



Logo by Terry Dolson

# Richmond Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

Issue 15, Fall 2006

## Announcements & Notes

By Joe Essid  
Writing Center Director

Lee Carleton  
Assistant Writing Center Director

### Welcome New WAC Faculty!

We'd like to welcome Rick Mayes in Political Science and Ilka Saal in English. Thank you for extending our work across the curriculum!

We'd also like to thank our lucky stars for the presence of Margaret Paxton, the Administrative Assistant now working for both the Academic Skills and Writing Centers. Ms. Paxton, a Scot who has lived in Richmond for the past two years, has a great eye for detail, a flair for "thinking outside the box," and a reputation as a miracle worker! Fellows and tutors, be sure to stop at Ms. Paxton's desk to thank her for the improvements you have already seen in payroll and communication.

### Students to Present at National Writing Conference

Writing Fellow Caitlyn Paley and Anna Dounce (just invited to enroll in Eng. 383) will be traveling to the Conference on College Composition and Communication in New York City in March 2007 to present their perspectives on multi-genre projects in writing-intensive classrooms. Richard Selfe of Ohio State, a leading

scholar in the field of technology and writing, invited Anna, Caitlyn, and Joe Essid to join his workshop at CCCC this year.

### Recommendations for Fellows and Tutors Needed

We invite faculty to recommend freshmen, sophomores, and juniors to join the program. Students must enroll in the Eng. 383 training course next semester, taught by Terry Dolson. To recommend a student, faculty should write a short letter of recommendation or send an e-mail to Lee Carleton ([icarleto@richmond.edu](mailto:icarleto@richmond.edu)).

Faculty should also tell the students they recommend to send a short writing sample (at least 3 pages) to Mr. Carleton (campus address: Writing Center).

Potential Writing Fellows should have good writing, interpersonal, and organizational skills; all students would enroll in English 383 next semester.

### Campus Writing Committee

Joe Essid will be an ex-officio member of this committee.

Joe hopes to get information from WAC and Eng. 103 faculty, Writing Fellows, Tutors, and writers to meet the committee's charge: to study the writing requirements on campus and make recommendations to best serve all students.

Please take some time this semester to record your thoughts about the needs, strengths, and weaknesses of our courses and the writers our programs serve. Joe will be asking for this input as the semester continues.

## Writing Around Campus

### A Cup of Coffee--And Assignments

Grab a mug and pull up a chair at Comp Cafe, the site for writing materials and discussion of writing. Designed for Eng. 103 teachers' needs, the site has sample assignments that could be adapted to many WAC classes. Follow the link at the right of our main page,

<http://writing.richmond.edu>,

to explore Comp Cafe.

### Writing in the Disciplines: PLSC

During the summer, Writing Fellow David Roberts collaborated with several faculty members in Political Science to develop a substantive online guide for students in that department.

We hope that the PLSC online handbook will surpass similar, but more limited, materials at George Mason University. GMU is home to a strong and innovative WAC program as well as a Writing in the Disciplines (WID) program.

Unlike WAC, which tends to focus its efforts more in general education classes and in areas where writing is not commonly done, WID assumes that writing is being done in a major and looks at ways to draw upon the disciplinary expertise of faculty in concert with the writing resources of a WAC program.

Look for an announcement soon by e-mail noting when this site, integrated into the structure of *Writer's Web*, "goes live."

Next year we hope to work with Dance to develop UR's second WID handbook.

## Faculty Column:

### Re sensitizing Students to Writing

Lee Carleton, Assistant Director UR Writing Center

Today, as technology rapidly changes our lives and the ways in which we communicate, teachers face an increasing challenge in capturing and keeping student attention and focus, particularly when it comes to writing. Essays abound decrying various causes of student disinterest ranging from consumerism to ADD to video games to weak teaching, but it is often the lack of a clear, convincing rationale for the centrality of writing that is a primary culprit in the detachment of our students.

Though I don't like the consumerist implications of the word "salesman" or the trivial connotations of "cheerleader" it seems that some combination of these two roles is what I take on when introducing a course to students. Fortunately I don't have to wear the outfits for each role! Competition for our students' attention is so great that we cannot assume they come to us convinced of the value and relevance of writing outside of their English classes. Further, many students come to our classes with a sense of superiority that deceives them into thinking that their critical writing and reading skills are sufficient for university work. By introducing our courses with a thoughtful rationale, we can transform these potential negative responses into enthusiasm and engagement.

Whatever a student's major or interest, language is the foundation of all other disciplines, and as such it is the most crucial area of study for their academic success. Spoken language is one of our earliest technologies, and writing has been around for several millennia, so the presence and power of this useful tool easily becomes invisible to us as we necessarily filter out most of the messages we receive every day. Our students are likewise surrounded by and bombarded daily with a non-stop flood of language, both spoken and written, and this serves to dull their apprecia-

tion of the power and primacy of language, often leading to the disinterest we encounter in the classroom. This "invisibility" of language is like that of a sound or smell that is encountered so regularly (like traffic noise, or the scent of our detergent) that it ceases to register with our senses.

Because of this natural desensitization, effective teachers must "repackage" language and re-sensitize students to its presence so they can experience it in a new way with curiosity and interest. Recent research has revealed the centrality of language to brain development: the complexity of language and the challenge this represents to the human brain actually stimulates "neurogenesis" or the growth of brain cells known as neurons. See:

<http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~Ingbrain/main.htm>

Students need to know that there is a direct connection between their engagement with language and their intellectual potential.

I remind my students of the broad applicability and tremendous social impact of language to help them see its value beyond the classroom and the academy. When we thus foreground language for our students, it can reorient their attitude towards their studies, and open up exciting new possibilities for them that inspire enthusiastic engagement rather than bored dismissal.

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

**Please contact Joe Essid at [jessid@richmond.edu](mailto:jessid@richmond.edu)**

**Thanks for supporting Writing at Richmond!**

**<http://writing.richmond.edu>**