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Richmond Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

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STAFF WRITING PROJECT

by Stephen O'Hara
Writing Consultant

The need to write and communicate well doesn't end after college, and the Staff Writing Project at the University provides staff members with the opportunity to learn writing skills that will benefit them in the workplace and beyond.

The Staff Writing project started about 1 1/2 years ago when Kathy Carmody, learning and development coordinator with human resources, thought about those staff members who had worked with the university for decades, some for as long as 40 years, and how technology had changed in that time. She said that business writing, whether in work orders, e-mails or other means of communication, was an important part of the staff members' jobs. Seeing an opportunity for full-time staff members to improve their writing and communication skills, Carmody reached out to the Writing Center. The project eventually expanded beyond just business writing, and now includes personal writing. Currently, the project features a Web site with resources for on-the-job writing, Writing Center Workshops and book discussion groups to be held throughout the year.

One of the most interactive ways to become exposed to writing and also communicate with one another is in book discussion groups. One such group was held during the summer, when three facilities workers volunteered to participate in a series of five meetings with Carmody to discuss Mike Rose's *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker*. The book features a series of interviews with workers in a variety of professions, including hair dressers, carpenters and electricians, and shows how traditional blue-collar jobs require

intuitive skills that are often overlooked by society.

Benjamin Smith, a painter with university facilities, said that one of the things the group emphasized throughout its discussions was that "there is no such thing as unskilled labor" and that it took intelligence to work on campus, no matter what the job. Smith joined the discussion group after hearing about it a department meeting, noting that it was a natural fit considering his love for book clubs and discussion. He said that he would definitely join the group again if the opportunity arose.

Ofelia Dunlap, a custodian with facilities, also participated in the discussion group. She said that the book and discussions helped build confidence in their job skills, and she added that she hoped others could see and appreciate them. Dunlap added that she wanted to pass the book on to her co-workers, and show them that they should take pride in their work while fulfilling their responsibilities at the university.

Carmody said that there were 1,200 staff members at the university, 200 in facilities, and that she hoped the series of discussions helped the group consider the legacy they all could leave at the university. Moving forward, Carmody said that she was grateful for everyone who gave their time for the group, and hoped that they would go forward and continue to be leaders through the university.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

This issue will focus on the Staff Writing Initiative. Soon we will release another issue to look at the forthcoming first-year seminars program.

Lee Carleton and I would like to thank Linda Hobgood of the Speech Center for graciously sharing office space with us. We also want to thank all of our other colleagues in Rhetoric & Communication Studies for making us all feel welcome in Weinstein Hall. In the coming year we will work closely with Dr. Mifsud and the RhCS faculty to integrate our work into the department's approach to research and teaching.

We have new WAC faculty to welcome! Mark Broomfield in Dance, Andy Litteral in Business, and Kim Joyce in Education are using consultants for the first time in their courses. Scott Allison in Psychology and Rick Mayes in Political Science rejoin us after some time away from the program.

We will need your assistance recruiting new consultants for two sections of 383 next semester. Please ask first, second, or third-year students who would like to join us to contact Joe Essid.

For more information on the Staff Writing Project, go to:

writing.richmond.edu/resources/urtouchdown.html

THREE TIPS: REPORTS TO FACULTY

by Stephen O'Hara
Writing Consultant

For many writers who come through our doors, the tutorial doesn't end at the end of the hour – in fact, it never ends for them, because they'll always be striving to improve. So try not to think of writing reports as the final step, because for the writers who entrust their work in our hands, they are anything but that. As the proofreader of these writing reports, I see as many as 50 reports every week, and it seems that every day I see a few things that, if fixed, could make the report clearer and more beneficial for the professor and writer. I offer now my Top 3 Things to Look Out for in Writing Reports:

1. The Professor's Full Name

– How can the writer get additional help if I can't send the report to the correct professor? Finding the correct professor through other more time-consuming means isn't always as easy as you might think.

2. Saying "The Professor" in a Report

– "I told him to go to the professor and find out what he meant." The writer's professor is the primary recipient of the writing report, so try to think of the report as going straight to the professor – except for a quick stop in my inbox, that's exactly what it does! So write the report as if you're talking to the professor, and feel free to add in the "you" in your dialogue.

3. Two-Sentence Summaries

– I'm always kind of humored when I see a report for a tutorial that lasted 1 hour but has been summed up in two sentences. Even if all you did was "work on the thesis", there had to have been more to the tutorial than that. Really let the professor know what happened at your meeting. Now, no one wants the writing report equivalent of *War and Peace*, but a little more detail can go a long way in helping the professor know what happened in the tutorial, and the professor can continue helping the student from there. Keeping these things in mind will help you compose writing reports that will help writers get the ongoing attention that they need.

Have a photo, announcement, or idea for our next newsletter?

Please contact Joe Essid (jessid@richmond.edu) or Lee Carleton (lcarleton@richmond.edu)

REFLECTIONS FROM THE CENTER

"A Lifestyle"

by Connor McMahan, RC 09

The Writing Center is one of the University's most valuable resources for students. It helped me adjust to college academics and inspired me to become a Writing Consultant. Students can feel confident about getting essays revised while taking part in a constructive learning environment with peers like themselves. Most importantly, students learn that writing is beyond grammar and structure, but that it is a lifestyle.

"My Writing Center Experience"

by Alex Maletesta, WC '09

Between my first and third years at the University of Richmond, I perceived the Writing Center as that untouchable "City on a Hill," where the elite of the elite counseled students who were less prepared for college level writing than their peers. However, when I nervously approached a professor bearing my audition paper that had recently been branded as "weak," a few short minutes of leisurely conversation quickly dispelled my qualms and presuppositions. He became my teacher and mentor for my Writing Consultant experience.

The Writing Center was a tremendous help when I needed somebody to discuss my thesis statements, outlines, and general understanding of a paper topic. A Consultant was always available whether I was writing for American Government 101 or Modern Political Theory 312. However, my most significant experience with the Writing Center was becoming a Writing Consultant my senior year. Never had I thought that I had the ability to break into the "upper echelon" of writers, let alone have the notion dispelled that there even was an upper echelon of writers. As Consultants, we are not perfect writers lording it over those below us on the ladder, but rather peers who have simply gotten a firm grasp on the basics of writing, and have been trained to help others develop their thought processes enough to sync them with words. We aim to serve, push, prod, and develop—not to edit, redo, or criticize.

I am currently working in a law firm in Downtown Richmond editing Memoranda, Briefs and Motions, while applying to law schools on the East Coast. I also work part-time at the University of Richmond's

Athletic Department as an "Athletic Academic Advisor," a fancier way of saying a "graduated writing consultant." While my path is currently set on attending law school, being a Writing Consultant

ignited another passion for teaching that I would not hesitate to utilize.

I would encourage anybody who loves to write and is disciplined enough to accept feedback to improve their own writing, to pursue becoming a Consultant. The skills I developed coaching my peers, as well as the improvement of my own writing process has been invaluable to my law firm work and preparations for law school.

"Revision as a way of life"

by Lee Carleton, Assistant Director

This semester begins with the Writing Center in a new physical and departmental location in Weinstein Hall with the Rhetoric and Communication Department. Our new location represents a new perspective, a revision of our vision that enhances collaboration and encourages a fertile interdisciplinary cross-pollination between the Writing Center, the Speech Center and Rhetoric and Communication Studies. Though we miss Hope and Marie in the Academic Skills Center, our new colleagues have been most welcoming and collegial.

The move might be considered an enactment of the principles of revision that we teach our students, a new draft of the Writing Center. New drafts occasionally require re-examination of terms and a renegotiation of the thesis in light of new developments, and the key to success is flexibility and a willingness to grow in collaboration with our colleagues.

We are encouraged by our warm welcome and excited about the potential of new energies released from hybrid projects that, as McLuhan notes, "release great new force and energy" for creative, positive change. As we transition into our First Year Seminars and expand our writing program, let us tap this hybrid wisdom.

Stay tuned...