

# Southern Discourse

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**Jerry Mwangbe from Kennesaw State University performs at the 2007 SWCA Conference**

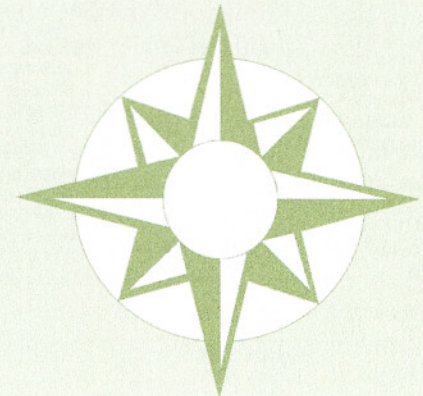
**Join us February 7-8 at the 2008 SWCA Conference in Savannah, GA**



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Glenda Conway (2006-08)  
University of Montevallo  
ConwayG@montevallo.edu

## Representatives-at-Large

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Millsaps College  
griffkr@millsaps.edu

## 2007 Conference Chair

Trixie Smith (2006-08)  
Middle Tennessee State  
University  
tgsmith@mtsu.edu

## Vice President

Beth Burmester (2006-08)  
Georgia State University  
engbtb@langate.gsu.edu

Jill Frey (2008-09)  
Presbyterian College  
jmfrey@presby.edu

## Southern Discourse Editor

Christine Cozzens (2004-09)  
Agnes Scott College  
ccozzens@agnesscott.edu

## Secretary

Kerri Jordan (2006-08)  
Mississippi College  
Jordan01@mc.edu

Kevin Dvorak (2007-09)  
Keiser University  
kdvorak@keiseruniversity.edu

## SWCA Website

www.swca.us

## Treasurer

Sandee McGlaun (2007-12)  
Roanoke College  
mcglaun@roanoke.edu

Karen Keaton Jackson  
(2006-08)  
North Carolina Central  
University  
kmkeaton@ncu.edu

# A Note from the Editor: The Writing Life

By Christine Cozzens,  
Agnes Scott College



*Christine*

This spring Agnes Scott inaugurated a new president. The event coincided with alumnae weekend, so I visited with lots of former students—writing tutors and others—and got caught up on the twists and turns of their lives since graduation. In talking with them I was reminded that writing is not just something we teach in college and practice if we teach or write for a living. Writing is everything.

“You wouldn’t believe how much I have to write in my job,” said one alumna to me on that sunny, happy day in April. “The writing center has stayed with me,” said another. “Now I tutor the people who work with me on their writing.” She had not actually been a tutor or an English major but had felt at home in the center. “You won’t remember me,” said one student (I did!), “but I’ve never forgotten what I learned about writing from the tutors.” Another young woman, now in law school, told me that her professors want her to write in a more “technical” and less “English” style. “But I’m sticking to my way, even if I get lower grades,” she said. “My style will make my cases more compelling.” One ten-year graduate is not working at the moment because she is taking care of her seriously ill mother: “I’ve started writing again!” she said with a light in her eyes. “It’s something I can do right now.”

I know that you—tutors, directors, writing center staff—will hear these stories and comments and others like them at reunions and chance encounters all your life. Writing centers are at the core of the educational experience, helping students grow into a way of life that will be with them no matter what path they take. ✨

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### Editorial Staff

Christine Cozzens, editor  
Gingle Lee, assistant editor  
Maggie Greaves, assistant editor  
Hayley Gallagher, assistant editor  
Susan Dougherty, assistant editor  
Mary Zimnik, publication design

### Editorial Address

Christine Cozzens, Editor  
*Southern Discourse*  
Agnes Scott College  
141 E. College Ave.  
Decatur, GA 30030  
Tel. 404-471-6221  
Fax 404-471-5223  
ccozzens@agnesscott.edu

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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE  
THE WORLD FOR WOMEN

# Bringing It Home: Discussions from SWCA Continue at UT Martin

Jason Adkins, Anna Clark, Mattie Davenport, Beth Walker, and Jenna Wright, University of Tennessee, Martin

Five staff members from the Hortense Parrish Writing Center at the University of Tennessee at Martin reflect on how presentations they attended at the 2007 SWCA Conference have contributed to the sounds of learning in their center.

## Anna Clark, writing center co-coordinator

When Jenna Wright and I returned from the excellent 2006 SWCA Conference in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, we immediately began planning proposals for the 2007 conference in Nashville. We liked the 2007 theme, “Static and (dis)Harmony: Tuning into Writing Centers in the Music City,” we were excited to know that Beth Boquet would be the keynote speaker, and we knew that Nashville was an easy driving distance from UT Martin in the northwest corner of Tennessee, thus making it possible for more of our staff to attend this conference. We gathered up several of those neat flyers (kudos to MTSU and SWCA for such creative advertising!) and encouraged other staff members to submit proposals with us. Four of us decided to work together on one presentation, and one person decided to give a separate presentation. We truly enjoyed all the reading, discussions, and planning that went into preparing for this conference; last February, we arrived in Nashville ready to contribute to the overall conference as well as to gather as many ideas as possible to bring home to our center.

After returning from the conference, we each wrote summaries of the sessions we attended. We compiled our comments into one file to share with the entire staff, and we used this material as the basis for discussion at a staff meeting. We also made available books and handouts we had gathered at the conference. In

addition, we distributed a set of questions that Jill Frey (Presbyterian College) had shared with us in her session entitled “Resolving the Dissonance: Educating Tutors to Work Across the Disciplines.” We asked the entire staff to choose one or two questions to answer, and one of our student assistants compiled the answers into a file that is now available for all tutors. Jill’s questions and her scenarios in working with writers across the curriculum have been the basis for much discussion and exchange of information, and our responses now will be resource material for future staff training sessions.

For me, the best session of the entire conference was “A Broad Perspective on Mentoring” presented by Leigh Ryan (University of Maryland) and Pamela Childers (The McCallie School, Chattanooga). After presenting interesting background information, the session leaders asked us to write about some of the mentors in our life. As we shared our responses, we also talked about the functions of both formal and informal mentors; we discussed the roles and responsibilities

of both mentors and mentees—especially in the writing center. From this session I gained ideas for staff meetings, a bibliography of materials about mentoring, and a signed copy of *The Bedford Guide for Writing Tutors* (Leigh Ryan is co-author), an essential for any center’s library.

Other sessions I attended gave me ideas for improving our online presence and strategies for tutoring in disciplines other than English. Indeed, the sounds of this conference resonated with me. I was pleased to give a presentation with my colleagues, and I was eager to listen to others and consider ways to enrich UT Martin’s center where a symphony of sounds (tutoring sessions, workshops, roundtable discussions, etc.) continues throughout each day.



Mattie Davenport, Beth Walker, Anna Clark, Jenna Wright, Jason Adkins

## Jason Adkins, writing center assistant

Although the SWCA 2007 conference focused on “noise,” the conference’s sounds were much more of an elaborate, well-conducted harmony than chaotic dissonance. Centers differ widely on issues such as incorporating technology into tutoring sessions and accommodating ESL students. At the SWCA conference, many helpful discussions centered on these differences. However, another beneficial line of discussion—constituting the melody of the conference—consisted of areas of agreement. The agreement most often mentioned at the

# Writing Our Stories

By Jayetta Slawson, Southeastern Louisiana University

The recent SWCA conference in Nashville, “Static and (dis)Harmony: Tuning into Writing Centers in the Music City,” put some of Beth Boquet’s notions of performative writing center pedagogy center-stage in the numerous discussions and presentations. As someone versed in the interdisciplinary Performance Studies perspectives of Richard Schechner and New York University, I felt at home instantly in the conversations.

For me, thinking about Writing Centers through the lens of performance makes all kinds of sense. At the Southeastern Writing Center in Hammond, Louisiana, for instance, we embrace and celebrate the performative in stories, orality, literature, and the writer’s voice. We believe that “voice” takes many forms; that is, it wears many costumes. Further, the unique ways we tell our stories is central to informing content explorations whether the adopted form is academic, anecdotal, or acts-oriented.

At a recent event sponsored by the Southeastern Writing Center for Black History Month, the famed New Orleanian Yarnspinner, Angela Davis, performed in the student union ballroom to an audience of over 200 students and faculty members. Ms. Davis, an international performer for festivals, businesses, professional organizations, and schools and universities, used storytelling, setting, and improvisational techniques as she asked our students to find joy in the stories they write and in the stories they tell one another. Featuring a storyteller for our Writing Center speaker series was a strategic move in our development of a “performing writing center.”

I had the opportunity to talk to Ms. Davis before the event. Some of our conversation is excerpted below:

## Can you talk a little about your background and how you got started as a storyteller?

I was an elementary school teacher, and would tell stories to my kids every day. One day we were on a field trip, and someone came up to me and asked, “How much do you charge to do this?” The question came to me out of left field because I had always told stories; although, I had never been paid for it. I told her \$25 dollars. She hired me to tell stories at her daughter’s birthday party. That day, I sat down and decided on a name for myself, made business cards, and from that moment things just began to happen. I was telling stories at Maple Street

Bookstore in New Orleans one day and a *Times Picayune* photographer was in there. He took my picture...and the next thing I knew Young Audiences called and said, “Hey we’ll pay you \$100 to tell stories.” So I started telling stories. I guess I had been telling stories for about six months for pay when I finally realized: “This is it...this is what I am supposed to be doing....”

## What kind of stories did you tell? Did you write the stories?

Initially, no. I was a very private writer...afraid to share my thoughts as a writer. I was afraid people would say to me: “Why are you sharing this information? Don’t you know this is just crazy...this is just stupid.” So, interestingly enough, it has taken me many years to be confident and comfortable with my own writing abilities. I actually have two children’s books that are in the process of being published. For the longest time, they just sat on a shelf because I was so afraid of putting them out there.

## Can you talk a little bit about stories in relation to Katrina and the projects going on nationally that involve collecting the stories of other people, writing them down, and publishing them. Do you see this type of storytelling as a way of healing?

Storytelling has so many different mechanisms to it—including healing. Stories can also be visionary. I would strongly encourage anyone who is writing their story not only to focus on the past...certainly get those stories down...but more importantly, write the story that you envision for your life. Don’t let the model for your life be based on the past. Create a new story out of what happened to you...like the phoenix rising from the ashes. Create a story that is a much more compelling story about what you intend to be in this life. What it is you intend to accomplish. What it is you want to do. How Katrina has helped you to achieve those dreams. How Katrina propelled you forward giving you momentum to finally make your dreams come true. To see them actualized and not just a story....

## How do your stories play cross-culturally? Is there something different that happens when you go to Holland or to Africa?

No, actually I tell the same stories when I go around the world. They are Louisiana stories mostly; they are stories that I have created as my own signature



Courtesy of Angela Davis

tales. When I tell these tales, it is like I bring a little Louisiana culture wherever I go. When people tell stories, they are bringing a part of who they are...they are bringing stories from their own points of view that have never been presented before. This is what I tell audiences all around the world: "We all have bodies...human bodies. If you cut us, we will all bleed red blood." There's essentially no difference between humans in Louisiana and humans in Holland or Africa or anywhere else. We are all still humans and we are still going to feel our human emotions. We all want to be happy...we all want to laugh and be overjoyed by life. At the heart...at the core...of each human being is that similarity. Now, our experiences as a result of growing up in these different areas of the world tend to give us our unique perspective on life...our unique life story...and to influence how we tell that story. How the other people take it in has so much to do with how we interact with one another...how we treat one another... You've got to find a way to tap dance on the joy inside of people so that they can hear other stories from a place of compassion, from a place of love, from a place of: "What can I do to help?" I think after Hurricane Katrina people in our country were just overwhelmed by the enormity of what happened in New Orleans. All of this negative energy was being propelled into our country. After a while people stared to say, "I just can't hear anymore. This is just too much."

I talked earlier about storytellers being visionaries. We are all storytellers to some extent because we all have our own life stories to draw from...but I think storytellers are visionaries because they have the ability to touch the future. And what I mean by that is: when we tell a story we have the ability to touch students in a way that just speaking or just touching a person or just giving them something is not going to touch them. But, if a person speaks through story, that particular story will affect the individual so that the listeners will become motivated to create something that did not exist before. All of your great teachers and scientists and inventors were motivated by someone...some story that they heard or they knew or they read....



Courtesy of Angela Davis

### Is it important to write our stories down?

It is important to tell them. I recommend taping them as you are telling them so you can go back and listen to what you are saying. Then, you can begin to write down what you are saying. Sometimes we talk and we don't hear what we are saying. There's so much useless conversation going on in our lives. When you become aware of what you are saying...when you tape it and begin to write it down...you not only begin to crystallize it, but to get a clearer vision of what you are saying and what story you are telling. And then you get to ask yourself: "What is the end result I want? Where do I want this story to take me?" But, importantly, we need to hear our own stories.

I feel like I have so much to say. One of the things that I do when I talk to children, especially little children, is to make sure that they understand, "Don't let someone else write your story...tell you who you are..." It is important for children, young adults, and anyone who wants to know where they are going, to write their stories down...just write them. I know for me, I was afraid to write my stories because many of them were so painful. In some places, you can't articulate that pain in a way that communicates what you've experienced. Sometimes you don't even know what you've been through; you're numb from what you've experienced. In those cases, you've got to allow yourself to be...to just be...well just hang out and be until you can get to the place where you know what is good for you and what you need. There are people in our society who have just been so hurt that they cannot even give voice to their words. They can't. But in those instances, they can start to get in touch with what they are feeling by writing their stories. In those instances, it's so critical to put the story down first before starting to verbalize it. You've got to find out what is going on inside your own head.

To become a really good writer in a school setting, you've got to practice. And sometimes you don't feel good about what you are writing because you don't know if your punctuation is correct, and you don't want anybody judging you because your punctuation is messed up. Everybody is a product of their environment...what they have been through. Some people have had the benefit of really excellent educations and some people have not. Then, they are afraid to really share what is going on because they don't know how to start. I know when I first got into college, I was intimidated by writing. Every time I spent a lot of time trying to make a good paper to impress my professor, it was horrible. I got a terrible grade. But, when I wrote from what was going on inside of me, somehow I got really good grades for what I wrote. And I think it comes from getting in touch with the authenticity of who you are when you are writing. It comes from what you know verses from writing to impress. There is something in our world that really values authenticity...that values our true story. ✨

# Compass Points: Independent Studies in Writing Based in The Writing Center

By Wills Baker, Anthony Conney, Brandall Jones,  
David Mullens, Sean Murnan, and Pamela Childers,  
The McCallie School



Anthony Conney, David Mullens, Sean Murnan, Pamela Childers,  
Brandall Jones, Wills Baker

Many writing centers have writing fellows programs or peer tutoring courses connected to them; however, few have independent study writing courses based in their centers. From our experience attending a school that has offered independent study courses in writing through the writing center for a dozen years, we find the opportunity a unique one. Since we individually write our proposal and design the course with the writing center director, we benefit from working collaboratively and focusing on specific interests of our own and ones we did not even know about before we took the course. Below are our thoughts.

The existence of a writing center with an independent study is vital to the growth of the individual student. Whether working on a short article or a research paper, I find the writing center represents a solid ground for inspiration and of tolerance for poetry, the southern voice of Picasso and any other muse to be bent and molded into a master literary work. In the words of Emerson, "Put the argument into a concrete shape, into an image, some hard phrase, round and solid as a ball, which they can see and handle and carry home with them, and the cause is half won." The cause begins within the motivated writer who lives the restless process; the writing center becomes a savior to those of us who devote our time to

an independent study, paralyzed by the deterring wit of the blasphemous semicolon. It is impractical for anyone involved in an independent study to receive network support from any place except the center founded upon the passion of writers.

Since I began the independent study course, my writing has improved tremendously. I have read articles and other publications that have given me guidance with writing. One was "Fifteen Ways to Write Five Hundred Words" by Laurence Perrine who discusses wordiness and talks about how writers should not add so much useless information to their writing. I reflected on some papers I had written for class and began criticizing myself for turning in low quality, watered-down papers. Perrine would agree, and his essay has contributed to the way I now create quality essays. I am currently using the writing skills I have developed to help a friend write a paper for college. I am thankful that I had the opportunity to take the independent study course so that I could write better and have the knowledge I need to be successful with writing.

In my two independent studies on advanced writing and poetry, I have become a better communicator and a more knowledgeable reader through writing. For my school's newspaper, I submitted my first article, entitled "MLK Day: 25 minutes (or less)." Because of my training in the writing center, I was able to convey my thoughts in a way that others could easily understand, relating to their own experiences. I will soon be submitting my first poem to the school literary magazine. Without the independent study, I would not have had the confidence to express myself in this way. After moving beyond the fear of voicing my own opinions, I have been able to break the barrier that prevented me from truly expressing myself vocally. This year, I have given multiple performances to the entire student body and continue to perform with confidence. My studies in the writing center proved worthwhile also when I had to apply to colleges for scholarships. I have received full scholarships and financial assistance to my top two colleges.

Our writing center has given me the opportunity to push myself as a writer, forcing me to analyze myself, to recognize my weaknesses and to play off my strengths. None of my classes have challenged me in as many ways as the independent study has. With guidance, I recently completed a research paper selected for publication in the next edition of *Contemporary Reader*, certainly a project that I would have found impossible to create without the tools and knowledge offered through the writing center. My main project is to develop a screenplay. What makes having a high school writing center so terrific is that we are allowed to pursue our dreams and given the tools to feasibly achieve them. I will also be exposed to poetry, a weak point of mine, but it will help broaden my

horizons and make me a better literary “connoisseur.” Through the writing center, we are offered opportunities and challenges not found any other place in high school. I am grateful for being able to work with my school’s writing center; it is an asset no student should be without.

I find myself in a strange region between the standard and Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate curricula (AP, IB). During my sophomore year I excelled and believed I was ready for an AP English class. The first semester of my junior year left me with the realization of my sub-par writing techniques. I attended tutoring sessions with my teacher, but they did not help me achieve the level of improvement I desperately needed. I yearned for a class, which met my needs for a personalized English workshop, so I applied for an independent study, based on the art of writing. With approval, I was able to draw up a plan for my semester-long course. Suddenly I was able to decide the direction my course would take. I found myself immersed in new forms of writing that I had never expected. My favorite aspect is collaboration, which takes place during the composition process. Each of us sends drafts to one another. Through this process, each writer is subjected to constructive criticism, which produces insightful revisions. Currently, I am composing a poem. After submitting many drafts to my peers, I feel as if it is finally ready to submit for publication. Without their feedback, my poem could never have achieved its level of quality.

As the writing center director and teacher of this class, I have the luxury of working with a variety of students, some whom I have never known well, and guiding them in the discovery of new writing experiences. It allows me the joy of teaching writing, rather than what are sometimes only brief encounters with students in the writing center. The independent study students challenge me as much as I challenge them. Just as they respond to my writing for different audiences, I question their ideas that I want to understand more fully. I have co-authored several articles with students and helped them communicate with professional writers and writing center directors to get feedback on specific aspects of their writing. Our readings, based on their interests, allow us to share ideas on the composing process through new and different essays or poems that each recommends.

Independent studies based in writing centers offer support and resources to those of us who are trying to discover our own voices, communicate better, publish, gain experience with a variety of genres, and take risks with writing in a specialized course. We students are not peer consultants, but we have learned skills that enable us to voluntarily work with others on their writing and that empower us to continue developing as writers in college and throughout the rest of our lives. ✨

# SWCA to Offer New Grants and Scholarships Program

Shevaun E. Watson, University of South Carolina

Since 2005, the SWCA Executive Board has been developing a grants and scholarships program, for which it hopes to begin accepting applications next fall. Over the past several years our organization has accrued funds which the board plans to earmark for various kinds of grants and scholarships to be awarded to directors and tutors. Many ideas for such a program have been discussed at board meetings over the past two years, and the board accepted the final recommendations of the Scholarship Committee at the Nashville meeting.

SWCA Grants and Scholarships will address three main concerns: outreach, scholarship and research, and financial need. Outreach includes facilitating efforts to increase SWCA membership, to bolster participation at the annual conference, to assist Gulf Coast centers affected by Hurricane Katrina, and to reach out to HBCUs, high schools, and other under-represented centers in the Southeast. Scholarship pertains to efforts to promote writing center research throughout the region. Financial need is a pressing issue for many centers in our organization, especially as it restricts conference attendance.

The proposal accepted by the board in February is a dual scholarship program, including SWCA Initiative Grants and SWCA Conference Scholarships. The Initiative Grants will be competitive monetary awards dispensed annually to one or two recipients. A key feature of these grants will be a working partnership created to promote outreach and collaboration with under-represented or in-need constituents within SWCA. These partnerships will be “organic” as they respond to local issues and specific needs, working to extend resources, share information, and increase membership. Award winners will receive requested funds to achieve specific goals, up to a limit still to be determined. They will also be invited to present on their project at the annual conference, with SWCA membership and conference fees waived for that year.

Conference Scholarships will be noncompetitive, need-based awards given on a first-come, first-served basis to centers seeking to attend the annual conference. Currently, such assistance is provided in a haphazard and ad hoc fashion, which seriously limits SWCA’s ability to address financial needs. Preference will be

# Back to the Center: Becoming the “University” Writing Center at MTSU

By Trixie G. Smith, Middle Tennessee State University

When I came to Middle Tennessee State University as an assistant professor in composition and rhetoric, the English department planned for me to take over their University Writing Center—one day. One day became my second year at MTSU, but that was okay because I was moving into an active well-run center. The department administration was proud of having moved the center’s budget and immediate line of accountability out of English and into the College of Liberal Arts, with a hope of more extensive resources. They were also proud of the newly renovated computer lab now attached to the center. The biggest concern was that most people on campus viewed the UWC as the English center, not as the “University” Writing Center, if they even knew the UWC existed.



Trixie G. Smith

I made it my personal goal to make our center the University Writing Center that had been envisioned by those before me. The question I asked myself was how? How do we get the word out to students across campus? How do we let faculty across the disciplines know that we exist? How do we prepare for the new students who will come in—their genres and formats, their citation styles, their research methods and content? How do we train our writing assistants (WAs) for the expected growth and change? How do we recruit more WAs besides those assigned to us by the English graduate program? The answers to these questions were part of an evolving five step plan.

## Step 1: Education

My first step was to design a graduate course in Writing Center Theory, History, and Practice, a requirement for all new WAs. The course introduces WAs to writing center, composition, and WAC and WID (writing across the curriculum,

writing in the disciplines) theory through readings, projects, and seminar papers. At the same time, I worked with our writing program committee to create an undergraduate course in the Peer Tutoring of Writing, so we could recruit and train undergraduate WAs from across the curriculum to help with the anticipated increases and diversity. It was also my hope that these courses would help the WAs become personally invested in the mission and goals of the UWC, even making the UWC their own. These courses also helped us secure more dollars from the college and the provost.

## Step 2: PR

The next step was to get the word out. To help with WA investment in the center and to tap into their creative ideas, I presented PR as one of the ongoing projects in the writing center course. I was not disappointed. One group of students planned the first annual UWC Rock Show Benefit, which we have now held six times and which serves as a UWC fundraiser. Infomercials and testimonials between local bands who donate their performances help spread the word about the UWC and the benefits of using its services. Another group began *The Blue Writer*, our biennial newsletter which goes out to the faculty and administration and can be viewed online. Another group created a variety of advertising materials: revised posters and flyers for summer orientations, tent cards to advertise our website in computer labs across campus, a virtual tour of the UWC for the Web site, a poster campaign for strategic placement across campus, UWC ink pens, and new brightly colored bookmarks for distributing during class visits. During this time, I also worked to announce the UWC at every meeting possible: I visited as many departmental faculty meetings as I could wrangle an invitation for, attended graduate student orientation and placed announcements about our services to graduate students in the graduate handbook, sent materials to new faculty orientation, and talked to every individual who would listen about our services. We also held annual open houses, open mic nights, and open workshops designed to appeal to faculty and students from every discipline.

## Step 3: WAC, WID Programs and Collaborations

If we were going to have a University Writing Center, we had to learn more about the writing being assigned and completed by those outside of the English department. In another course project over many years, both graduate and undergraduate WAs conducted primary and secondary research to learn about writing and tutoring writing in other disciplines. WAs talked to faculty and students, gathered sample assignments, reported back to their UWC colleagues, and designed WAC and WID handouts to make available in sessions and online. We also began conducting more workshops for courses across campus. In some



cases, these workshops were a part of program partnerships and collaborations. For example, we have partnered with the Research Coach program in our library to provide writing help when they provide research help; our McNair Scholars program which serves first-generation college students headed to graduate school to facilitate reading and writing groups and to help with poster presentations, research reports, and graduate school applications; our distance-learning office to provide online tutoring for out-of-town students; and community schools to work with student writers through service-learning projects.

Over the past two years, we have also piloted a writing fellows, or content-based tutoring, program. Through this program we have placed WAs in physical science, speech, women's studies, and music general education courses; the WAs attend the class, work with the teaching faculty on assignment design, and work with the students on their communication assignments. Our partnerships with the speech department have also led to the development of our new University Speaking and Writing Center which has small rooms designed for tutoring students working on group projects and houses a miniature master classroom that allows students to practice giving oral presentations using PowerPoint and the SmartBoard; we can also videotape students to help with the tutoring of their presentations. All of these connections to students and faculty across campus have increased our visibility, as well as our workload.

#### Step 4: Diversify

While many of the programs and partnerships mentioned above help students with their writing, most of these efforts were focused on the classroom. Because we wanted the UWC to become the center of writing on our campus, we thought more student-focused, even extra-curricular, programs were needed. One such program is our creative writing groups. Students sign up for weekly groups of four to eight, facilitated by one of our WAs; the members of these groups share their writing (poems, short stories, plays, novels, memoirs), help each other revise, and challenge each other to new techniques. They also share with the greater community in our open mic nights, which happen twice a semester and always have good attendance. We also began research writing groups in which students, usually graduate students, help each other with lengthy projects including theses and dissertations.

Diversification also included expanding our web presence. First, we put all of our information and materials online, then we designed new materials for the website, such as WA bios, our virtual UWC tour, and our ever-changing photo albums. We also decided to expand our tutoring to the Internet. We now have online

synchronous tutoring for four hours each night, as well as asynchronous tutoring through our email system. While this program is still growing, we have more WAs and students try it every semester.

#### Step 5: Expanded Leadership

Of course, all of these new and expanded programs could not have happened without hard work and support. To help with training, mentoring, and general administration, we moved from a one-person lead tutor program to a two-person administrative assistant program, now known as our Graduate Student Administrator (GSA) program. These graduate leaders are mentored in writing center theory and administration and in return help train and mentor new WAs, assist with daily administrative tasks, and contribute to the overall vision of the UWC. In addition, each GSA oversees a program of specific interest, such as the fellows program or the online writing center.

Expanding our leadership also meant reaching out beyond MTSU. It was a GSA and four fellow WAs who helped me plan and host the first statewide meeting of writing center personnel, a meeting that resulted in the founding of the Tennessee Writing Center Collaborative, now headed into its fourth year. It also led me and many of my WAs to become much more active in SWCA and IWCA, attending and presenting at conferences, serving on committees, serving on the board, and then hosting the 2007 SWCA Conference in Nashville.

As we have become the University Writing Center at MTSU, we have four important to represent MTSU to the greater writing center community. It is a way for us to give back to both—and to keep expanding who we are and what we do. I have recently moved out of the UWC in order to educate and supervise the TAs, but I still remain close to the center—its mission and its people—and I still take every chance I get to talk about what the UWC has to offer the university. ✨

#### By the Numbers

**Middle Tennessee State University:** 23,000 students in undergraduate and graduate programs

**Interim Director:** Jimmie Cain

**Assistant Director:** Rachel Robinson

**Number of Tutors:** 18 graduate, 6 undergraduate

**Number of Student Visits:** approximately 5500 30-minute or 50-minute sessions; another 2000 service contacts through workshops, writing groups, fellows, and other UWC events

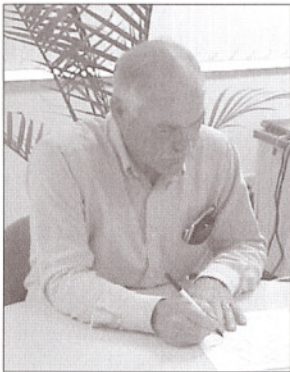
**Hours of Operation:** 84 hours in two centers, and 28 hours online

**Website:** <http://www.mtsu.edu/~uwcenter>

# What's the Point?

## The Glamour of Grammar

By Peter M. Carriere,  
Georgia College and State University



Peter Carriere

The *OED* tells us that the word “grammar” goes all the way back to the Greeks where it meant “of or pertaining to letters or literature.” Shortly before and during the Renaissance, the word “grammar” among educated English writers originally pertained only to Latin: “in the Middle Ages, *grammatica* and its Roman forms chiefly meant the knowledge or study of Latin” and was “synonymous with learning in general.” “Learning in general” included magic and astrology, two understandings of grammar that may be genetic: many of my students see the application of grammar to their writing as either magical or an astrological operation, and I don’t think any of them

used the *OED* as the source of this knowledge. They had to get it from somewhere, and I suspect they got it from their genes. The *OED* adds that the word “survives today in certain corrupt forms,” one being the English word “glamour,” hardly a word my students would apply to the study of language. On the other hand, I’ve known more than one colleague whose ability to pounce on grammar mistakes made them glow with a kind of intellectual glamour—at least in their own minds.

The *OED* also tells us that in grammar studies of the past, “many questions of ‘correctness’ in language were recognized as outside the province of grammar: e.g. the use of a word in a wrong sense, or a bad pronunciation or spelling would not have been called a *grammatical* mistake.” I think we need to hide this definition from students at all cost. It lends historical precedent to an already-too-fervent belief in this notion among the student body.

Yet another component of grammatical study—a current one no less—that should be kept from students at all cost is the idea of “accidence.” The *OED* lists three sub-divisions of grammar study today: phonology, accidence, and syntax, with “accidence” being defined as “the inflexional forms or equivalent combinations.” If grammar is already perceived as either magical or astrological, I don’t think we need to add “accidence”; students are already up to speed on this understanding.

Heaven forbid that they might use it in conjunction with magic and astrology and render their writing even more mysterious than it already is. In 1678 a scribe named Cudworth reported that “they who are skilled in the Grammar of the Heavens may be able from the several Configurations of the Stars, as it were letters, to spell out future Events.” I must reiterate: let’s not encourage students in this direction—some of them seem to be already genetically predisposed to viewing syntactical correctness as an occult visitation.

A possible precursor to Cudworth’s observation was described in 1620 by Hume: “You wald cause the universities mak an English grammar to repres the insolencies of sik green heades.” I don’t know about you, but I, for one, am more than thankful that I don’t have to deal with “sik green heades.” I have enough to do trying to teach students how to write without having to clean up the floor after trying to repress their “insolencies.”

We all know, of course, that God is in the details, but few of us know that Adam and Eve were tempted by bad grammar. A thinker named Trapp (an obviously allegorical name) declared in 1657 that “it was the Serpents grammar that first taught men to decline God in the plurall number.” I suppose until that happened language only had the singular form and only one person at a time could “decline God.” In any case, sin is not the only thing we inherited from that experience in the Garden: bad grammar has been our lot ever since, much to the chagrin of a man named Jewel, who wrote in 1611 that “some Popes be so voide of Learning, that they understand not the grammar rules.” If these deficient popes had learned more grammar, the Protestant Reformation may not have happened.

We do need to be thankful, however, for those steadfast grammar heroes who continually fight against that sad inheritance from the experience of Adam and Eve. Unfortunately, history has not been kind to these heroes, often labeling them either “grammar grubs,” “grammar fleas,” “grammar-grinders,” “grammar-pedants,” or “grammar-mongers.” Perhaps the worst is the grammar-monger, whose language was described by one J. C. Hare in 1833 as “like a sluggish, monotonous canal.”

But what else can we expect from institutions of higher learning that function mainly as a “grammar-shop.” “You may call it an university,” wrote Sydney Smith in 1836, “it will only be a grammar-shop.” A newspaper observation from 1906 spells it out exactly: “opportunities for experiment are not often forthcoming in our much-examined and grammar-ridden schools.” Well, the writer of this observation should see us now if he thought schools were grammar-ridden in 1906. One hundred and one years later, he would be forced to ask, “what’s the point.” ✨

conference was a tutoring technique that focuses on “global concerns.” Almost every writing center encounters many students with short-term goals, specifically the repair of a draft. Paradoxically, the tutor (consultant, assistant, etc.) is not particularly interested in improving the paper, but, more so, improving the writer. A temptation exists for all tutors to compromise this conviction. However, SWCA conference attendees uniformly endorsed the more “global” approach to tutoring, which focuses on locating patterns of errors in a paper and analyzing its overall strengths and weaknesses. Hearing this approach emphasized was both refreshing and rejuvenating.

### **Mattie Davenport, student assistant**

When I began working in our writing center at UT Martin, I was so proud of myself for knowing the difference between a coordinating conjunction and a subordinating conjunction. I could not wait to point to someone’s paper and utter the terms, “fragment,” “run-on,” or “prepositional phrase.” Jessica Ellen Davis’s presentation, “When Tutoring Comes to a Full Stop: Cultural Blocks in the Writing Center,” explained why I sometimes got confused looks from international students when I used my fancy language. Many international students do not use the same language for grammar that we use. An example Davis used was an Arabic student calling a period a “full stop.” Sometimes, a tutor must simplify his or her vocabulary despite its magnificence. I decided after her presentation that I should not be so overeager to use the language of grammar if I do not make sense to the people whom I am trying to help.

### **Beth Walker, writing center assistant**

The writing across the curriculum (WAC) panels were very well-attended, which suggests that many writing centers have a need for both information and outreach—information about how to train staff on best practices for tutoring writing outside their fields of study, as well as outreach to those departments that traditionally do not rely upon the resources of the writing center, such as the graduate programs. After all, the writing center is so often thought of as an extension of the English department that many students and faculty do not think about using the center beyond introductory writing courses. The WAC panels have reinforced our center’s commitment to all of the campus community, not just to the lower-level writing courses. Students who excel in writing, who need strong communication skills in the pre-professional courses, who are preparing for graduate school, and who are in writing-intensive graduate courses also should find support from the writing center through workshops, tutorials, and other activities.

### **Jenna Wright, writing center co-coordinator**

When I drove back into Martin from this year’s SWCA conference in Nashville, I brought with me both motivation and plans for increasing our outreach to the creative writers on campus and to faculty who support writing across the curriculum. For the last two years, I have been challenged in several SWCA conference sessions to have a stronger outreach from our writing center to creative writers. Through our networking with the writing center at Middle Tennessee State University, Alan Coulter came to our writing center fall retreat two years ago and led a session on tutoring creative writing. Ironically, last week when Anna mentioned to me that she felt we needed to do more with tutoring creative writing, I opened my SWCA program to a session’s notes where I had written thoughts about broadening the outreach to creative writers and increasing staff training in that area. She and I agreed that “great minds run together.”

In her presentation “Tuning into a New WAC,” Marcia Toms from North Carolina State University shared opportunities to reach WAC faculty through a writing center newsletter. I was challenged to rethink our publishing a newsletter again—perhaps an online newsletter this time. For several years during the late 1980s and 1990s, our hard-copy newsletter kept the campus informed of writing center activities. With the heightened use of campus-wide email, we developed a letter that is now sent to faculty and staff at the beginning of each semester and a weekly workshop reminder that is sent to faculty teaching targeted courses. Posters announcing writing center activities are put up in classroom buildings, as well as the University Center and residence halls. The campus newspaper runs center activities in its weekly calendar. Yet, the writing center newsletter, which can offer articles and creative writing as well as activities in the writing center, generates an opportunity for us to expand our communication with WAC supporters and creative writers.

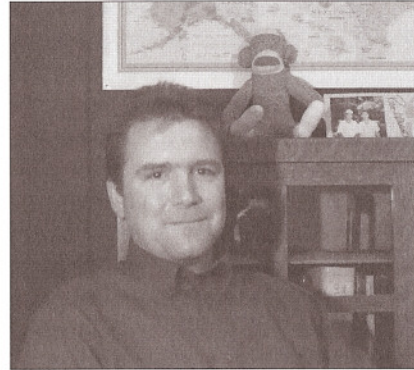
Truly, the writing center at UT Martin is a combined symphony of sounds in its daily activities, and just like in an orchestra, each “instrument” or service of the writing center has its unique sound and significance. For the symphony to make the music come alive to those who experience it, the instruments must blend their sounds—all playing on key, in time, and on pitch. At the 2007 SWCA Conference in Music City, our writing center staff “tuned in” to our writing center and brought home innovative plans to “tune up” our services, synchronizing them to reach our audience of writers. ✨

# Popcorn and Newsreels: An Apologia

A new column by Karl Fornes,  
University of South Carolina, Aiken

Ralphie almost ruined Christmas.

Jennifer and I, perplexed as to how her parents have managed to survive almost twenty holiday seasons without seeing *A Christmas Story*, managed to talk them into watching the movie on Christmas Eve. During supper, I bored my in-laws with my “compositionists unite” speech in which I bemoan representations of writing teachers in movies, books, and popular culture in general. I railed on and on and on, and they nodded politely—  
”These yams are delicious. Do I taste cumin?”



Karl Fornes

After supper, we retired to the family room and flipped the remote to *A Christmas Story* in the midst of the scene in which Ralphie, after having no luck with his mother, moves to his second authority figure, his teacher, on his quest for the Red Ryder Carbine Action 200-Shot air rifle. Ralphie, biting firmly on his tongue, drafts his essay espousing the virtues of the Red Ryder Carbine Action 200-Shot air rifle while dreaming of Ms. Shields ecstatically scrawling A+++++++ on the chalk board, dancing like a raving lunatic at the sight of such a “masterpiece.” Of course, ultimately, Ms. Shields does not recognize Ralphie’s talent and the paper is returned with a C+, a familiarly dismissive “you’ll shoot your eye out” the only end comment (*A Christmas Story*). An uncomfortable silence ensued as the in-laws braced for Karl’s inevitable harangue on all things pop culture. “Well, at least she commented on the content,” I thought and silently congratulated myself for such a mature display of holiday restraint.

Although Ralphie’s contribution to the state of writing instruction is less than profound, I tend to believe we should consider how the culture surrounding us represents what we do each day. Of course, those same cultural referents portray lawyers as plotting scoundrels, accountants as dangerously quiet geeks peering

behind round glasses, and engineers as pocket-protected humanoids. That’s to be expected. And, let’s face it, I don’t recall the lamentations of bailbondsmen everywhere, “I am NOT a meathead like *Dog, The Bounty Hunter!* I have a graduate degree in criminal justice!” Taken as a whole, however, we, teachers of writing and people who engage in and enjoy writing, are as bad if not worse than other professional stereotypes. In the world of movies and television, if we write, we are distant, pompous, sex-obsessed drunks (adjectives may vary depending on the movie). If we dare to teach writing, we are obsessed with arbitrary rules to the point of absurdity and enjoy nothing more than belittling helpless students to buffer our own weak egos. Perhaps my frustration belies my belief that, as trained and theoretically bound rhetors, we can do better. We know how to work with language, shape messages, and position ourselves within our own culture.

In the Spring 2007 issue of *Southern Discourse*, Beth Burmester discusses how writing and tutoring are represented in several Hollywood films while noting that such analyses can “open up theoretical and practical discussions about pedagogy” (4). Burmester also notes that such representations “tend to reflect current-traditional pedagogy, with an emphasis on error and the text instead of on the writer, while many of the professional, or extracurricular, sites of writing are revealed to be more collaborative and creative” (4). To be fair, Hollywood must wrap their protagonists and antagonists in nifty little ninety-minute packages for popular consumption; it should come as no real surprise that Hollywood scripts construct their antagonistic educators in current-traditional trappings. A smarmy and salivating current-traditionalist looming over the strewn carcasses of innocent and well-meaning students provides a convenient antagonist for scriptwriters. Why complicate matters when there are love interests to develop?

Indeed, we are not so distracted by our own Ivory Tower navel-gazing that we wander ignorantly unaware of the culture surrounding us. Heck, we engage in water-cooler banter discussing episodes of *American Idol*, 24, and any number of television shows and movies. In fact, Stephen North conjured *Dead Poet’s Society* (ooh, don’t get me started on that movie, grrrrrrrr) in his revisit to the “Idea of a Writing Center,” concluding that writing centers should be careful to avoid being caught in “trajectories which—should we persist in following them—are likely to take us places that we don’t really want to go” (17).

Perhaps of more concern than Hollywood to tutors, instructors and practitioners of writing might be how the act of writing is represented in media, particularly the news media. Only recently have we identified the need to be proactive in how we

“Popcorn and Newsreels” continued on page 12

# SWCA Election News and Results

By Beth Burmester, Georgia State University

At the SWCA Conference in Nashville, we welcomed our newly elected Executive Board Officers, voted in through a mail-in election concluded on 6 February 2007. We bid fond farewells to Treasurer Karl Fornes (University of South Carolina, Aiken), and At-Large Representatives Tracy Hudson (Winthrop College), Shevaun Watson (University of South Carolina, Columbia), and Deaver Traywick (formerly at Newberry College, SC, currently at Black Hills State University, SD). Each of these board members made substantial contributions to SWCA, and we appreciate their dedication and leadership.

Joining the Executive Board to begin a four-year term as treasurer is Sandee McGlaun, an alumna of the Agnes Scott College (Decatur, GA) Center for Writing and Speaking, and the former director of the writing center at North Georgia College and State University in Dahlonega. Sandee is presently directing the brand new writing center at Roanoke College, VA.

Kathi Griffin, of Millsaps College, MS, has been chosen to complete the final year of the position vacated by Deaver Traywick. And our other new at-large members beginning their two-year terms include Jill Frey, Presbyterian College in Clinton, SC, and Kevin Dvorak, of Keiser University in Fort Lauderdale, FL.



(Front) Beth Burmester, Trixie Smith, Karen Keaton Jackson (Back) Glenda Conway, Christine Cozzens, Jill Frey, Kathi Griffin, Sandee McGlaun, Kerri Jordan

And here are some interesting statistics from this election:

- Ballots were mailed to 104 active members.
- Ballots completed and mailed back totaled 46, giving us a 44% return rate.
- Within our region, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina had the most postmarks for ballots received.
- Outside of our region, we received ballots from: New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Texas. ✨



Beth Boquet, Keynote Speaker



Agnes Scott College presents at SWCA



Kathi Griffin



Christine Cozzens and Glenda Conway



# Bob Barrier and Ruth Johnson Receive Awards in Nashville

By Deaver Traywick, Black Hills State University

On Saturday, 10 February 2007, during the closing luncheon of the conference in Nashville, the Southeastern Writing Center Association honored two of its members with the annual Achievement Award and Tutor Award.

Dr. Robert Barrier of Kennesaw State University received the 2007 Achievement Award. Barrier, professor of English and interim chair of the English department, founded the writing center at Kennesaw State in 1988 and has directed it ever since. In writing to support his nomination, a colleague remarked, “At Kennesaw State University, the name Bob Barrier is synonymous with Writing Center.” In addition to his service to Kennesaw State, Dr. Barrier was recognized for his many contributions to the writing center community, including presenting research at numerous SWCA and IWCA conferences and hosting the 2004 SWCA conference.

Ruth Johnson, an undergraduate Writing Consultant at the University of Alabama-Huntsville Writing Center, received the 2007 Tutor Award. The awards committee was impressed with Johnson’s initiative so early in her professional career; in addition to her one-on-one consulting duties in the UAH Writing Center, Ms. Johnson had initiated a series of handouts and workshops on her campus and consulted with students sanctioned for plagiarism as the writing center liaison with the UAH Judicial Affairs Office. In Nashville, she made her first research presentation on building rapport with engineering students in the writing center.

The awards committee—composed of Pam Childers (2006 Achievement Award winner), Alan Coulter (2006 Tutor Award winner), Marcia Toms, Deaver Traywick, and Shevaun Watson—received many strong applications in both categories. In fact, nominations and applications have grown steadily for several years, and this year was no exception. While the number of deserving applicants



Bob Barrier and Ruth Johnson

made the job of choosing winners more difficult, reading about the accomplishments of so many SWCA members ultimately made the long process rewarding.

Both 2007 award winners deserve our thanks for the work they have done to strengthen not only their own campuses, but our regional writing center community. Please help us continue recognizing such commitment by nominating a deserving member for the 2008 awards. For more information, please see the Call for Nominations in this issue of *Southern Discourse*. ✨

## “Popcorn and Newsreels” continued from page 12

as professionals in writing are represented. Perhaps the most visible manifestation of our actions is the “Network for Media Action” developed by the Council of Writing Program Administrators <<http://www.wpacouncil.org/nma>>. As media outlets continue to appeal to the public’s lowest common denominator, they are increasingly willing to reduce complicated issues to black and white, good and bad. Writing teachers—and tutors in their role as student confidantes while simultaneously protectors of all things institutional—are consistently cast in conflict with students, not unlike the Hollywood mold. Thus, we encounter increasing coverage of issues that lend themselves to such conflicts: plagiarism, the writing portion of the SAT, machine-based scoring of essays, etc. Although media representations may switch the antagonistic nature of the conflict from teacher to student and student to teacher, they emphasize that learning to write is a conflict in itself. Our reaction to such representations speaks volumes about how we envision ourselves and our roles within popular culture.

I plan to explore these representations in future columns with an understanding ear to the limitations of Hollywood and a cynical one for the news media. Perhaps such discussions will allow us to be more proactive in how we are represented and, at the very least, careful in our reaction to such representations. ✨

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# The President's Letter

By Glenda Conway,  
University of Montevallo

April 2007 was a cruel, cruel month for higher education.

The trauma began with the hurling of a maliciously profane noun phrase at the Rutgers University women's basketball team. Then, just as that painful issue was being resolved, news of the shooting rampage at Virginia Tech reached us. Both events originated from single perpetrators. However, where one act elicited angry demands for apologies and retribution, the other simply numbed us.

Within minutes of the first reports from VT, a subscriber to WCENTER (the email discussion forum for writing center practitioners) posted a statement of concern and caring for any VT personnel who might be reading. More messages of concern, sadness, and a desire to do something followed, and within just a few hours, dozens of center directors had offered to the VT writing center access to their online tutoring services. By the end of the day, those who added their centers to the list were commenting that more help was being offered than would likely ever be used. There was just an overwhelming desire to do something.

Whether VT students used any of the offered services or not, the sad truth is that there was and is very little anyone can do to alleviate the trauma experienced on their campus on April 16. In fact, I would propose that all of us who have heard, read, and thought about that day have experienced some degree of trauma ourselves. All of us, undoubtedly, have found our worldviews changed.

I will close with a proposal that there may actually be something we in writing centers can do to promote the kind of awareness and healing that the first April incident brought to our attention. Students who come to us sometimes do not know that showing respect in their language toward authors and other public figures is an expected academic practice. I have seen many an author accused in student writing of having mental deficiencies (in more specific and less kind language); and I have read many papers that have proclaimed crass judgments on the moral or social status of fictional characters and public figures. I would



*Glenda Conway*

like to think that writing center tutors will see such disrespectful language as a teaching opportunity: a chance to teach writers that they have an enormous ethical responsibility when they describe or represent individuals in their texts.

Whether intended or not, malicious representations of others are damaging in ways that can be very far-reaching. It may be, in fact, that the worst damage of all is done to the person who writes these representations and never rethinks them. I wish to express my gratitude to all the tutors who have suggested and who will in the future suggest that writers think twice about the words they use to describe others. ✨

## SWCA Membership Application 2006-2007

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Center or Department: \_\_\_\_\_  
Institution: \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing Address for copies of Southern Discourse:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Fax: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Writing Center Web URL: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2006-2007 Membership

- Student \$12                       Faculty \$30  
 Institutional Level I \$50         Institutional Level II \$100

See [www.swca.us](http://www.swca.us) for details.

The membership period is one full calendar year.

Mail application with check to:  
Kerri Jordan, SWCA Secretary  
Mississippi College  
200 S. Capitol Street, Clinton, MS 39058  
Tel. 601-925-3000

### "New Grants" continued from page 7

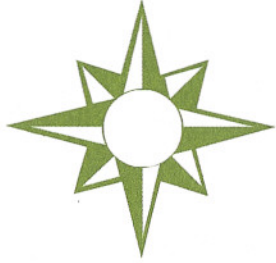
given to directors and tutors new to SWCA, as well as first-time presenters. In addition to outright monies to offset conference costs, other kinds of financial assistance may be awarded, such as registration waivers and free lodging.

The 2007-2008 Scholarship Committee will finalize the parameters of both award categories, with the hope of inviting applications in the fall and determining recipients in time for the 2008 conference. Stay tuned for more information about this exciting opportunity. ✨

# Southern Discourse

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Christine Cozzens, Editor  
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At the 2007 SWCA Annual Conference in Nashville, the Southeastern Writing Center Association presented Peter M. Carriere with a special award for his column in *Southern Discourse*, "What's the Point?" (1999-2007). "What's the Point?" illuminates the complex history of punctuation and the English language with intelligence, respect, humor, and style.

