Richmond Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

Logo by Terry Dolson

Announcements & Notes

By Joe Essid
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http://writing.richmond.edu

Update on Events at the Center

Marie Boylan, Administrative Coordinator

The Writing Center has been open since January 28, and 73 tutor appointments have been scheduled.

On-Line Appointment Calendar

The on-line appointment calendar is working smoothly. You should be receiving an email notice when someone makes a reservation in your time slot. You can also view information on that appointment by going into the calendar and clicking on the blue appointment box.

No Shows

If a writer misses an appointment, or does not cancel before 24 hours, it is considered a no-show. You will forward the email reservation you receive to the Center office. The

office will notify writers that they missed appointments, and after two no-shows they will not be able to use the Center for the remainder of the semester.

When you arrive for your appointment and suspect it may be a no-show please stay in the Center for approximately 15 minutes. You are then free to leave. Report your time as a half hour.

Tutor Reports

Reports should be completed after each appointment on the website by going to Resources, Forms, Tutor Report Form. The recipient of this report is a faculty member. Always write the report to the faculty member as if you were writing a personal memorandum. Check spelling of student and faculty names and always use "Dr." in front of the faculty member's name.

Writing Center Sunday Tutoring

The Writing Center is experimenting with offering tutoring on Sunday evenings in the Library. The first session was on February 10 from 5:00-9:00 p.m. It is proving to be a much needed service.

If you need help with a writing assignment on a Sunday evening contact Becky Walker by email <becky.walker@richmond.edu> to make an appointment. If she does not have an appointment, walk-ins are welcome. Becky meets writers on the first floor of the Library.

End of Semester and Beyond

Joe Essid, Writing Center Director

We will be revising the schedule after the spring break to better utilize the tutors and the times available.

Nominations for Tutor and Writing Fellow of the Year

We invite faculty to nominate a senior for this honor. We'll have an awards lunch at the University Club and present the winners with framed certificates and a gift. Please send nominations with a short rationale to Joe Essid at jessid@richmond.edu.

Tutor Training for Next Year

Know a rising sophomore or junior who might want to join the program? Lee Carleton will again be teaching Eng. 383 in the fall semester. If you know a student who would like to join us, please refer him or her to Mr. Carleton <lcarleto@richmond.edu> for information about the fall section of the training course. The class is by invitation only. I will be teaching the section in Spring, 2009. Prospective applicants should have good (though not necessarily excellent) writing skills. Sometimes the best writers impose their style on others! One absolute: Fellows and tutors must possess outstanding interpersonal and organizational skills.

Faculty Column:

Their Wiki-Minds, Our Paper Habits

Joe Essid, Writing Center Director

We know, from a couple of dire NEA reports on reading, as well as the evidence of our classrooms, that many undergraduates no longer read deeply, when they read at all. But this is a writing program…so why do I begin with reading?

For as long as I've taught writing (21 years and counting) good reading skills have been a prerequisite,

though not the only one, to effective and interesting writing. There is no more effective way to build the vocabulary needed for a nuanced written style.

Sadly, however, reading for leisure is dwindling, and some prognosticators fear it will soon become a pastime for a bookish elite. I'm pleased by one datum: the latest NEA report on reading does consider Web-based reading as "reading" in its statistics. Blogs may not be Proust (they might be Joyce), but I've long advocated using the work that students know (in my own past, 1960s Fantastic Four comics and Doc Savage pulp novels) to ones they avoid (my love for Faulkner, discovered in my 20s).

Networked technologies that have contributed to the waning of "serious reading" will not reverse this trend. But one technology I plan to use in place of traditional papers may ameliorate some of the worst effects of student a-literacy.

I have made the radical decision to never again assign traditional papers in my classes. Instead, each student will prepare an online portfolio using the same wiki technology one sees at the Wikipedia site. This technology is not as complex as designing a Web site: imagine Microsoft Word, stripped-down, but embedded in one's Web browser, so pages can be published and edited by multiple authors. Every change is tracked, so the faculty member knows who has collaborated with whom. And the results can be public, as with my "Invented Worlds" Wiki at:
http://inventedworlds.wikispaces.com

Students love this technology, and the early projects about the worlds we make up in our heads, in the wilderness, or in cyberspace have produced some interesting and inter-disciplinary, if still raw and free-form, work. Soon I'll share with WAC faculty how I'm teaching my students to reign in the projects through a series of revisions (each graded). So far the process has been delightful, the grading perhaps a bit too high, but the range of Web and print research in

the best projects, none prompted by me, impressive.

I suspect that projects, encouraging collaboration, citation, and a sharing in the context of a larger "creative commons" set up as an alternative to the corporatist and elitist worlds of copyright and traditional publishing, will replace our printed and stapled papers. I'm just making this leap earlier than many of my colleagues. But this type of work will be what students do outside our campus "bubble" in all but the most cloistered of academic settings. I've decided to side with that future.
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Student Perspectives:

Lee Carleton's Eng 383 Writing Tutor Trainees were asked to respond to the following question:

What do you see for the future of writing? What role will technology have?

"The future of writing will inevitably be influenced by technology; however, it is up the students to incorporate its benefits in their writing practices while maintaining their own individual writing styles."

--Caroline Breed

"I worry about writing. I worry that technology, in its ability to provide such vast and uncensored access to the work of so many authors/poets/journalists, inhibits originality. It's as though any thought you could have, any phrase or thesis you could compose, is already out there a thousand times over, floating adrift in cyberspace. "

--Rachel Dougherty

"Although handwritten assignments are already a thing of the past, all writing will soon be available worldwide and all assignments posted online."

--Whitney Nexsen

"In order to reflect an ever-advancing society, technology, as in the past, will continue to change writing into a more impersonal, formulaic mode of communication."

--Kristin Runey

"As digital media evolve, the use of pen and paper will likely become obsolete, like the quill and parchment has today."
--Peter Steinmetz

"In the age of wireless technology, we have less physical contact with others, so we will have to express our ideas through wireless writing."

--Emily Field

"Digital interconnectedness both hinders and facilitates the writing experience by granting all writers, profound and poor, the ability to share their work on a large scale."

--Dan Schauder

"Technology will improve, not abolish the future of writing. Online databases allow access to millions of texts and tutorials that make writing and reading convenient."

--Krista Madaio

"Writing will continue transform from a means of expression to a means of communication with the emphasis shifting from artistic value to utilitarian value."
--Lauren Milam

"Writing is ever-changing; technology merely makes it easier. I see the future of writing as being a work in progress."
--Kevin Walsh

"The future of writing is a vast wasteland turned green by the seedlings of a new literacy, in which technology allows us to sew the crops of digital language and allows us to realize ourselves as the projections of our imagination."
--Tyler Steele

"The future of writing is unlimited. With the evolution of technology, *writing* has become an art form that manifests itself differently depending on the mind of the author and their presentation style. Technology is merely the newest vacuum for writing."
--John Meador

"I believe technology will lead to better communication. People are enamored by email, and its popularity will make peer editing and writing easier on everyone."
--Tyler Morris

Article:

The Dreaded Multimedia Presentation?

Daniel Coudriet, Visiting Instructor of English

For the third portfolio in my 103 course, I have students complete a research-driven project asking them to identify and explore representational trends in popular culture. Specifically, students are required to consider the manners in which constructs such as gender, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity are portrayed in cinema, television, and/or advertising and then research the cultural significance of such portrayals. As a companion assignment, I have students form "panels" alongside students embarking upon related research projects and then present their research as "talk papers" with multimedia visual aides (i.e., clips from various media) during the last weeks of the course.

Having now incorporated this sort of assignment for several semesters, I have noticed a rather eye-opening trend. I devote several weeks of coursework to leading the students through the research process; however, as can be expected, the strength and execution of central argument varies fairly substantially from student paper to student paper on the finished products. There is much less variation, though, on the panel presentations. Students almost always perform phenomenally on this component. Arguments are presented in clear, PowerPoint-style bulleted format. Video clips are incorporated successfully and close read with careful attention and insight. I leave these class meetings utterly stunned with what my students are able to observe and comment upon.

Part of my bewilderment harkens back to my own student experiences with a widespread general dread of class presentations. The other surprising aspect, for me, is that often the very students having the most difficulty sustaining an argument in the research paper absolutely excel with the seemingly complicated nuances of the presentation format. It is certainly no surprise that students are more comfortable with articulating themselves in new media formats, but these experiences have been very compelling for me to consider how rhetorically and academically savvy students can be if new media is made an active part of pedagogical approaches.
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