

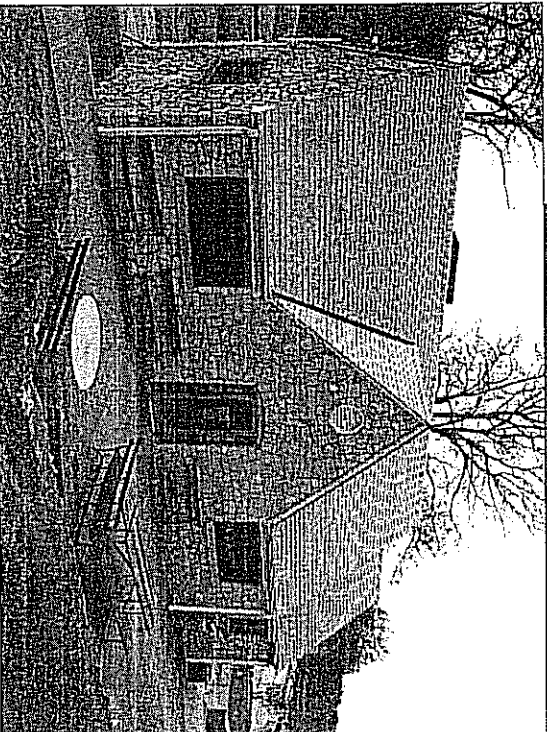
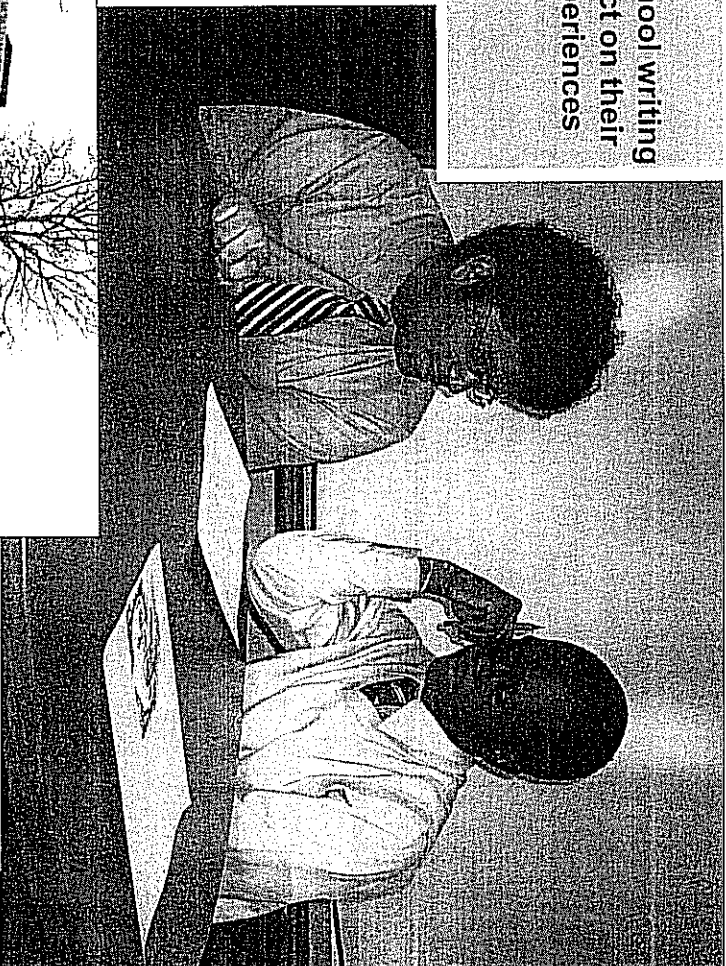
Southern Discourse

Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



Summer 2009 • Volume 12, Issue 3

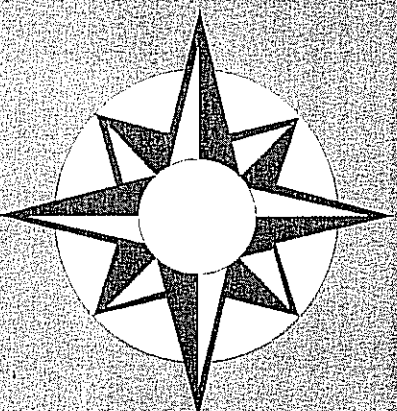
McCallie School writing fellows reflect on their teaching experiences (page 6)



The Stone Lodge, home of University of North Alabama's Center for Writing Excellence (page 8)

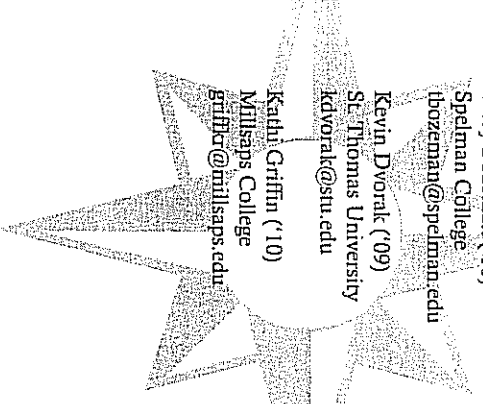
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A Note from the

Editor: Mute
Inglorious Miltons
Christine Cozzens,
Agnes Scott College



Christine

You don't have to be a writer to be a writer. I don't mean to be glib or elliptical. In colleges we tend to celebrate writing by celebrating famous writers. We focus on published work, prizewinning work, work that has been made into movies or work that is often quoted. I've written in this column about visiting writers' houses and taking pictures of the typewriter on which this or that great work was pounded out. That's a logical thing to do, but what about the vast majority of us who may or may not aspire to fame and publication but probably won't achieve it? What about the rest of us "mute inglorious Milton[s]" (apologies to Thomas Gray and his wonderful "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard").

A lot of people love writing, collect writing, do writing, but don't consider themselves writers necessarily, or if they do, it's "writer" with a small "w." These are the people who keep writing materials at the ready: are addicted to Crossword puzzles (especially the ones in *The New York Times*), the Jumble, Scrabble, and other word games; always seem to be on top of literary "finds" whether old or new; and show up faithfully at readings, book signings, and other "writing" events. For these MIMs, writing is what they do and love, might and day. Writing is how they take in and process everything that happens to them. They are, of course, writers. Maybe they are the real writers, the ones who write and do it as a way of life.

I suspect that many of our writing center clients—and most of the staff—are MIMs. I think we should do more to notice, honor, and encourage those who follow the writing life in this way. At the Agnes Scott writing center, we're launching a new workshop this year: "Writing for Personal Fulfillment." Writing centers have a lot to learn from reaching out to the MIMs around us and among us. ✨

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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE
THE WORLD FOR WOMEN

London Professor Visits the College of Charleston Writing Lab: A Report

Bonnie Devet, College of Charleston

The British have come! The College of Charleston (CoC) Writing Lab recently hosted a visit from Margo Blythman, director of teaching and learning at the London College of Communication at the University of the Arts London. Because only professionals staff her United Kingdom writing centre, Blythman wanted to observe the CoC Writing Lab peer consultants to see how a US writing center uses students; she also wanted to discover how peer tutors have benefited from working in the lab. Of course, as what usually happens in a collaborative exchange—especially across the pond—the consultants, too, learned a great deal from talking with a British counterpart.

Professional Learning Staff versus Peer Consultants

While the practice of using undergraduate students to staff writing centers is common in the US, this model is not necessarily the norm in the UK. In fact, in 2006, Blythman, Susan Orr (York St. John University—UK), Celia Bishop (London College of Communication), and I cowrote a book chapter examining American models of peer tutoring and assessing their implications for developing student writing in UK higher education (See "Peering Across the Pond: An Investigation into the Role of Students in Developing Other students' Writing in the US and UK."). Although US writing centers view the use of student consultants positively, UK higher education has not necessarily embraced the idea. Acknowledging there are advantages to peer tutors, institutions of higher education in the UK question whether or not "peer" tutors are really peers with their clients; the institutions also fear that using peers might affect staffing and decentralize UK writing centres on their campuses. With these concerns, Blythman visited the CoC Writing Lab to explore further the differences between American and British methods for staffing a center.

Realizing that using students offers some advantages, Blythman acknowledged, "To be with a peer is more relaxing and less scary." However, she also felt that

"experienced teachers have their considerable teaching skills and experience to offer. My view is that in an ideal situation students would have a choice." While the CoC peer consultant Brad Marialke (classics, sophomore) agreed that a professional staff probably has more knowledge than do peer consultants, he stressed that "Students like the equal plane with peer consultants. It makes for a better session because we are the same age and are currently going through the same process as the clients. While we do not have the background of a professional staff, we do have resources, like books and handouts, so we are almost equal to a professional staff."

Both Marialke and Blythman agreed that much depends, of course, on what types of tutors are available at each college. Blythman explained, "We would like to be able to offer the choice of professional or peer consultants at the University of the Arts London, but because we are a specialist art and design school we do not have a pool of students who have the skills and interests to be consultants."

What Peer Consultants Learn By Working in a Writing Center

When meeting the CoC peer consultants, Blythman also asked how they had benefited from working in the Writing Lab. Consultant Michelle Byczkiewicz (psychology, junior) said, "I am more comfortable working with other students; I am able to adjust to different types of clients. During my time in the lab, I've also really developed my own writing style and skills and have become a better writer."



Brad Marialke explains Writing Lab work to Bonnie Devet and Margo Blythman

Marialke, too, stressed how much he has discovered about the process of writing: "I see what works for students in their writing and what to avoid. I am a stronger writer because of my work." Peer consultants are able, as well, to use their majors while helping clients. Marialke, as a classics major, told Blythman he had found his background in Latin has served him as a consultant: "It especially helps with grammar, but also with seeing how English uses structures and words from Latin." As is true for peer consultants, they are learning as much as their clients; a major advantage to staffing a center with students.

Benefits of Blythman's Visit

Peer consultants Byczkiewicz and Marialke agreed that meeting the London guest was useful. "It blew my mind that she would come here and that the UK had something like what we do. It is neat to know there are other places like us so that we are not alone," Marialke explained. Byczkiewicz noted, "It impressed me she would take the time to visit us, reaffirming we are doing a good job."

“Does My Paper Flow?”

Student and Faculty Perceptions

Jill Frey and Lori Garvin, Presbyterian College

A student sits down for a writing conference, tosses his paper on the table, and asks, “Does it flow?” This typical scenario challenges writing center tutors because the nebulous nature of the word “flow” makes the student’s particular concern unclear. To clarify the direction of such a tutorial, we investigated the meaning of flow to students and faculty.

In the spring of 2008, tutors asked thirty students who indicated flow as a main concern, “What do you mean by flow?” We categorized the responses based on repeated words and created a checklist of aspects of flow. Using this checklist, we surveyed forty-one students who mentioned flow in the fall of 2008. We also received responses from thirty faculty members, who defined flow and chose items on the checklist to indicate what they considered crucial to making a paper flow.

The following sections describe the results of our study:

Student Definitions

Transitions were students’ most frequent definition of flow in their spring responses (Table 1). They specified transitions sentence to sentence, paragraph to paragraph, idea to idea, and topic to topic. Organization ranked last after unity, not choppy, and ease of reading.

Table 1 Definition of flow in written comments by students ranked in descending order of frequency.

Word in definition	Number of students who mentioned word	Percent who mentioned word
Transitions	16	60%
Unity	10	37%
Smooth, not choppy	10	33%
Ease of reading	9	36%
Organization	7	26%

Flow is “how it sounds, how it works for the reader aesthetically, if you can read it out loud to keep it going for the reader at a regular pace.” (Student)

Faculty Definitions

In their written definitions, faculty in the Humanities and Social Sciences ranked organization first in frequency of mention with transitions second, and Natural Sciences faculty ranked transitions first with organization second (Table 2). Overall, transitions and organization tied for first with twenty mentions each by faculty.

Table 2 Definition of flow in written comments by faculty ranked in descending order of frequency.

Word in definition	Humanities	Natural Sciences	Social Sciences	Total faculty
Organization	11 (1st)	3	6 (1st)	20
Transitions	10	6 (1st)	4	20
Unity	5	2	1	8
Reads easily	5	1	1	7
Smooth, not choppy	2	1	4	7
Cannot define	4	0	0	4

Checklist of Definitions of Flow

On the checklist students chose transitions between paragraphs more often than any other definition (51%) (Table 3). Organization of ideas in a logical order ranked second in frequency; 44% of students chose the item. All faculty checked overall organization of ideas in a logical order as crucial to flow. Transitions between paragraphs ranked second (Table 3).

Differences in How to Organize

According to the checklist responses, faculty agreed on the primacy of organization in making a paper flow, yet their own written definitions of an organized paper that flowed differed by division. Faculty in the Humanities and Social Sciences mentioned argument, thesis, and topic sentences, whereas Natural Science faculty emphasized sections of the paper under specific headings. Faculty need to recognize that students may not know how to organize a particular type of paper in their discipline and thus guide them in the process. The examples below illustrate these differences.

Humanities

"Each paragraph furthers the argument—has a direction in the argument and doesn't repeat. Flow in paragraphs comes with good topic sentences and with examples and quotes." (History)

"[Flow] also implies good organization, as in an argument that builds from least to most convincing evidence." (English)

Social Sciences

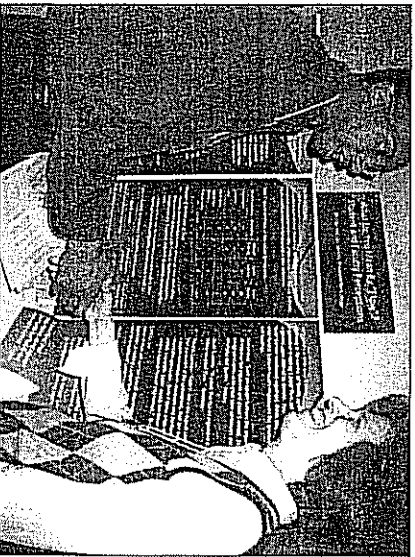
"The opening of the paper lists points to be addressed, and they are addressed throughout the paper in that order. The material is logically organized into subtopics." (Psychology)

"A paper that has an argument that is easy to follow has good 'flow.'" (Sociology)

Natural Sciences

"There is a logical structure that connects strings of thoughts. This could be achieved through headings, such as introduction, data, analysis, results, conclusions." (Physics)

"What I grade as flow in a scientific paper is a logical connection between thoughts from one passage to another, or from stated theory (hypothesis) to supporting data, to discussion and summary." (Biology)



Jill Frey presents her poster at the SWCA Conference

"Flow to me is the logical connectedness (if that is a word) of the components that are supposed to be in a paper—introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion, conclusion. Even if these areas are not precisely stated, a scientific paper usually has these parts [that] to me create a natural flow of information." (Biology)

Table 3 Ranking of frequency of checklist definitions of flow chosen by faculty and students.


Item on checklist	Rank of students choosing item	Rank of faculty choosing item
Ease of comprehension when read aloud	4th 27%	5th 67%
Style of writing is consistent throughout paper	5th 17%	4th 78%
Transitions between paragraphs	1st 51%	2nd 87%
Transitions between sentences	3rd 41%	3rd 83%
Overall organization of ideas in a logical order	2nd 44%	1st 100%

Conclusion

Students may not see the overall organization of the paper as significant in making a paper flow as faculty do: for students flow may be a matter of using transitional words between paragraphs or sentences.

Implications for Tutor Education

- Tutors need to share with writers the importance of the overall organization and logic of the paper when students consider flow a concern.
- Tutors might suggest glossing what a paragraph does in the paper to further the argument, as well as what the paragraph says, for students writing in the humanities and social sciences.
- To prepare for students in natural sciences courses, tutors should study the use of headings and sections in organizing.

Frey and Garvin presented a poster on this study at the SWCA Conference February 27, 2009. 

Compass Points: Writing Fellows are More Than Tutors

Arun Augustine and Philipp McGill,
The McCallie School

As writing fellows in a secondary school, we have worked with students in a variety of ways this year. Unlike most peer tutors-consultants, as writing fellows we get to teach classes and work with teachers of all subjects in designing writing assignments and assessment tools as well. We have prepared materials to teach tenth grade world history classes, worked on policy briefs for energy plans with introduction to physics classes, prepared a half-day workshop as part of the school Culturefest, and created portfolios to teach poetry to eighth grade English classes. We wanted to share two experiences we have had as writing fellows to demonstrate how we are learning to improve work on our own writing by helping others and to develop some teaching skills as well.

Phil's Culturefest Experience

Culturefest is the combination of a folk festival and cultural awareness day. Students participate in a variety of activities with the hope of learning about something they have not yet experienced in life. The writing fellows decided to offer a session, so we collaborated to create one. Two of us really liked the movie *The Motorcycle Diaries*, based on the diaries of Ernesto "Che" Guevara, which describe his journey as a young man traveling through South America with his friend Alberto Granado. Therefore, we chose "The Motorcycle Diaries: A Cultural Experience That Transforms a Young Man into a Revolutionary" as the title of our session.

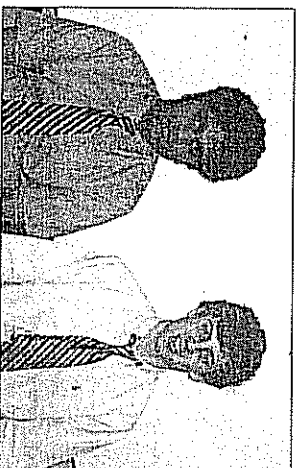
Preparation for the session was rather straightforward, the only difficult part was matching times when everyone could meet. After we had all viewed the movie, we compiled ideas that ran through the movie that we thought would be of interest. We focused on a breadth of themes: music's role in the movie, expectations of the young Che Guevara, and the words from his journals. We went through multiple drafts of questions for the film so they were sequential, focused on the written words of Guevara, and connected to specific experiences he encountered meeting people from a variety of cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. Also, we created our PowerPoint and had a clear agenda for the session.

This group, while not an actual class, still worked in the same way except that students had chosen this session. Students were given a descriptive list of titles a week prior to Culturefest, and advisor groups (students) chose collectively. Two groups of ninth graders chose our session creating the challenge of short attention spans; however, they had not been worn down by a previous year's presentations. The session began early in the morning, and since this session counted towards nothing, there was the possibility of the students ignoring it completely and simply "falling asleep" for the entire session.

We set up the movie to play inside the writing center, showing it on both a projector screen and a computer screen. For some of the freshmen, this was

another snapshot of how many different uses the writing center has. The setting did not look like a normal everyday classroom.

Instead of heading straight into a Spanish movie with subtitles at eight o'clock in the morning, we began with my presenting a PowerPoint of information on the South American instruments being used with pictures of the



Arun and Phil

different instruments, such as the charango and guitarrron, and information on the composer, Gustavo Santaolalla. This introduction also gave depth to the viewing experience because I made the students aware of the importance of music in the film. I had seen the film a few years earlier, and I could still remember the music.

After the PowerPoint, we moved on to the portion of the session Arun, Dr. Childers, and I prepared collaboratively, the viewing questions. The students were given a small break midway through the movie because of the schedule, but it did not really seem necessary as all students seemed genuinely interested in the film.

After the movie, Arun showed another PowerPoint that focused on Che Guevara's life as a revolutionary. This period of his life was quite different from his motorcycle travels, which ignited deeper questions regarding Che's character. The presentation also included actual film footage of Guevara reciting a poem and inciting a revolution. Arun concluded with an Associated Press photo of Che Guevara's dead body.

The ninth graders' response to the film was positive; most students answered our questions, and several had many more questions. When I had seen the same film in ninth grade, my interest in travelogues and South America instantly grew. This experience was an unanticipated success because we were able to move beyond subtitles and viewing a movie for its educational content and making it interesting and intriguing.

Arun Teaches Poetry to Eighth Graders

Although I am surrounded by educators 24/7—I'm son of two math professors—I, a mere high school student, never would have imagined myself having to step up to the same plate. After receiving my instructions to teach poetry to eighth graders, my neurons began to short circuit. What if they don't like me? Aren't I too quiet? Could I relate to both the jock and the aspiring thespian? Beyond the personal connection, could I relate to the students the complicated yet simple art form known as poetry? I would soon be confronted with several of these questions.

Weeks before the classes arrived, Phil and I started planning our lessons. Our goal was to create a master anthology filled with various poems and accompanying questions for the students. Luckily, we already had the tools to complete this mission, our first semester personal anthologies. We had drawn upon Lucille Clifton, Billy Collins, and Walt Whitman, for instance, to fill our pages. We had also created questions to guide the reader in his understanding of each poem.

In spite of having such powerful tools, we still had to decide which poems to pick. We both agreed on two criteria: accessibility and depth. Having once thought poetry is simply boring, we knew we had to incorporate pieces that the 8th graders could immediately relate to through their own experiences. I personally wished that my students would develop an understanding of the universality of poetry—that poetry is for both the pitcher and the potter. Just as important, we wanted poems with poetic devices. After all, these honors 8th graders would be tough customers: they would gobble up every word they could find, so we had to keep them on their toes.

Phil and I created new questions for several of the poems. Every time I wrote a question, I forced myself to view my work from the perspective of an eighth grader. What does the question really ask me to do? If I could leave my desk, return after five minutes and have the same level of comprehension that I had when I wrote the question, I knew it would work. This process was one that really caused me to analyze the subtleties of language.

Three days after finishing our materials, eighth graders marched up the hill towards the writing center. I felt excitement and nervousness all at once, as if my mind simply couldn't decide which emotion was more appropriate. I walked through the door, sauntered over to the sterile whiteboard, and grabbed my pristine copies of the anthology and syllabus.

"Whoa, you're a senior." Those were the first words I heard from the sea of eighth graders. I was now facing the task I had spent days preparing for: I was ready to take control of the situation, ready to teach. After Dr. Childers' brief introduction, I began to teach. I asked for two volunteers to read aloud the first poem. I then asked if any students had insights into what they heard. It was here where I encountered my first problem: two students who had volunteered to read now dominated the discussion. As a student, I wouldn't have cared about such a situation; however, it was my obligation as a teacher to encourage everyone to participate actively. I started to wait longer between responses, directing my eyes toward the back of the room. I offered warm calls of "Anyone in the back?" After a few minutes of silence, I spotted a timid hand. Excited, I quickly pointed my finger and shouted, "You." What I heard was a very thoughtful response. The class came alive after that moment; more people were eager to tackle the poems.

While enjoying this newfound eagerness, I ran into my next problem as a teacher: the wrong answer. It started as we analyzed Billy Collins' "Introduction to Poetry." In the midst of our discussion, a student raised his hand and offered a completely erroneous response. Internally, I panicked. I can't just tell the lad he's wrong. That's not what a teacher would do. After a moment, I returned to my roots as a peer tutor. I asked questions to see if the student could support his beliefs. After several questions, it was clear I wasn't getting anywhere. It was then that the teacher and Dr. Childers intervened. They asked questions that simply used the language of the poem and guided the student down the correct path. I hope I can do this one day. Then the period ended. I gave my students their homework assignment and the ultimate goal for this journey: writing their own poetry.

The next day I stepped into the classroom fortified with lunch but also with the words an eighth grader had written after our first class. "The first day of the poetry workshop . . . was very interesting and exciting for what is to come . . .

" I was no longer nervous but rather ready both to learn and to share knowledge with my students. As the eighth graders returned, much to my surprise, most jumped into the discussion, sharing insights from Billy Collins' "Vade Mecum" to Whitman's "Sometimes with One I Love." They even identified metaphors

Back to the Center History in the Making:

The University of North Alabama Center for Writing Excellence

Robert T. Koch Jr. and Katie Crum,
University of North Alabama

"History and writing are inseparable. We cannot know history well unless we write about it." --Richard Marius and Melvin E. Page,
A Short Guide to Writing about History, 6th edition

Building History... Literally

On November 8, 1939, Florence State Teachers College announced the completion of a new student lodge, complete with couches, tables, and a kitchen ("Modernistic" 1). Built by FSTC students under the leadership of the National Youth Administration (NYA), a component of Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration, the lodge served as a venue for student organization meetings and events for several years. Eventually, however, the Stone Lodge, as it came to be called, became a catch-all for the various odd needs of the university.

By the Numbers

University of North Alabama: approximately 7,200 undergraduate and graduate MA students
Center for Writing Excellence Director: Dr. Robert T. Koch Jr.
CWE Age: 4 years (2 as an official university academic support service)
Number of Tutors: 12-15
Number of Tutorials: 925 in Fall 2008
Hours of operation: M-F 8-4, M-R 6-9, Sat 10-5, Sun 2-9
Website: <http://www.una.edu/writingcenter>

- Through at least 1954, the lodge hosted organizations like the Wesleyan Foundation, which met on Wednesday nights.
- Sometime after 1954 and until 1969, it served as the practice and storage facility for the FSTC marching band.

- Conflicting alumni reports identify the space as having two purposes in the early 1970s. It may have been an audio-visual classroom, but it is also remembered as a greenhouse and primate study site. Since the lodge has two stories, it may well have been both.

• By 1978, the lodge was the home of the Student Government Association (SGA). In Fall 1979, it became the site of an impromptu and heated SGA debate on the separation of church and state that made not only campus news headlines, but local newspaper headlines as well.

• In 1996, fifty-seven years after FSTC President Keller declared that it was "in no sense to be a student hangout throughout the day" ("New" 1), UNA reopened the Stone Lodge as a student social hall, renaming it Leo's, after the university mascot Leo the Lion.

By 2005, the Stone Lodge had become a computer classroom and part-time lab operated jointly by the English department and Collier Library. Because the lodge is located near the geographic center of campus, much of the student body pass the lodge each day, going to and from class, residence halls, and campus parking. For both the English department and the university administration, this fact made the Stone Lodge a logical site for a new writing center. Although geography made this location an obvious choice, the discovery of such a varied history adds to the lodge's appeal.

Center for Writing Excellence History

The Center for Writing Excellence began as the English department's volunteer effort in spring 2004. Faculty served at least one office hour per week in the center, but this still resulted in limited access and service. Dr. Nicholas Mauriello received permission to hire and train the first peer tutors during the 2006-2007 academic year. From the outset, however, the larger vision was to create a sustainable, full-time program that would serve the entire university community. In 2007, the English department received approval and funding to hire a director for the writing center who would develop it as a university-wide resource for students and faculty.

As the new director, Dr. Robert T. Koch Jr. adopted and expanded the department's vision by creating a Center for Writing Excellence. This Center includes programs to serve not only students, but faculty and the community as well. The Center was given a three part mission: "to provide UNA students at all academic levels with instruction and resources for writing, reading, and writing-as-critical thinking skills development; to provide UNA faculty with teaching resource support and professional development

opportunities in Writing Across the Curriculum (MAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID); and to facilitate and develop community-oriented writing, reading, and writing-as-critical thinking programs" ("Center").

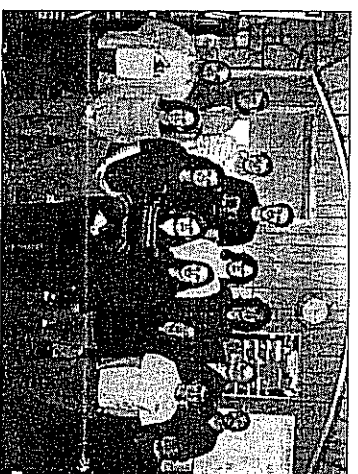
Center for Writing Excellence Services

In the early years, the Stone Lodge was home to a variety of clubs and organizations. Today this variety is reflected in the diversity of CWE academic support programs. Of course, most students and faculty are familiar with the University Writing Center (UWC), where peer tutors provide writing tutorial support to individuals and small groups. UWC half-hour tutorials cover anything from brainstorming and paragraph organization to grammar and reading skills. The UWC provides APA style instruction and support for the university as well. Faculty contribute assignments and syllabi, which are used to help guide their students when they visit. In addition, the director conducts in-class workshops on writing issues specific to the various disciplines.

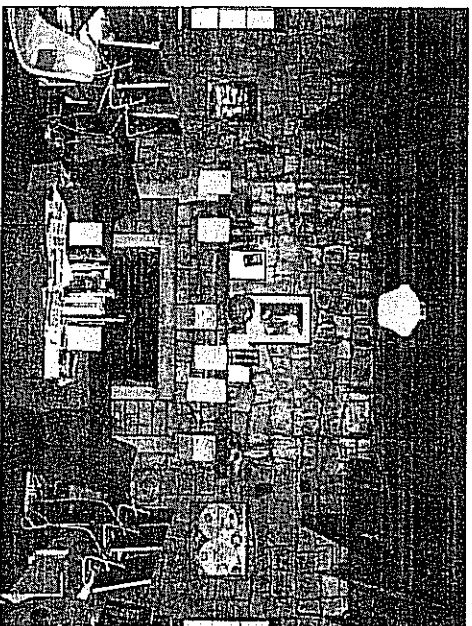
The UWC is not the only program hosted by the Stone Lodge. The Center for Writing Excellence also includes other student-oriented programs not directly pertaining to any specific course. Hearing in regard to its purpose as a student group meeting site, the CWE hosts student-organized Reading and Writing Groups, which can be started by any UNA student. These groups have standing appointments to meet at the Center to discuss and write on literary topics of their own choosing. In addition, the CWE director coordinates the Academic-Athletic Mentoring Program (AAMP), which provides qualified student mentors who encourage student-athletes to establish and achieve academic goals. The program includes lessons in time and resource management and study skills.

In the past, lodge events and student activities fostered community relationships and raised awareness. Today, the CWE takes its message about the pleasure of writing and literacy into the community in two distinct programs. The CWE helped start and provides continued training for the Florence High School Writing Center, a lunchtime tutorial support service directed by a high school faculty member and operated by peer tutors. The CWE also works with the Florence-Lauderdale Public Library to offer community writing workshops that meet at least six times on a weekly or biweekly basis each

semester. The first was a memoir writing workshop, followed by a fiction workshop for new writers. For the summer, the writing workshop is directed to a high school-aged audience. Finally, modern composition and education scholarship, like the works of Patricia Bizzell and Lev Vygotsky, shows that writing and learning are social processes, so the CWE encourages students to make the lodge an academic hangout, through a casual meeting and reading area, a board for public comments, and a word of the day feature. While the late President Keller might have frowned upon Leo's Stone Lodge as a social hangout, the CWE attempts to bridge the gap between academic and social identities.



UNA Writing Center Tutors



UNA Center for Writing Excellence

make this assumption either. What is left is history: the record of the CWE contribution to UNA, its place in the lodge's timeline, and the work it does to make students' lives better. The Center helps students and community members develop their writing skills, and it encourages them to take pleasure in creating, defining, and presenting their ideas. These purposes echo the words of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, whose portrait hangs above the lodge mantle, and whose recovery programs led to the lodge's construction: "Happiness... lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort."

Into the Future...

The Stone Lodge has been a catch-all over the years, housing a variety of activities and organizations. In the process, it has come to reflect all of the diversity and many different interests of UNA students. Though all its uses, alumni and students continue to share fond memories of the place. It is the hope of all those involved in the CWE that students continue to have fond memories of the lodge, the activities, and the programs housed there.

But who knows what the future brings? In the face of state budget cuts and long-range planning, no one can assume the UNA Center for Writing Excellence will always be housed in the Stone Lodge. Of course, none of its prior occupants could

What's the point?

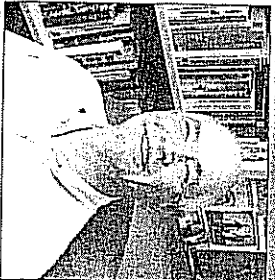
The Necessity of Imperfection

Peter M Carriere,

Georgia College and State University

One hundred and fifty-one years ago, John Ruskin wrote a compelling essay on the need for imperfection. That's right, imperfection.

Personally, I think Ruskin had something here, especially in terms of student writing. Ruskin's essay, from *The Stones of Venice*, has a lot to say about the contemporary desire for correctness and precision, which, according to Ruskin, stifles creativity and enslaves both the purchaser [or reader] and the maker: "these perfectnesses are signs of a slavery," he writes, adding, "above all, demand no refinement of execution where there is no thought, for that is slave's work, unredeemed." I would have to admit that my students are far from slaves: they do not demand refinement of execution, and their mysterious use of grammar and punctuation remains unredeemed.



Pete Carriere

I'm always amazed when a great figure from history, like Ruskin, has anticipated contemporary conditions that affect the teaching of writing! Beauty, declared Ruskin, requires imperfection, irregularities, deficiencies: "In all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies which are not only signs of life but sources of beauty." He practiced what he preached, too: the "which" in the quoted passage should be "that," and the comma after "Life" is unnecessary (if you are a slave to perfection) so this sentence obviously exudes a degree of beauty. I myself have never required perfection, and so far I have maintained a perfect record in not doing so.

Now it just so happens that a colleague of mine forwarded me an email from a professor at Drexel University that contains a great deal of Ruskinian beauty. In the email were excerpts from church bulletins that have evoked in me and my colleagues a great deal of mirth, not to mention awed delight. Here is one that Ruskin would have been proud of (I have to admit I cannot help but admire the achievement):

"The Associate Ministers unveiled the church's new tithing campaign slogan last Sunday. It topped my pledge... Up Yours."

This awe-inspiring line could not have been written by a Ruskinian slave. Its bizarre beauty, which evokes in us a rather crazed delight, originates in a severe mistake that a more precise writer would have noticed and eliminated immediately: "to up" is a pop-culture verbalism that has replaced the more normal but mundane "increase." The result is a marvelous confusion of the idea of increasing a pledge with a pop-culture insult. This kind of creativity requires a mistake of linguistic naiveté, but of such mistakes, Ruskin writes, "he thinks, and ten to one he thinks wrong; ten to one he makes a mistake. . . ." Like Ruskin, I think we need more mistakes like this. Don't you?

This kind of humorous, naive mistake was mined successfully over and over again by Mark Twain. The illiterate Huckleberry Finn doesn't have the vocabulary to fit the things he describes, so he ends up using erroneous terms that create linguistic irony and therefore humor. At the Grangerfords, for example, Huck describes a woman in a beautiful, slim black dress that was belted small under the armpits, "with bulges like a cabbage in the middle of the sleeves. . . ." To use "armpits" and "cabbage" to describe a beautiful dress is ironic because these two words are so pedestrian that they don't match the elegance associated with the dress. The result is humor. In this same passage Huck describes a young lady "with her hair all combed up straight to the top of her head and knotted there in front of a comb like a chair-back. . . ." Obviously, the beauty and elegance of her hair doesn't match the pedestrian image of a chair-back, and the resulting irony creates humor.

Here's one of my favorite entries from the church bulletins:

"Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door."

There is no grammatical mistake, spelling mistake, or punctuation mistake here. Everything is perfectly normal. Except, of course, the request to use the back door. In itself it's harmless, but using the back door entrance is synonymous in American culture with being a servant or a person of low quality. Hence the irony of requesting that a support group for people of low esteem use the entrance reserved for people held in low esteem, thus validating their complaint about themselves!

How about this one:

"For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs."

SWCA Executive Board Elections

Kerri Jordan, Mississippi College

The Southeastern Writing Center Association welcomes to the executive board our newly elected at-large representative, Laura Bokus, who coordinates the writing center at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute in Hudson, North Carolina. We also congratulate Kevin Dvorak of St. Thomas University for his re-election as at-large representative. Thank you to each SWCA member who returned a ballot during the recent election.

SWCA members interested in serving in leadership roles are encouraged to consider running for a position on the executive board. We are currently seeking potential candidates to fill the positions of board members whose terms expire in February 2010. Upcoming board vacancies include the following positions:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- At-large representatives (two)

Through committee work, outreach activities, and various collaborations, all SWCA board positions provide opportunities for writing center professionals not only to shape and guide our organization, but also to positively impact our profession both within and beyond our region.

At-large positions generally involve work on selected committees suited to each representative's strengths and interests. Other positions similarly involve a variety of committee service; they also include the following specific responsibilities: the SWCA President orchestrates board meetings and conference calls, works closely with each year's conference planning committee, and composes the "President's Letter" for each issue of *Southern Discourse*. In addition, the president serves as the SWCA representative for IWCA. The vice-president conducts and reports on annual elections and other ballot measures, and the secretary's duties include maintaining minutes of board meetings.

All upcoming vacancies are for two-year terms beginning in February 2010 and concluding in February 2012. Three face-to-face board meetings are generally held each year: two at the SWCA conference (usually in February) and one at a central location during the summer. Other meetings are conducted via conference calls, and participation in electronic discussions is also key to the board's collaborative work.

The upcoming election will be held in mid-fall. Plans are underway for ballots to be cast electronically via our new SWCA Web site (www.swca.us). Please check the Web site for updates and deadlines.

If you are interested in running for a position, would like to nominate a candidate, or have any questions, contact Kerri Jordan at Jordan01@mc.edu. In addition, current board members will be happy to discuss their work with you. Their email addresses are posted on the SWCA Web site as well and on the masthead of *Southern Discourse*.

The SWCA Mission—"to advance literacy, to further the theoretical, practical, and political concerns of writing center professionals; and to serve as a forum for the writing concerns of students, faculty, staff, and writing professionals from both academic and nonacademic communities"—guides the SWCA executive board's work. We hope you will consider what role you might play in helping our organization fulfill its goals. ✨

"London Professor" continued from page 3

The consultants were not the only ones who benefited from the exchange. Blythman was pleased to see that student consultants use the same tactics with clients as do her professional tutoring staff: "What I found most interesting was what the consultants told me about their approach to looking at a client's work that they started with the overall factors rather than grammar. I really agree with that and it is nice to see them taking such a holistic approach."

Conclusion

Many years ago, the famous British export Paul McCartney sang about "hands across the water" ("Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey"). During Professor Blythman's visit, the CoTeC Writing Lab experienced "hands across the pond." Her discussing with the peer tutors such fundamentals as staffing and the benefits accrued from working in a writing center serves as a model for how cultures can talk to each other about higher education. Collaboration is a keynote both for what we do with clients and what we can do between labs. ✨

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Popcorn and Newsreels:

The Pymalion in All of Us

Karl Fornes, University of South Caroline, Aiken

On my rainy-day return from the SWCA Conference, somewhere near Charlotte, North Carolina, I had one of those rare confluences of thought that, thus joined, just might produce a mighty river of inspiration. Cold rain battered the windshield as I mulled over the idea of "multiple literacies" that seemed much discussed at this year's SWCA Conference and how such an approach might help to inform writing center practice. The rain increased in intensity as my thoughts went to this column and how I've focused almost exclusively on "newsreels" without much "popcorn." I like popcorn.



Karl Fornes wins an award for his column, "Popcorn and Newsreels."

As the visibility dwindled, I clicked the wiper controls from "high" to "frantic" and watched the poor wipers swing violently to and fro across the windshield.

"The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain."

"Now, once again, where does it rain?"

"On the plain. On the plain."

"And where is that soggy plain?"

"In Spain. In Spain." Audrey Hepburn sings and flits about the sitting room.

"Am I really going to write about a musical?" I asked myself. Don't get me wrong. I am not against musicals in that "I-hate-musicals-and-will-never-watch-'em!" way. I am willing to suspend belief in order to allow a character to suddenly break into a song that will magically capture an emotion and summarize the plot for me. In fact, I enjoy that. Rather, I am bothered by the discomfort that surrounds the singing character or characters. As they sing away, secondary characters loom about, not singing but in the unfortunate position of having to somehow lend legitimacy to the song. Eventually, at least one of the secondary characters does something so inexcusable that it will become my lasting memory of the musical.

In *My Fair Lady*, an otherwise wonderful movie, my lasting memory is Colonel Pickering's behavior in the "Rain in Spain" scene. Why he chose to do pointy fingers and act like a bull running through Rex Harrison's mock cape is beyond me, but that little move turns the whole scene into an Iberian nightmare. Eventually, all three—Eliza Doolittle, Henry Higgins, and Colonel Pickering—fall into a sickening flamenco-like thing. By the time the scene is over, I can barely watch. The whole thing becomes really quite bothersome and insulting.

My personal issues aside, if we look at pop culture manifestations of the Pymalion myth, especially the creation aspect, I think we can find something instructive. I don't doubt for a second that *My Fair Lady*, the movie that was a stage musical based on George Bernard Shaw's *Pymalion*, is a romantic comedy. To me, though, it is equally instructive in terms of the role of language and gender and class, especially in terms of interpersonal relationships. As such, the movie can provide fodder for discussions of how "multiple literacies" can be handled, particularly from a writing center perspective.

For instance, the scene above, even with the bullfighting and flamenco dancing, captures the moment in which Eliza Doolittle officially and completely negotiates the linguistic variances that allow her to "speak upper class." We know the transition is far too sudden, to be sure, but we experience similar realizations in our writing centers all the time.

Eliza's transformation thus complete, Henry decides she needs to be tested in front of a "real" audience. Before long, the movie moves to the "Ascot Opening Day," at which gussied-up ladies and gentleman dandies slide in uniform stiffness at the rail of a horse track, their formality emphasized by the staccato, almost spoken, song: "Pulses. Rushing. Faces. Flushing. Heartbeats. Speed up. I have never been so keyed up." Their blank stares are interrupted briefly when they raise their spyglasses to watch the horses clamber by. They then comment on how "thrilling" and "chilling" the race was before spending the rest of the day daintily sipping champagne glasses, exhibiting voluminous hats and superfluous umbrellas, and seeing and being seen, all the while emotionless.

Henry stumbles into this culture of unwritten formality and introduces Eliza to a group including Henry's mother and Freddy Eynsford-Hill. Eliza is under strict instructions to comment only on the weather—particularly Spain's precipitation patterns, the viewer presumes—and matters of health. Eliza is clearly trying to sound like someone she is not, a situation we encounter often in papers

written by students negotiating what they perceive as a formal and stiff discourse community. She is soon discussing health, the death of her aunt, and the theft of her aunt's hat before concluding, "Them 'as pinched it done her in."

Freddy Eynsford-Hill, clearly smitten with Eliza, giggles conspicuously at her word choice and syntax. When Eliza, holding to her necessarily forced formality, asks about his giggling, he claims that, "It's the new small talk. You do it so awfully well." And Eliza responds, "Well, if I was doing it proper, what was you sniggerin' at? Have I said anything I oughtn't?"

Eliza's response reflects some of the discomfort she feels in the situation, a situation that drags her into an arena of pompous formality. She's more interested in whether or not her response was "proper" than whether or not it represented her accurately. In writing center terms, I enjoy how this scene captures the difficulty many students have in mediating a sense of "propriety" while maintaining an individual "voice."

Of course, it's important to allow for multiple literacies, but too often in academia we do so from a comfortable distance created by the traditional classroom structure. The writing center is where these literacies converge, not unlike Henry Higgins' sitting room or, less comfortably, during Opening Day at Ascot. In the writing center, talk and interpersonal relationships are the capital of learning. Further, though, when we discuss "multiple literacies," it seems to me we need to consider the role gender, class, race, and culture play in negotiating those differences. Literacy, after all, is as much a social and political entity as it is an educational goal. From such a perspective, My Fair Lady can provide a fruitful discussion of multiple literacies in the context of class and gender. (For example, Eliza's last name and Henry's initial treatment of her are obvious points of discussion.) Eliza's father, Alfred Doolittle, is especially worth a look.

I should note that My Fair Lady is almost three hours long and, for practical matters, perhaps best handled in pieces. Of course, the "Pygmalion theme" is common among pop culture representations of teaching and learning, and I will spend a future column or two looking at similar "Pygmalion" movies and considering how they might inform writing center work. ⁴

"What's the Point?" continued from page 10

Again, we have no grammar or punctuation problems here, not even any spelling problems. But the mistake is in the logic: how can one have children and not know if? Furthermore, this church nursery must be always empty because it exists only for those who have children and don't know it. I suppose those who have children and know it must leave their children at home. So there can't be any children in this nursery; those who have children and don't know it would not know that they needed a nursery, although the nursery only exists for them!

Here's one that could have been prevented by a hyphen and a correct pronoun: "The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon."

Put a hyphen between "cast" and "clothing," and change the pronoun "they" to "it," and this one becomes correct. And boring.

So let's enjoy the majestic ingenuity of these quotations and leave them alone to bask in imperfection and beauty. I would not change a thing. I hope you wouldn't, either. To do so would violate Ruskin's idea of beauty and creativity, which I definitely admire, both because of Ruskin's insight about the necessity for imperfection and in the church bulletins' use of it. And if I were to ask myself if I should correct these ingenious works, make them more precise, I think that eventually I would have to ask, what's the point? ⁴

"Back to the Center" continued from page 9.

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Letter from the President

Saying What We Mean:

Name Games and Playing with Language as Tutor Development

Beth Burneseter, Georgia State University



The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he SAID was, 'Why is a raven like a writing-desk?' 'Come, we shall have some fun now!' thought Alice. 'I'm glad they've begun asking riddles. —I believe I can guess that,' she added aloud. 'Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?' said the March Hare. 'Exactly so,' said Alice. 'Then you should say what you mean!' the March Hare went on. 'I do,' Alice hastily replied; 'at least—at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing, you know?' 'Not the same thing a bit!' said the Hatter. 'You might just as well say that "I see what I eat" is the same thing as "I eat what I see"!' 'You might just as well say,' added the March Hare, 'that "I like what I get" is the same thing as "I get what I like"!' —Alice in *Wonderland*, Chapter VII, "A Mad Tea-Party."

It strikes me every time I read accounts of "first time" tutors that many identify themselves as "good writers," but believe they should be "experts," knowing the "right" names or labels or definitions associated with editing, proofreading, and the technical and mechanical aspects of producing texts. Much of their stated beginners' anxiety arises from what they see as a shortfall in "expertise." What can directors and tutor trainers do to alleviate this anxiety? Let me pose a potential solution with a preface: I believe this is a nomenclature and perception problem.

Our contemporary definition of expert calls to mind someone very knowledgeable, highly skilled, and called upon to provide answers and advice. But if we go back to its root vocabulary, the Latin terms tell a different story. Latin "expertus" means "known by experience," which itself comes from the verb "expiri," meaning "to try." So if we reclaim the ancient source, we see that an expert gains knowledge from trying, from first-hand experience. We learn from being in-the-moment and connecting with other people.

If we focus too hard on the act of "definition," we run into trouble. "Definition" can mean "a statement conveying fundamental character," as well as "an act of stating a precise meaning or significance," and each of those is static. But both the writing process and the relationship of teaching and learning are highly dynamic, social, and changeable. Tracing "definition" itself back to Latin roots reveals just how problematic defining can be; "de finire" is translated into English as "to limit, to end, boundary." Certainly as writing teachers we want to open or eliminate boundaries and encourage writers to go past limits and ends, to see writing as a process of continual re-writings, with multiple possible texts. So perhaps we need to examine our own acts of defining and naming and how each act we choose may be holding us back from our goals.

One way we can start is having our staff research the meaning of their own names. Helping them relate the attributes of their names to what they bring to their tutoring can boost their confidence and demonstrates how it's not expertise so much as personality traits and the ability to relate with others that shape good tutoring. If we look at Alice (from Lewis Carroll's eponymous story), we find it is of Old German origins beginning as "Adelaide," becoming popular in Old French, as a short form of "Adelais," then becoming "Alice," in English. It's been popular since the twelfth century. Alice is "noble one," or possibly "true one." In addition to talking about teaching attributes related to names, students can research names across countries and languages, and identify authors, literary characters, and famous people who share that name. For Alice, some variants are: Alisa, Alita, Aliza, Alyssa, Allison, Alida, Alina, Alicja, Elise, Alicia, Ali and Allie. This exercise shows how we can use what's familiar to relate to difference. Authors include: Alice Walker, Alice Sebald, Alice Munro, Alice Fulton. Other famous people include: Alice Roosevelt, Ali MacGraw, Alice Cooper, Alice Miller, Princess of Monaco Alice Heine, and Alice Waters. For fictional characters we have Alice Adams, Alice Cullen, and Alice Longbottom.

A popular posting on "Facebook" over this past Spring was to try "Google" to search for the phrase: "[your name] needs" and then to record the first five to ten items returned. My results were: "Elizabeth needs... protection, loving, Facebook, to stomp that Latin out, numbers, coffee, three olives and some yarn." It would be fascinating to brainstorm with staff how these terms could be applied to tutoring practice or tutor preparation. The focus on names, naming and personal attributes all shift our emphasis away from "expertise" and toward something more personal: conversation, collaboration, and creativity. An activity like this allows for tutors to see how much they offer, how varied their experience is individually, and within the community of other tutors and writers they belong to. It shows how they (like student writers) are individuals, and also have

identities outside their roles as students or writers or tutors. And ultimately, I think this kind of research in naming and names creates a sense of community.

Another fun "meanings" and definitions exercise can be demonstrated through several other Google database searches, looking literally for "associations" with terms and labels familiar to your campus or student life in general, or specific hobbies or interests of the staff, or even writing center life, and revealing just how many parallel and other-disciplinary or professional contexts they hold. Many of the acronyms we take for granted have more than nine lives:

- TWCA—International Writing Centers Association; International Window Cleaning Association; Irish Wolfhound Association of America; International Wildfowl Association; International Workshop on Cometary Astronomy; International Women's Coffee Alliance;
- SWCA—Southeastern Writing Center Association; Soil and Water Conservation Assistance; Southwest Ceramics Association; The Star Wars Collective Archives; Sine Wave Communications Adaptor; Special Well Construction Area;
- TWS—The Writing Studio; The Wildlife Society; Transworld Skateboarding; Thomas Wolfe Scholarship; The Wodehouse Society; Tsunami Warning System; Trusted Work Station; Temporary Work Space;
- WC—Writing Center; Welcome; Web Cam; World Class; Wind Chill; Working Copy; Work Completed; Word Count; Without Charge; Wind Current; World Changers; Wealth Creation; Writer's Cramp; Water Closet
- SD—Southern Discourse (publication); South Dakota; San Diego; Special Delivery; Standard Definition; Secure Digital; System Display; Survey Data; Socratic Dialogue; Stage Direction; Sustainable Development

Tutors and directors practice invention strategies as they discover what other entities share their initials, and then discuss how these seemingly disparate associations may in fact relate to each other, or how one might describe others. I hope this summer provides opportunities to stay connected and to enjoy working together. And I hope our members will share their name and association exercises with the SWCA community, so we can all continue to learn from each other.

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"Compass Points" continued from page 7

and smiles! We next moved into small groups for analysis. As I walked around the room, every group was on task with some telling me how excellent my teaching was. At the end of the period, I felt successful as a teacher.

Based on this experience, I have learned that teachers are students as well in the classroom. There isn't much going on physically and mentally when the teacher is simply lecturing. Students are willing to share their insights if given the chance. I also learned that there is no need to be nervous as a teacher. Students realize that teachers are human beings capable of mistakes. Students are open to new experiences if given the proper challenges in which they can flourish (i.e., open space, mutual understanding, and intellectual freedom).

Conclusion

So, what have we learned from these two experiences that connect to our writing fellows program? First of all, every experience connects writing, thinking and learning. Since the Culturefest presentation took place in the writing center, it showed the versatility of the space. Also, just as peers in the writing center seem to make a difference to many students, one of the eighth graders said, "I believe that it makes it a lot more interesting that a student at least helped teach the workshop."

We had a chance to organize a complete unit of work, do our research, collaborate, and discover new ways of doing something along the way. We do the same as writers and want to model those activities for others. Even though we need a foundation as peer tutor-consultants, being a writing fellow involves so much more.



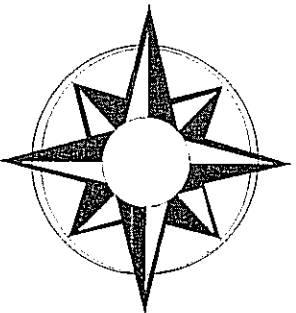
Arun and Julian

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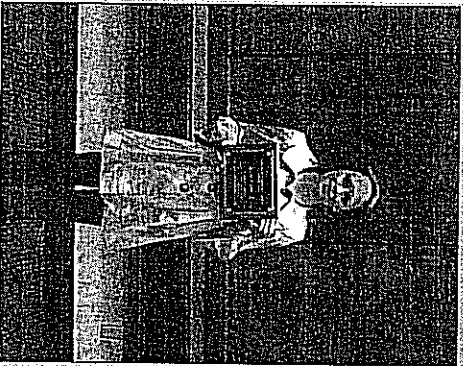
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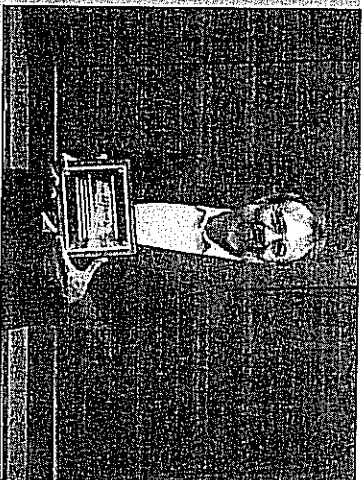


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**Congratulations to SWCA
2009 Award Winners!**



Sarah Hamrick



Michael Pemberton

Michael Pemberton of Georgia Southern University received the Achievement Award. The Tutor Award was given to Sarah Hamrick of the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Karl Fornes, recipient of the *Southern Discourse* Award, is pictured inside this issue (see page 14).