutoring in the areas of English and math.

Diana Darris, Coordinator of Disabilities Services and I (I direct the writing center) have developed the organizational design for the program. Darris has agreed to copilot the program and allow it to operate in the writing center. An intense training program for the tutors in this program took place in April.

Dr. Noel Gregg, a nationally noted expert in the field of learning disabilities and a Board of Regents L.D. specialist conducted the training workshop, which was open to students and volunteers who are involved with tutoring other students. As we develop this program we are issuing an open invitation to all faculty members to present needs or submit new ideas. We want to incorporate instructional ideas into the program, as well as include faculty in the training.

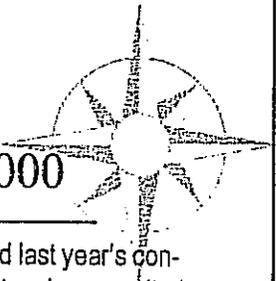
We will use the spring semester for training and organization. The summer semester will serve as a pilot program. At the end of the summer semester, we will review the program, obtain feedback from students, and make any needed adjustments. The program should be in full operation by the fall semester of 1999. Aside from our campus resources, I will also be gaining some operational support from the Board of Regents L.D. team at the University of Georgia. Continuous training will be provided for tutors who participate in this program.

Seed funding has been provided by a gracious do-

nor who specified that the gift be used for this purpose. We are also looking into some additional grant funding sources. This program will benefit the entire campus. Most importantly, the upcoming program will serve as a valuable tool for our students. Thanks to our donor, faculty, and tutors for providing a great atmosphere in which our students can learn and grow to their full potential.

Karen R. Sisk
Augusta State University

My Vote: Savannah in 2000



Don't get me wrong, I thoroughly enjoyed last year's conference, but even before we left Charleston, I was excited about Savannah in 2000. As someone who has been to Savannah too many times to count, I enjoy opportunities to be a tourist there and to show the beautiful historic district and its shady squares to people who have never seen them. I grew up fifty miles from Savannah and relied on the city for my clothes shopping and high school rivals. Only when I was a senior in high school and now in college have I learned to appreciate Savannah for the charming city that it is.

Savannah has become a tourism phenomena; "the book" (*Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* by John Berendt for those of you not familiar with Savannah-speak) has turned the historic district into a place of literary pilgrimage for those who long to walk in the footsteps of the Lady Chablis and sip gin and tonic with Jim Williams's ghost. "The bird girl" (the hauntingly beautiful statue displayed on the cover of "the book") is featured on everything in Savannah from tourism brochures to cookie tins.

Literary pilgrimages are not the only reasons for visiting Savannah. Families and college students flock to Savannah each year for one of the most extended St. Patrick's Day parties in the country. The Telfair Museum, River Street, Fort Pulaski, Tybee Island, and the numerous homes of the Historic District are popular sites the rest of the year. Girl Scouts can visit the home of founder Juliet

The National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Penn State
University Park, Pennsylvania
October 29-31, 1999

UNMASKING WRITING: A Collaborative Process

Writers and tutors often wear masks. The mask can be a persona, usually knowingly chosen -- but not always. Sometimes we don them unconsciously. Masks can represent formulaic thinking, such as the five-paragraph essay or a preconceived tutoring agenda.

"Unmasking" can mean exploring, questioning, explaining, probing, finding, or negotiating meanings that don't at first declare themselves. "Unmasking" would signify, then, discovering with writers their achievements, accomplishments that may have been obscured by the linguistic and cultural "masks" they wear. "Unmasking" can also be helping the writer to see what is not yet achieved and -- until the tutor and writer have talked about it -- not seen or known.

Call for Proposals

We invite you to propose presentations for the 16th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing. We emphasize interactive, tutor-led workshops, roundtables, and panel discussions. The conference seeks to explore issues of trust and collaboration in our writing centers, as well as to investigate any other dimension of peer tutoring.

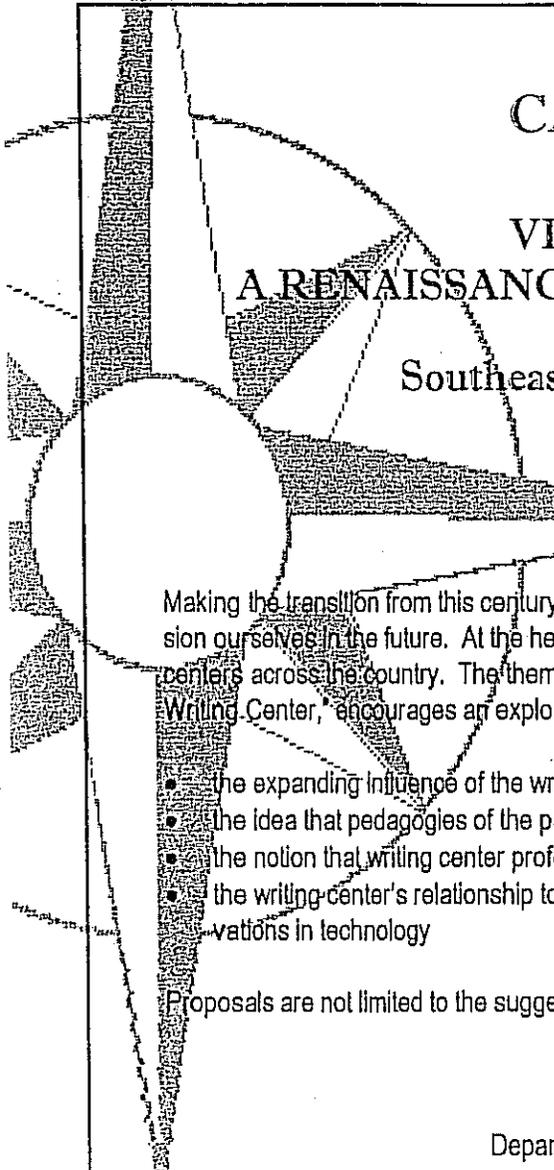
Please include the following with your proposal:

- Name and position of contact person
- Address, phone number, and e-mail address
- Time required: (15, 25, 50, 75 minutes)
- Intended audience
- Format: (workshop, discussion group demonstration, paper, etc.)
- Participants and their positions
- Description in 150-250 words
- Abstract of 50 words with title (for the program)
- Equipment needed
- Any additional needs or concerns

Please send to:

Julie Story, Conference Director
Center for Excellence in Writing
206 Boucke Building
University Park, PA 16802-5900
Phone: (814) 865-0259
E-mail: jaw12@psu.edu
Fax: (814)-863-7285
Online information:
<http://www.chss.iup.edu/wc/ncptw>
Deadline: May 1, 1999
Notification: May 10, 1999

-- Penn State is committed to affirmative action, equal opportunities, and the diversity of its workforce --



CALL FOR PAPERS

VISION AND REVISION: A RENAISSANCE WITHIN THE WRITING CENTER

Southeastern Writing Center Association

February 3-5, 2000
Savannah, GA

Making the transition from this century into the next affords us the opportunity to both rediscover our roots and envision ourselves in the future. At the heart of this transition is the spirit of the Renaissance, a spirit embodied in writing centers across the country. The theme for the 2000 Conference, "Vision and Revision: A Renaissance within the Writing Center," encourages an exploration of the following topics:

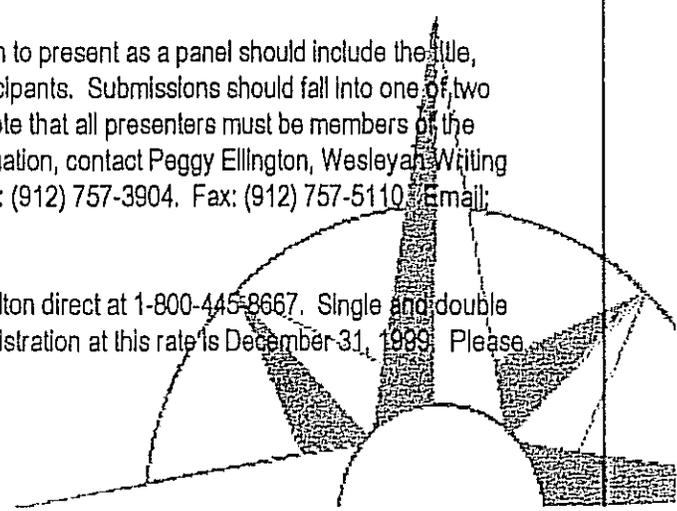
- the expanding influence of the writing center within the academy
- the idea that pedagogies of the past can be revived and revised to meet present challenges
- the notion that writing center professionals are Renaissance men and women
- the writing-center's relationship to writing across the curriculum, to English as a second language, and to innovations in technology

Proposals are not limited to the suggestions outlined above. Please send one-page proposals to

Christina Van Dyke, Conference Director
The Writing Center
Department of Languages, Literature, and Philosophy
Armstrong Atlantic State University
11935 Abercorn Street
Savannah, GA 31419-1997
Phone: (912) 921-2330
Fax: (912) 927-5399
Email: vandykch@mail.armstrong.edu

Abstracts must be received by October 15, 1999. Those who wish to present as a panel should include the title, chair of the panel, a brief summary of topics, and a list of the participants. Submissions should fall into one of two categories: 20 minute talks or 45 minute presentations. Please note that all presenters must be members of the Southeastern Writing Center Association. For membership information, contact Peggy Ellington, Wesleyan Writing Lab, Wesleyan College, 4760 Forsyth, Macon, GA 31210. Phone: (912) 757-3904. Fax: (912) 757-5110. Email: peggy_ellington@post.wesleyan-college.edu

If you plan on attending the conference, please call the DeSoto Hilton direct at 1-800-445-8667. Single and double rates are \$109.00 plus 12% tax per night. The cut-off date for registration at this rate is December 31, 1999. Please make your reservations early.



Gordon Low, and religious history enthusiasts can visit Temple Mikve Israel, the third oldest Jewish congregation in America.

But truthfully, despite numerous attempts by native Savannahians to declare that "the book" is not the only side of Savannah, most tourists come seeking the eccentrics and charmers that have kept *Midnight* on best-seller lists for years. And Savannah, never one to protest too much, has accepted her fate and opened her arms to tourists from all over the world. She has even allowed her shady streets to be featured in numerous films, including *Forrest Gump*, *Forces of Nature*, and the upcoming *The General's Daughter*.



Two Savannah specialties: historic homes and Southern springtime. (Photo used with permission from the Savannah Chamber of Commerce.)

During the filming of "the movie" (motion picture version of "the book"), Savannah went on her best behavior, offering full media coverage of each day's filming, extras, and even actors: lawyer and Uga owner Sonny Seiler—an important character in the book and movie—played the judge. My personal favorite part of

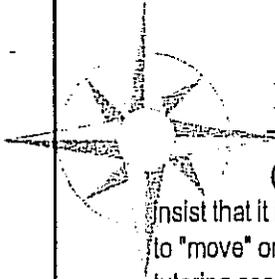
the movie and my favorite chapter in the book features "The Lady of Six Thousand Songs," Emma Kelly. She actually lives in my hometown, but she commutes regularly to Savannah to entertain with her singing and piano playing at Hard-Hearted Hannah's.

Miss Emma earned her nickname from Savannah's native son, songwriter Johnny Mercer. As I grew up I learned of the beautiful songs he wrote, which to me seem in many ways to be always about Savannah. While I know this is a very disputable claim, it seems to me that what his songs do contain is the feel and mood of Savannah. It is the kind of thing a tourist can't get from visiting the Davenport House or the Green Meldrum House but must just soak up from the air. Savannah has its own feel, one that matches the sway of the Spanish moss in the oak trees covering Abercorn Street or Victory Drive. You could hurry around Savannah, and people do, but when you look at what is around you, you begin to wonder what's the point of all that hurrying. Just like Johnny Mercer's "Moon River," Savannah seems to realize that there is a wider world out there but is in no mood to do more than just drift along.

Savannah is also an ordinary town with a couple of decent malls, good places to eat, and the site of many lives that have little to do with the book, but what would be the point of travelling all that way just to end up where you started. Rather, I—and other romantics like me—prefer to hold Savannah dear in our hearts as the muse of Johnny Mercer, with music in its breeze. And next February attendees at the SWCA Conference will have their chance to cast their vote in the never-ending debate between Charleston and Savannah over which city is quintessentially "Southern." I think I know where my vote will be.

For information on specific sites, try <http://www.savannahtraveler.com/>.

Hillary Wiggins
Agnes Scott College



Liberatory Tutoring

(continued from page 7)

insist that it is through dialogue that such a capacity to "move" oneself and one's world will come. A silent tutoring session, despite the potential of a "fixed" paper to receive a high grade, is unlikely to be of any long-term assistance to the student who brought that paper to the writing center. Tutors need instead to engage students in conversations about their papers, their subjects, their arguments, their courses, their goals, and yes, even about their teachers. Dave Healy believes that tutors, perhaps more than anyone else on campus, have the capacity to lead students to develop visions of themselves as writers. This advantage stems from the fact that tutors are "removed from the classroom—not only physically, but [also] institutionally" (20). Hence, a tutor is in a position to explain (rather than take off points or make an accusing red mark) when a comma is needed to punctuate a particular construction. And perhaps this explanation will be the one that the student hears and understands, for the first time.

A tutor can sympathize with students who have been given monumentally difficult assignments, then share his own success strategies for impossible writing projects from the past. A tutor can calmly say "hmm" while viewing an unclear request for revision on a student's draft, admit a lack of understanding, explain that such communication difficulties may occur, then suggest that the student visit the teacher during office hours. This tutor can suggest language that the student might use when meeting with his teacher; if that student has been well taught to be "good," he may be inexperienced in asking a teacher to explain her directions. He may be accustomed to a school identity in which students are rewarded for not causing trouble, not demanding attention, not asking questions. A tutor can share "tricks" for impressing readers; a tutor can remind students that different teachers have different priorities; and a tutor can express pleasure with a well-written sentence or a well-made argument.

Liberatory education is not simply about revolutions, at least not major revolutions. Liberatory tutoring should not be aimed at making students embrace

liberal values; it should not push them to make their arguments into political arguments they might not be ready to make. It simply should be about assisting students in developing into independent writers with an appreciation and respect for their own authority as thinkers and makers of knowledge. Writing tutors can do what too many teachers don't have time to do, don't want to do, or don't know how to do. They can help students learn to see themselves as writers—writers whose views are valid and whose voices are valuable.

Glenda Conway
University of
Montevallo



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Looking for examples of SWCA websites?

Armstrong Atlantic State University
[www.it.armstrong.edu/Academia/Writing/
index.html](http://www.it.armstrong.edu/Academia/Writing/index.html)

Francis Marion University (under construction)
<http://ALPHA1.FMARION.EDU/writing/>

Presbyterian College
<http://home.presby.edu/writingc>.

Winthrop University
www.winthrop.edu/wcenter/

Western Carolina University
[www.wcu.edu/WritingCenter/html/main.
html](http://www.wcu.edu/WritingCenter/html/main.html)

Is your writing center wired?
Share your URL on SWCATalk (see details
on page 13).

Center Goes Online

(continued from page 11)

our site to let students know specific guidelines for writing in their classes, hoping faculty would learn from each other as well. One part of the site would include an online copy of our spring newsletter with ideas from faculty: the math professors who use journals, the philosophy professor who says holding writing conferences with his students is "the single most rewarding and challenging thing I do as a teacher," and the biology professors who teach courses on writing in biology.

One of our primary purposes for our site is to give students, prospective students, alumni, administrators, and of course the rest of the wired world information about our writing center, now in its second year. We wanted to mention the writing center whenever we could on our pages, explaining how it could help the students and faculty who link frequently to our home page. The writing center Web

site should provide writing help for both students and faculty and be a place they could turn to from any computer on campus to find information. We wanted links to online writing resources and to our own center's pages on the writing process, revising, editing, proofreading, citing sources, and using quotations.

Our first big decision was how to organize our Web site. We decided on a few basic categories: writing center information, faculty resources, writing resources, our newsletter, and guides to writing at Presbyterian College. Each category would have a table of contents page with links to the other pages in that category. I asked the public relations director to take pictures of the new center for our site. With this plan, we began to work on individual pages using PageMill as our Web construction software and developing a style guide so that the site would have a uniform appearance. Tutors helped me work on the site when they had no one to tutor. Through trial and error and with help from the director of Academic Computing and a technology student assistant, we made progress.

I asked our faculty listserv for any additional guides or handouts to writing that we could add to the site. This announcement brought some immediate responses. Keeping in mind that students are more likely to read bullets than paragraphs on the computer screen, the tutors condensed several departments' handouts. After viewing our site on various computers, I made some changes to colors and fonts to improve its appearance on any computer.

The Web site project has kept the tutors and me writing and learning in several media this semester. Perhaps all the increased publicity our Web site may bring will keep us from having as much free time next year as we did this spring, and our future efforts may of necessity be limited to revising the site. This spring's effort to design and set up our own Web site gave us a great sense of community and accomplishment. Look for us at <http://home.presby.edu/writingc>.

Jill Frey
Presbyterian College

What's in a Name? NWCA Refocuses Accreditation Process

As many of you know, the National Writing Centers Association (NWCA) has been debating the issue of accreditation for writing centers for most of the last decade. In 1996 Jeanne Simpson, Barry Maid, and Joe Law wrote a report recommending that NWCA go forward with the accreditation process. This report, which was accepted and endorsed by the NWCA board, recommended that NWCA develop a process along which accreditation might be granted, suggested that we consider three levels of accreditation to encompass all the kinds of work that various centers do, and proposed a number of areas that could be used to gauge those levels.

In 1997 the board commissioned Dennis Paoli, Marcia Silver, and me to go ahead and develop this accreditation process, which we did. We recommended that the accreditation process begin with a thorough institutional self-study, which would enable each center to define itself with using categories such as an institutional description, the center's place in its institution, the center's mission, the population it served, the users of center services, and its staffing and training. The self-study would then assess a center's efforts in areas such as technology, research and scholarship, outreach within and outside the institution, marketing, evaluation and assessment, and the all-important budget. Centers could also describe elements not covered in the process—what made them individual and special. By letting centers describe themselves, we believed that we would receive information that was appropriate to the context of each institution, rather than imposing external standards that might not be relevant.

The process we envisioned would send the results of this self-study on to a trained two-person team to be reviewed; using standards articulated by the NWCA, that team would decide based on the application what level of accreditation would be assigned. In

cases of a discrepancy between reviewers, a board member would adjudicate. Our committee went even beyond the bounds of our charge to develop a self-study instrument, which we have field tested on the Web and at regional meetings for over a year.

Accreditation as a word has power and recognition among administrators. We know that institutions have resources (financial, staff, support) available for programs that are accredited. The powers-that-be to whom administrators report (boards, regents, trustees, legislators) understand what accreditation stands for (at least a little bit). Centers can use "seeking accreditation by our national organization" as a means of seeking support, funds, and recognition on their campuses. All of these seemed valid reasons to pursue a process called accreditation.

But at the Bloomington meeting other voices objected to the term and to the process. Some NWCA members attacked the concept of levels of distinction and words like "standards," "excellence," and "appropriate." They felt these terms smacked of standardization and rigidity. A few pointed out that some institutions might bend the truth in their applications. Some questioned what the point of such a process would be. Would more students come to their institutions because their writing centers were accredited? Would the fact that a center was accredited protect it from budget cuts and other assaults? Ed White discussed his long experience in evaluating programs with WPA (Council of Writing Program Administrators) and explained why CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication) had backed off from accrediting writing programs. He said that CCCC decided, reluctantly, that the threat of lawsuits by institutions denied or losing accreditation and the cost of running an accreditation program would be too great to overcome.

Taking all these points into account, the NWCA board voted to take a new direction with this process. Acting on a resolution proposed by Kevin Davis, the board voted for a new four-step process that might achieve similar ends to accreditation while keeping us out of legal and financial quicksand. The resolution is for NWCA to:

Establish guidelines for conducting internal assessment and provide models for constructing self-study reports.

This process will encourage ongoing self-assessment and help centers build on their strengths while developing weaker areas. The self-study questionnaire developed by Dennis, Marcia and me is expected to be at the center of these guidelines.

Create lists of resource persons for each region.

Writing center "experts" can assist with start-up, crisis intervention, assessment, and conducting and interpreting the results of these self-studies. This program would be modeled on the Consultant-Evaluator Program of the Council of Writing Program Administrators.

Establish connections with WPA, regional accrediting agencies, and other assessment organizations to inform their analyses of writing centers.

Since these organizations are already respected granters of accreditation, their clout is already established with our institutions; if we work through them, we need not establish either *ethos* or procedures. And they have their own lawyers and budgets.

Assemble and make available to the membership national data about writing centers and their performances so that individual centers have benchmarks against which they can compare themselves.

This would involve collecting results of self-studies and compiling them, probably in electronic form, for access and use.

The board expects that the first two items will be completed within the year, with longer time frames for the last two items to be achieved. It hopes that this process of self-evaluation with outside support will achieve what centers have long wanted—a way to measure who they are, where they are, and where they might be going without the political, financial, and legal difficulties inherent in an accreditation process. So we have revised our "draft," reorganized our focus, and changed our language, all in service of creating a final product that meets our purposes and the needs of our audi-

ences. Seen in this light, our process so far has been like that of a successful tutorial: a work in progress, ever striving to be better. It's not what we envisioned when we started—or even when we brought our draft in for review—but we hope the end product will meet our assignment.

Jo Koster Tarvers
Winthrop University

(Thanks to Dennis Paoli and Marcia Silver for helpful suggestions about this article. JKT)

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

SWCATALK

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

To join, follow these instructions:

- * Send an email message to: lis-terv@ascagnesscott.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

Speaking Up: Talking with International Graduate Students in the Writing and Communication Center

Last week, I listened to a presentation on the seasonal festivals of China. A week before, I learned tourist jokes and bicycle jokes, as well as why *not* to fly U.S. Air from Tri-Cities Airport to Los Angeles (no meal or in-flight movie!). In the past year, I have also learned about the pains and joys of living inside an alien culture, the anxiety and nervousness that come from trying to communicate and "fit in," as well as the delight found in making a personal connection with a student from another culture.

But these weren't my pains, or even my joys. They were experienced by the group of Chinese graduate students who have visited our Writing and Communication Center weekly for the past year. My learning experiences and the growing confidence with which these Chinese students approach speaking English have been the by-products of our center's "English Table," a weekly, two-hour informal session that is devoted to the needs of international graduate students who desire to improve their oral communication skills in English.

In the late fall of 1997, I was contacted by our international graduate student advisor, Maria Costa, regarding our oral communication services. She had several students who had failed to pass the oral communication proficiency test administered by the graduate school and for whom the language lab, with its audio tapes and drills, seemed to be of little help. I suggested that we get together with some of her students for a sharing session; our staff would listen to their concerns and discuss ways that we could help. After the introduction and general mingling, I sat down to talk with Anna Mu, a Chinese graduate student in mathematics who desperately wanted to teach, and her advisor. From them, I learned about

the SPEAK test and the problem areas Anna (and other international graduate students) needed to work on.

The SPEAK test is a retired Test of Spoken English. It tests pronunciation, clarity, fluency, and grammar in oral communication through standardized oral, pictorial, and written prompts. Everyone hated it: the students, their departments, the Office of International Programs. After a short while, I did, too. The problems with the test were many, but my criticisms were shared by most: it was entirely noninteractive (the students sat in a room with two tape players, one giving the audio prompts, the other recording the answers); and students could memorize answers to the prompts, since the same test was used over and over again. I soon became involved with a subcommittee of our Graduate Council whose mission was to revamp the oral communication proficiency standards. One of our first actions was to get rid of the SPEAK test in favor of the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), a fully interactive, interview-based assessment tool.

While awaiting approval and new guidelines for using the OPI, I realized that the type of help that I was giving Mu (and by now several others) was not going to be applicable to a more conversation-based test. Mu had brought another student, Haiqing Hu, to several of her SPEAK prep sessions, and I approached them about doing something a little different: meeting as a group once a week just to speak English. I had yet to find a name for it (I later happened upon Lorax College's "English Table" on the wcenter listserv and appropriated that moniker), but that was how our English Table began.

We assembled in one of our center's practice rooms, three (this year we have grown to seven) Chinese graduate students and myself, with no goal other than improving their oral communication skills. I began that first group session with a question: "What do you want to learn?" That spring 1998 group generated a list of their problems with oral communication. They prioritized them in the following order.

1. Listening comprehension in social situations (classmates, American friends, TV)
2. Listening comprehension in academic situations (in classes, professors' lectures, seminars)
3. Cultural differences (slang, idioms, nonverbal communication)
4. Self-expression (vocabulary, pronunciation)
5. Overcoming nervousness about talking (in and out of class)

To respond to this list, I tried to engage them in activities that would meet these needs. One of the most successful activities that we undertook was watching Mike Nichols's *The Graduate* (1967), which they selected from the library. We watched it in fifteen- to twenty-minute increments, stopping the film to discuss what we had seen and heard. I would usually prompt discussion by asking them to explain a particular scene or the significance of a character's actions. The students would inevitably turn the tables on me, asking me to explain cultural and historical references. These questions often led to group discussions comparing American and Chinese cultures.

Reading aloud formed a part of almost every session. We shared poetry, short stories, magazine and newspaper articles, focusing primarily on vocabulary and pronunciation and using the topics as springboards for discussion. Slang and American idioms were a popular topic. I asked participants to bring in samples, and they regularly came in with unusual words and phrases. Anna Mu told a very funny story this spring about her office-mate using the phrase "brushing off on me." "Doggone" was another confusing bit of slang that we discussed. I've used several books and websites as resources for discussing slang and idioms (see bibliography).

As a firm believer in learner-centered education, I do my best to maintain the role of facilitator. My staff also participates in the sessions; one of my peer tutors, Laura Brandt, has become a regular participant and contributor to the sessions. But it is the international students' sense of ownership that is the real driving force of the English Table. Two sessions this

year found participants leading the group. Hayan Zhou, a Master's candidate in instructional technology, led the group through a PowerPoint presentation she created on Chinese festivals. A discussion of U.S. and Chinese geography prompted Haiqing Hu, who is working on her Master's in chemistry, to create a web-based "slide show" of some of the most picturesque areas in China. Since teaching is the ultimate goal of most of the international graduate students, these self-directed teaching projects are an important aspect of the English Table.

But isn't this small group instruction a far cry from what a writing center is supposed to be doing? Considering the diversity of center models and our theoretical touchstones, I do not think so. What is the English Table but a setting where collaborative learning is the norm, an environment where the traditional paradigm of instruction is shifted? If writing centers are to remain leaders in providing educational opportunities outside the lecture hall, I think services like English Tables will become even more common. The key is to find the needs of your population and to meet those needs. In our case, we continue to try.

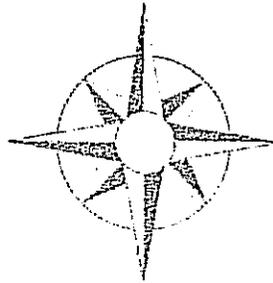
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Southern Discourse

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