



Logo by Terry Dolson

# Richmond Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

Issue 20, February 2009

## Announcements & Notes

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Marie Boylan  
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Newsletter Editor

<http://writing.richmond.edu>

Welcome New WAC faculty

We'd like to thank Mary Thomas and Monika Wadman in English, Carlos Valencia in Latin American and Iberian Studies, and Dick Leatherman in Continuing Studies for joining the WAC program his semester.

Congratulations!

by Joe Essid, Writing Center Director

Daniel Coudriet, a Visiting Lecturer of English and our newsletter editor, recently learned that his first collection of poems, *Say Sand*, will be published as part of the Poetry Series from Carnegie Mellon University Press. Now entering its 37th year, Carnegie Mellon University Press remains well-known for both its Poetry Series and its Classic Contemporaries Series. *Say Sand* is slated to appear in early 2010.

Mary Thomas, an English 103 instructor, used wikis (collaboratively authored Web sites, with discussion features) recently and with marked success. Mary reflects on this pilot project at the Writing Center's home page, as a feature story. Be sure to have a look soon.

Wendi Berry, an English 103 instructor, submitted a story to *Hayden's Ferry Review's* blog and won third runner up in the prose section for the holiday writing contest. "Christmas at Ground Zero, 2001" is about spending the holidays with family in New York City three months after 9-11 and is a work of non-fiction. Her story can be found at: <http://haydensferryreview.blogspot.com/>.

*Hayden's Ferry Review*, Arizona State University's print journal of literature and art for 22 years, began its blog in June 2008 to, according to Beth Staples, managing editor, "further the reach of...contributors' work, and [offer] a way to engage new readers and create conversations about writing and art."

The first holiday blog contest asked for "a good holiday story or poem," with the further stipulation that "holidays all get a lot of visibility already, but so much of it is commercialized or relegated to 'political correctness' that the underlying possibility for conflict (the lifeblood of storytelling) is largely untapped. So see what you can make of it."

The blog has had 15,000 hits since June, and although the print journal annually receives about 3,000 prose submissions and over 8,000 individual poems, Staples said they were really happy with the number and quality of holiday contest submissions. The blog will run different kinds of writing

contests regularly, and is now seeking book reviews, including reviews of poetry, short stories, novels, and books about the craft of writing.

Staples would like to extend a discounted subscription offer to Writing Center newsletter readers for *Hayden's Ferry Review* of \$12 for a one-year subscription (that's \$2 off), \$24 for two years, or \$36 for three years. To place an order email [HFR@asu.edu](mailto:HFR@asu.edu).

Writing at Stanford & Cornell

In February and March, Lee Carleton and Joe Essid will travel to these two universities to study their writing programs. With Richmond convening a committee on the first-year experience, we thought it useful to see how two well regarded schools with long-standing writing programs coordinate first-year writing, Core-style courses, writing-intensive seminars across the curriculum, and their writing centers.

We hope to share reports with program participants at Richmond later this semester and with members of the new committee in the fall.

Saving Paper: E-mail, BLogs

We will no longer print copies of this newsletter. Copy us if you have trouble with the PDF attachment.

To reduce expenses in the program and to employ pedagogically transformative technologies (as we do in our classrooms), the staff at the WAC program will also post entries about writing and the program to you by e-mail and use our "Richmond Writing" blog, at <http://blog.richmond.edu/writing>, for longer entries and multimedia posts about writing.

## Article:

Report from an Alumna

Patricia North

I served as a Writing Fellow in the Writing Across the Curriculum Program at the University of Richmond from 2001 to 2003. Since graduating from college, I have worked in the advertising field as an account manager for such major national brands as Pantene, CoverGirl, Tropicana and Quaker Oatmeal. My primary roles are to partner with clients to develop brand strategy and to lead the internal agency team in the execution of this strategy through advertising. Effective communication—both written and verbal—is at the core my position.

I am confident that the skills I honed as a Writing Fellow have greatly contributed to my professional success. First, being part of the Writing Across the Curriculum program gave me the opportunity to strengthen my own writing skills. As a result, I am able to clearly express my own ideas to clients, co-workers, management and others via email and other forms of written communication. And, given that I send an average of sixty emails a day, this is an important skill! Second, my experience as a Writing Fellow prepared me to evaluate the writing of others and provide constructive feedback. There have been many occasions when even my supervisors have asked that I proof-read important presentations because they are aware of my strong writing background. Finally, I believe that my work as a Writing Fellow gave me an advantage over my peers. In the ad industry, as in many others, promotions often occur at the discretion of supervisors. My preparation as a Writing Fellow distinguished me from others at my level, resulting in my quicker advancement.

## Student Perspectives:

These blog excerpts are from Lee Carleton's Eng 383 course, where in fall 2008 the students collaborated to create The Touchdown Project, a writing wiki for UR staff members taking writing-intensive classes:

"The Touchdown Project"  
Julie Crandell

I am incredibly grateful for the experience I have gained throughout this semester. My views throughout the duration of this course were constantly transforming, and although I gained valuable knowledge about tutoring, I feel as though the UR Touchdown staff writing project taught me the most. Through our reading of the introduction of *The Mind at Work* by Mike Rose, I was able to gain insight into the world that our class was about to dive into, head-first. I was somewhat apprehensive about the idea of teaching someone that is older than I am and clearly has more life experience. This anxiety was further compounded by my concerns about staff interest. Thankfully, I learned both apprehensions were unfounded. *The Mind at Work* provided an insight into a world I really knew nothing about and allowed me to appreciate the difficulty and value of the work our staff performs.

I gained an even better understanding through reading "The Disadvantages of an Elite Education" by William Deresiewicz. In the past, I always struggled when talking to a staff member, politely asking them, "How are you?" but our conversations typically ended there. Now, I've personally gotten to talk to staff members who are excited about our project.

At the beginning of the semester, I thought our project almost seemed too ambitious. Here I was, a student at U of R who had never had a meaningful conversation with a staff member, attempting to give them tips

about their writing. I've come a long way, as evidenced by my meaningful conversations with them. Next semester I hope to develop the web site and continue to develop better relationships with the staff!

"Still on Call"  
Catie Venable

Our 383 class has really helped me to look at writing, both my own and that of others, in a new and refreshing way. Before this class, I was already familiar with "editing" the papers of my peers; I have been helping friends with their writing since the frantic college-essay-writing days of senior year, and some of my high school friends still email me their papers! However, I now look at this task in a different way, and try to apply what I have learned about collaborative and facilitative tutoring to all the writing I encounter. Some of these experiences, while going over the papers of my friends, have helped me to really mentally absorb, understand, and apply the concepts we have discussed in class....Reflecting back on how I have changed as a peer tutor, I am happy with how the 383 class has taught me to facilitate conversation about writing with my peers. Although most of the people I tutor in the Writing Center will not be my close friends, and I will not be as familiar with their writing styles and thought processes, this experience with my best friend helped me to realize what I should be aiming for in all my tutoring sessions. As our readings have repeatedly stated, it is not my job to "take control" of the other student's writing, but rather to give them feedback as a reader and help them to organize and clarify their points, so that they can write their own ideas better.

"Writing for Geographers"  
Abby Novak

I thought it'd be a good idea to find an article that specifically describes writing in my discipline, geography. After searching, I found "Writing for Non geographers: Lessons from the J.B. Jackson Prize", by Kenneth

D. Madsen. In the article, Madsen describes a recent change in the geographical community. While traditionally geographic research has been directed at academics, there is now "some recognition that academic geographers should write for an audience wider than just other academic geographers" (Madsen 63). The geography community recently decided that writing in the discipline needed to be generalized in order to be understood by everyone, not just by other geographers. However, "Even if academic geographers want to aim more directly at the educated public, guidance in just how to proceed is rare" (Madsen 64). Geographers knew that in order to share their research they needed to not only have extensive knowledge of their discipline, but also of writing in general. Madsen, in expressing this point, quotes Paul Groth, one of the leaders in the movement, as saying "good writing means many many drafts, and (for most mortals) working at your craft by showing it to other people, and if possible taking nonfiction courses in writing" (Madsen 66-67). This comment surprised me, as it reflects the ideals promoted in the WAC program. Geographers responsible for this movement are aware that revision is a key step in the writing process and know that the best way to assure that their works are readable is to share them with others. Additionally, Groth advocates taking courses in writing and learning about the writing process. In order to best reach all audiences, Madsen recommends using "concrete instead of abstract language when possible" and "demistify[ing] work through commonly shared language" (Madsen 68).

"Writing: A Team Effort"  
Alex Malatesta

In 383, we were not drilled on grammar, judged for our lack of pedagogical knowledge, or criticized for our presence in such an elite class. It was a true learning environment. Our classroom experience, itself, mirrored the intent of our WAC program. Our writing proficiency was successfully

developed through collaboration with each other; by discussing the needs of our Staff for our class project, we could identify with the weaknesses in our own abilities- either as a writer, or a tutor.

The "hands on" aspect of this class was the best implementation of our reading; I feel fortunate to have had a class in such a team environment, where each student played a small, individual role in achieving a greater goal. After 3.5 years at the University of Richmond, no class has been as similar to my full time job as a varsity field hockey player, as this class. Serving as a senior captain, where initiative, leadership, and discipline were crucial to earning the respect of my teammates, prepared me for offering my skills to my 383 classmates. Even better, this class is a relatively close-knit crew compared to the other classes I have taken, where people still do not know each other's names by the end of the semester. Our class was about more than learning; our class was that priceless college experience that can't be downloaded through a micro-chip!

"Hail and Farewell, Reading?"  
Colin Hegwood

It's sad, I think, that the ink and paper book is moving out for electronic literature and, perhaps, audio books. Even as I write this via the Internet I still believe that the published book is the best way to read. In his *New Yorker* article "Twilight of the Books" Caleb Crain examines the ever-increasing decline of reading. Even more disturbing than the decline of paper books is the decline of reading overall. Without books society would change, perhaps, a fraction but without reading, as Crain points out, society would change monumentally. Imagine a world in which people couldn't read. It's almost as if society has been placed on a negative parabola, reached its peak, and is beginning its descent back to illiteracy and the knowledge that comes with it; knowledge which correlates with employment, higher wages, and more opportunities for advancement (Crain

1)...my generation is reading less than our parents who are reading less than their parents. This is a problem which may reduce reading books for pleasure to the arcane hobby of a very small number of intellectuals.... .What happens if reading for pleasure is lost? It's not such a big deal, is it? Perhaps reading for pleasure doesn't occupy much of our lives but I believe it molds much of the way we think. If you will, think of a great book you read that was then turned into a movie. Think of the way you felt, thought, and experienced the book. Then think of how much different it was while watching. The movie didn't incorporate all of the details, some of which were suppressed and others simply omitted. Characters and story lines were slightly altered during the jam-packed one and a half hour movie. The book took days, maybe weeks to read and to think about and to digest while the movie took an hour and a half, entertained for its showing, and then was mostly forgotten.... Beyond all of this, however, is simply the fact that we are losing knowledge. We are letting a highly advanced technology break away from us because we are too fascinated with the new, the "high-tech," computers, televisions, iPods, and more. If we are doomed to lose our literacy, however, it can only be hoped that a small group preserve this skill, as classics professors have preserved Latin and ancient Greece, so will this new sect of Literacy scholars preserve a technology which was vital to create the rest.

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

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

**Thanks for supporting Writing at Richmond!**

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