



Richmond Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

Issue 11, Fall 2004

Welcome back to campus! We would like to welcome two new WAC faculty: Ruth Longobardi, teaching Music History, and Marilee Mifsud, teaching Questions in Communication.

Announcements:

More Room for Conferences

The Spring semester continued a trend of breaking records. Tutors and Writing Fellows met nearly 800 writers for over 1400 appointments. We managed this feat, for nearly 900 hours of contact time with writers, in a small suite of offices that has, fortunately, just gotten bigger.

We now use the former International Education Resource Center in our building. This large space will help us and the Academic Skills Center bridge an important gap until the next phase of expansion is completed for the Boatwright Library.

Over the summer, Director of Academic Skills Hope Walton and Writing Center Director Joe Essid met with senior administrators and architects to discuss several exciting plans for new space to be added to the library, including larger and more flexible tutorial offices for both centers. While these are long-range plans, ultimately they will permit more growth in our programs and services. More details will appear here soon.

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The Latest With *Writer's Web*

We have new materials developed by Writing Fellows and tutors. Ryan Jackson's "What to Expect from a Writing Center Conference", Joanna Taraba's "Transitional Phrases", Alicia Surdyk's "Writing in French," G.M. Smith's "Building Writing Confidence," and Lauren Cone's "Confronting Writing Anxiety" can now be found on *Writer's Web*. Visit writing.richmond.edu and follow the links to our online handbook.

UPCOMING EVENT

As part of poet and NEA Chairman Dana Gioia's visit to campus, UR is sponsoring a panel, "The Professional and the Poet." Poet and Writing-Fellows Coordinator Cheryl Pallant will be among several faculty participating in a discussion on the difference between writing for profit and writing for art's sake. The event takes place on F, Oct 1 at 2pm in Brown-Alley Room, Weinstein Hall.

Congratulations, Kate!
Writing Fellow Kate Seferian won the Margaret Owen Finck Prize for Fiction, for her story "Sojourn" that appeared in the 2004 edition of *The Messenger*.

If you have an announcement or anecdote to run in our next issue, please e-mail Cheryl Pallant at cpallant@richmond.edu. We look forward to hearing from you!

Notes from WAC Classrooms

Ken Abrams (Psychology) writes that "I plan to use a writing fellow for my Psy 200 (statistics) course. Students will be required to meet with a Fellow and get feedback on their final project prior to submitting it to me. Final projects entail writing a manuscript based on a mini-experiment that students will design."

Joe Essid and Nuray Grove

(English) are experimenting with having Writing Fellows work directly with Eng. 103 classes. In Dr. Essid's class, Writing Fellow Kate Seferian attends class twice weekly and conducts draft workshops during class time. Ms. Grove's Writing Fellows, Rachael Byrd and Jeremy Snyder, will work in a section of 103 unlike any before at Richmond: the section's enrollment has been structured to include an equal number of US and international students, who will work together to explore issues of intercultural communication.

Faculty Column: Defining Expectations

*Dr. Michael Kerckhove,
Associate Professor of Mathematics*

I found the material in the article "The Science of Scientific Writing*" to be very useful for the teaching of writing in my Core class. The main principle I communicate to students is that as author, your job is to set up expectations in your reader's mind and then to satisfy those expectations. "Your writing in Core will be especially effective," I tell them, "if you are able to satisfy the reader's expectations in ways that are slightly unexpected."

From the outset, expectations for a typical Core essay are that the author will clearly convey the point he/she is trying to make, build evidence (both factual and logical) to support the thesis statement, clinch the argument, then conclude with a brief summary of the argument and an indication of why the author believes his/her thesis is valuable (why the paper was worth reading) in the context of our course. Once this overall format is understood, my Writing Fellows and I work with students to help them craft

their use of language within sections of their papers, again with an awareness of how expectations are raised and satisfied by the author for the reader.

This approach has helped me also to grade student papers quickly and with less subjectivity. My method, especially early on in the course, is to read introductory paragraphs and to record for the student the expectations that he/she has raised in my mind concerning the contents of the rest of the paper (if I don't have any clear expectations from the introduction, I return the paper with the rest unread). Next, I make a pass through the concluding paragraphs, which, it turns out, allows me to gauge pretty well whether my expectations will be satisfied by the contents of the body of the paper. I make another set of marginal notes in a different ink color. With this approach, I find that I am better able to maintain focus in my comments on an assessment of the effectiveness of the student's writing.

I should report that the Writing Fellows with whom I've worked over the past year have been quick to understand and support this approach to writing.

I hope that students leave my course understanding that they should be writing with a purpose and that they leave with a better sense of how they can effectively execute their intentions. I tell them something like "Clear intentions and thoughtful use of your talents will lead to your empowerment as a writer."

Reference:

*The Science of Scientific Writing: if the reader is to grasp what the writer means, the writer must understand what the reader needs, George D. Gopen and Judith A. Swan, *American Scientist* (Nov-Dec 1990), Volume 78, 550-558, posted at <http://www.amsci.org/template>

Mike Kerckhove has long been involved in WAC, both as a faculty participant and a member of the WAC Committee.

Faculty Column: Emerson's Echoes

by *Lee Carleton, Instructor of English Composition*

Though many students find 19th Century literature an onerous intellectual burden, an occasional re-reading of Emerson can be quite invigorating. The word "invigorating" may not be part of every student's daily dialog, but when reading Emerson, it applies.

The OED tells us that it means "active physical strength as an attribute or quality of living things; active force or power; activity or energy of body or constitution," etymologically related to words for "thrive" and "flourish." Growth is what Emerson offers students today.

Young scholars who truly desire to thrive and flourish intellectually would do well to consider Emerson's observations about books and their celebrated authors in his essay "Self-Reliance." He urged us to "learn to detect and watch for that gleam of light that passes across [your] mind from within more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages." In these days of "groupthink," "talking points" and the constant repetition of the calculated catchphrase, we could do much worse than watch for our own original inspiration.

Emerson does not totally reject past masters, but he does warn against following heroes and systems of thought – particularly when they contradict our own intuition and insight.

And he reminds students today that the greats we study were nothing more than young scholars of their own day who caught their "gleam of light" and then expressed it. To the men of Harvard, in his address "The American Scholar," he declares "Free should the scholar be-free and brave." Free to think new thoughts and plan new deeds. Free to make his unique contribution. And brave enough to resist the pressures of the party line.

Too often those who challenge us with the cliché "think outside the box" are still trapped in their own "box" of ideas, the limits of which we are not to transcend.

For the young scholar, transcending these artificial limits opens doors to creative thinking, new ways of reading and fresh approaches to old problems. And just maybe, fewer encounters with writer's block. This is the realm of the breakthrough, the world of genius.

Lee Carleton, teaches English 103 and 200-level literature courses. He also assists with the brave new world of online appointments at the Writing Center, even as he authors a teaching hypertext of Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel.

UPCOMING LUNCHEONS

Once again this year, PETE and the WAC Program are co-sponsoring events. We have a new series title, "Learning Over Lunch," and all faculty are invited. Please let your colleagues know about this program.

If you would like to participate, please notify Pat Schoknecht (x6689) to reserve a box lunch. Of special interest to WAC faculty:

"Writing to Learn During Class" w/ Joe Essid, THC 331, Sept. 22, 12:30-1:30. An old topic with a new twist or two, as we discuss painless ways to spur discussion and teach critical-thinking skills in the classroom.

"How to Grade Written Work" w/ Joe Essid, THC 331, Oct. 27, 12:30-1:30. We will discuss a few "grading rubrics," ways to avoid grade-inflation, and the merits and problems of numerical and letter grades. This topic is new for 2004-2005.

"New Facilities to Promote Interactive Learning" w/ Mark Nichols, Jepson G23, 12:30-1:30. Our classrooms have an amazing array of multimedia capabilities. Join Mark to learn more.