

Southern Discourse

Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association

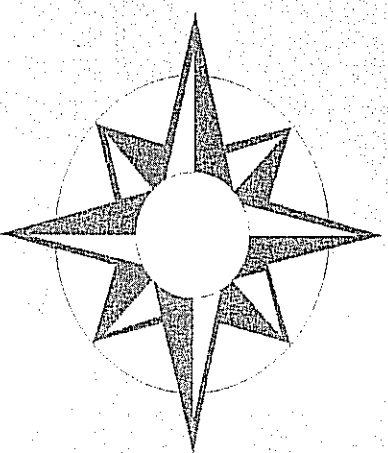


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Inside this issue

From the Editor	2
"Learning to Teach Writing from My Peer Tutors: A Shift in Authority"	3
"Is Ignorance Bliss? A Conversation Between Knowledgeable and Generalist Writing Fellows" ...	4
"The Rhetoric of Grammar"	5
Compass Points	6
Back to the Center	8
What's the Point?	10
Popcorn and Newsreels	12
The President's Letter	15
Executive Board Election Report.....	Back Cover



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A Note from the Editor:

Christine Cozzens,
Agnes Scott College

Agnes Scott hosted the Georgia mini-regional this February, as many of you know, on the day of the biggest snowfall Atlanta has had in years. As the weather forecast began to come into focus the evening before the conference, Beth Burnmaster and I contemplated cancelling the event, but the timing of the storm seemed to suggest that things might work out, so we chanced it. Though the college officially closed a few hours before we were to start, we received special permission to continue along with the support of the dining hall, public safety, and facilities we needed to host an event on campus. We're so grateful for their efforts and their willingness to stay late during the snow storm!



Christine Cozzens

As the snow began to fall Friday afternoon, guests started to arrive at the Bullock Science Center where the conference was held. At first we wondered if people would fail to show up, held back by ice and snow. With each new arrival, the attendees already present cheered "Here comes UNC Asheville!" or "Hurrah for LaGrange College!" By dinner time the campus was blanketed in several inches of snow, every branch of every tree was outlined in white, and a substantial crowd had assembled. Only a few people couldn't make it to the conference, and though we missed them, it was especially nice to share camaraderie with tutors and directors, eat good food, and talk about writing center work—all while snowed in.

The conference only lasted 24 hours, but much was accomplished both in the formal presentations and as we talked together between sessions and at meals. The small size of the group, the intimate facilities, and probably the "snowed-in" mentality fostered a great atmosphere and lots of exciting conversation. From what I understand, the other mini-regional conferences had similar experiences. Though budget tightening led us to consider this model for 2010, we might want to think about incorporating it as part of a multi-year conference plan. Exigency can be an occasion for creative new ideas.

Learning to Teach Writing From My Peer Tutors: A Shift in Authority

Kathi R. Griffin, Grand View University

In my first semester as assistant professor of English, I was scheduled to teach two traditional composition courses with twenty students each, a course I had not taught in nine years. As a writing center director, I had been

teaching writing each spring: a one-hour tutor training course, with an average of about eighteen students, and a required three-credit writing class for less experienced writers, usually about eight. Developing a syllabus for a more traditional composition course after so long, I realized I had learned a valuable lesson about teaching writing from my peer tutors and assigned "this assignment" from my tutor training course to my

Before this assignment,
I wouldn't have gone into
the writing center . . .
—Natalie, Comp student

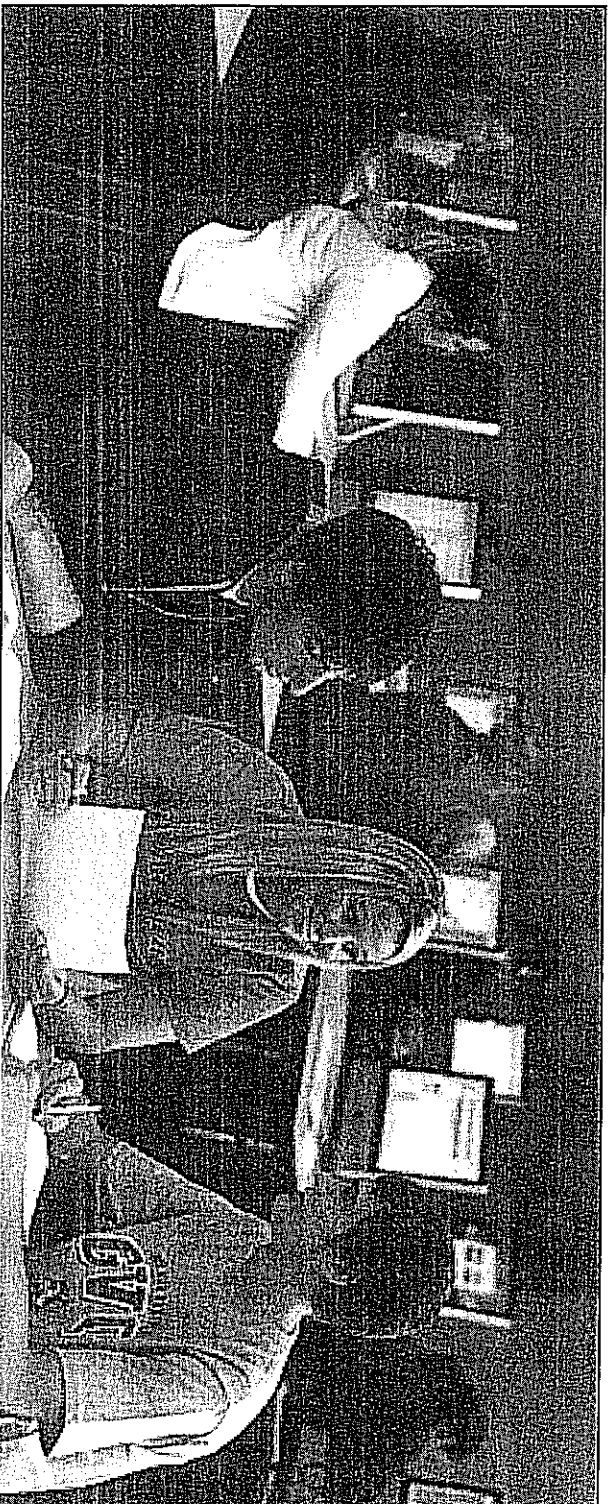
first-semester composition students: Describe a writing center tutorial.

Most of us, like Chris Anson (2008), realize that "[p]roiciency in writing is not a matter of simply mapping a discrete set of learned skills into new tasks in unfamiliar contexts; it requires the kind of rhetorical, discursive, and textual flexibility and sensitivity that we hope our programs and courses provide" (114-5). Before our students can acquire such flexibility and sensitivity, however, they must first recognize that they have a writing process and be invited into the assessment process through reflection. Anson is primarily discussing the problems with "closed systems," such as standardized writing texts, and an inability to "transfer of knowledge and skills across contexts" (117), yet I realized, as I considered the multiple audiences with whom I teach writing, the problem might begin with me.

Like Anson, I always hope my courses provide students with writing experiences that will transfer beyond the classroom, but I wondered why the enthusiasm and confidence of struggling writers continued to lag behind that of future tutors. Each May, new peer tutors said again and again how much their writing improved, while the less experienced writers offered less enthusiastic responses, to say the least. Both groups seemed to arrive at college with similar assumptions about writing but with different sets of learned skills. The skills in neither group, however, leaned toward flexibility, so I began to rethink assumptions

that inform my approaches to teaching writing to different audiences.

With peer tutors, I focused on helping them shift their authority—in relation to a peer rather than a text; to shift from writer to reader-responder, to position themselves as audience—a shift that seemed to increase their flexibility as both readers and writers. With struggling writers, I focused on building a common vocabulary as we discussed their assumptions about



Students at the Grand View University Writing Center

writing, trying to discover what might be getting in their way. In both classes, I used similar activities, large and small group discussions, peer-response groups, journals; however, I realized that the reading and writing assignments differed significantly. With the peer tutors, for example, we read texts on writing, like Frank Smith's "Myths of Writing," and with struggling writers, I assigned readings more often from a textbook and a reader with models of "good" writing. Yet students in both classes revealed myths Smith describes.

Like Downs and Wardle (2007), I considered assigning more articles from the tutor training syllabus in first-year composition courses, which might include articles like Smith's. While Downs and Wardle argue that we should make such a shift in course content, I considered a shift toward tutor training pedagogy. Thus I imported two assignments: the first assignment required students to observe and describe a tutorial session, and the second asked students to describe their own writing process as they wrote a paper for another class. With both student audiences, the second assignment seemed to work well for similar reasons: students discovered they have a writing process and that they can adjust it to fit various purposes. The first assignment, however, seemed to give struggling writers a greater sense of authority.

"This Assignment"

Before sending students to the writing center, I asked them to write about what they expect to see and why, I ask them to define "tutor" and share experiences they may have had before coming to college. In the writing center, they must introduce themselves to the tutor on duty and explain the reason for their visit. As they observe a session, the students take notes for their papers, and afterwards, they reflect on how their observation corresponds to their expectations.

While I grade the assignment, it is not considered a "formal" paper. If they complete all parts of the assignment, they receive an A. I tell them their experience is most important. With peer tutors and struggling writers, writing improved, and their reflections were positive. However, the response of composition students surprised me.

Students' Response to "This Assignment"

As with peer tutors and struggling writers, expectations of composition students remained predominantly negative and seemed to echo current traditional definitions of writing inherent in closed systems:

•"I thought there were only going to be a few upperclassmen that excelled in English and writing to be working with a few students, while a

grey-haired lady sat at a desk in the back to keep charge and assist the tutors."

•"A tutorial session, to me, would be to sit down with someone who knows the formats for all types of writings. We would read over my paper and try to find the mistakes."

•"I thought it would have tables with teachers or really smart students . . . In high school, our teacher would just write her thoughts on our papers. . . I thought I would feel dumb if I went to get help."

•"I pictured walking into this room and being greeted by an overly excited teacher sitting at a desk. Next, I pictured a student would pull a well

"I didn't expect much because all the help I've gotten from students previously hasn't been too helpful."

written paper out of his bag and offer it to the teacher. I pictured the teacher quickly scanning it over, looking for any grammatical errors and punctuation mistakes."
•"I assume the [tutors] are majoring, or have previously, in English."

•"My only experience with tutoring is peer editing. As each were reading the other's paper, we would mark any grammatical errors that we saw wrong."

While each student's comments offer opportunity for discussion and reflection for both student and director-instructor, more importantly I discovered that being positioned to observe what goes on in the writing center allowed students to find their own ways into the writing conversation:

•"I thought reading a paper backward to find mistakes was a cheap and elementary trick to find grammar errors, but after the tutor explained how easy it was to skip over things when reading from front to back, I see how useful reading backward is. . . I learned that the Writing Center isn't exactly what I thought it was, especially when I saw a student who seemed to be a good writer come in and ask for help."

•"Hearing different perspectives lets me know, as the writer, how [different readers] understand it. I know what I want to say, but maybe someone else may view it differently."

•"I will go . . . because I know I'll be getting the help I need from people who won't make me feel inferior. They will help me improve my writing skills, so I can be the best writer I can be."

"Learning to Teach Writing" continued on page 11

Is Ignorance Bliss? A Conversation Between Knowledgeable and Generalist Writing Fellows

Kate McRae, Marshall Solomon, Jessi Stewart,
Nathan Wetmore, Zachary Williams,
Western Carolina University

The Western Carolina University (WCU) Writing Fellows Program assigns trained tutors, called fellows, to classes across the curriculum to help students with selected writing assignments. Fellows are carefully screened students who demonstrate exceptional writing skills and an interest in helping others become better writers. Each fellow works closely with ten to fifteen students in a predetermined course for the entire semester, providing one-on-one support and facilitating the revision process by reviewing students' drafts. Fellows fall into two categories: knowledgeable and generalist. Knowledgeable fellows are assigned to courses within their majors, while generalist fellows are assigned to courses outside of their majors. The following article takes a look at advantages and disadvantages of each type of fellow.

The Knowledgeable Fellows Speak

At WCU we have found that within specific areas of study, including engineering, philosophy, and history, student writers benefit from collaborating with knowledgeable writing fellows. Based on our experience, we feel that a knowledgeable fellow brings specific insight to the tutoring session. As knowledgeable fellows, we feel more confident and better prepared. Not only do we feel equipped to answer students' questions, we can also ask meaningful questions about the direction of their drafts, helping them establish a more focused revision strategy. Further, students may find it comforting to know that their writing fellow is familiar with their course, instructor, and assignment.

Susan Hubbuch states, "Not only is the knowledgeable tutor able to provide a student with necessary technical information about written conventions but also to evaluate the quality of the work the student is doing" (26). For example,

we have found that in history it is helpful for the fellow to know Turabian documentation style and how to evaluate a student's use of primary evidence. In engineering it is helpful to know the conventions of technical writing and how to evaluate the student's integration of figures and graphs. And in philosophy, it is helpful to understand philosophical concepts and how to evaluate a student's engagement with the material on a critical level. Other disciplines may also benefit from working with fellows who have subject-specific knowledge, and as our program expands to include courses from other disciplines, the requirements of that discipline will be considered to determine which fellows should be placed in the course.

Deidre Paulsen, director of the Brigham Young University Writing Fellows Program, has discovered the benefit of hiring knowledgeable fellows: "After having my [writing fellows] become quite intimidated by following in a philosophy 400 class, and in an engineering course, I now ask specialized departments to recommend students in their fields for me to train" (qtd. in Soven 212). Paulsen recognizes the pressures a generalist tutor may feel in a discipline outside of his or her major. When assigning fellows to courses, it is important to consider the fellows' level of comfort and confidence, which not only benefits the fellow but also the students enrolled in the course.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of being a knowledgeable fellow is being able to understand the meaning of field-specific language. Without an adequate understanding of the specialized language of the discipline within which the fellow is working, the fellow must make a decision: learn the language or improvise. Because we are supporting courses we have taken, we have benefited from both our grasp of course material and fluency in the terminology. Simply put, the fellow derives an advantage from understanding the language the client is speaking.

While we feel it is important, and in many cases necessary, to be a knowledgeable fellow, we recognize there are some disadvantages. Knowledgeable fellows may enter a tutoring session with an attitude of authority, which may create tension and increase client insecurity. Hubbuch points out that while subject-specific fellows are helpful, they could supply the student with answers, which may "be beneficial to the student as a novice in a particular field, [but] may be detrimental to the student's development as a writer and active learner" (26). Further, Hubbuch argues that the generalist tutor is less likely to inject his or her own opinion of the subject matter into the client's paper and assume ownership. She reasons that because the generalist tutor "has little more than a cursory knowledge of the field, her focus in the session must be on attempting to

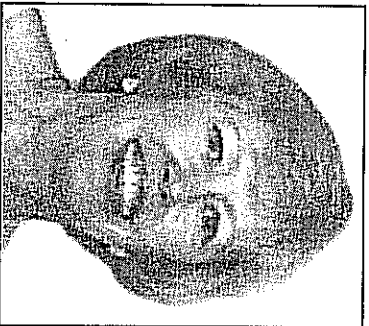
"Is Ignorance Bliss?" continued on page 7

Compass Points: What I Have Learned from My Students

Pamela B. Childers, The McCallie School

Spring will be in full bloom when you are reading this column; however, this cold winter day I am in a truly reflective mood. The bears will be coming out of hibernation soon, my seniors will be closer to graduation, and I will have to part with another great group of Writing Fellows. But this year will be different, and that is why I am so reflective.

This year I will graduate with them and move into a third chapter. In other words, I am planning to retire from a position I have held for 19 years as Caldwell Chair of Composition.



Pamela B. Childers

Pamela Barnard, Pamela B. Farrell or Pamela B. Childers? As Pamela Barnard, I was a student teacher of English and biology, then a new teacher at Red Bank Regional High School in New Jersey. My students in the lowest level ninth grade English class taught me that students want to learn, and they care about how they are taught. Within that year, I convinced their history teacher that we should team teach the students so they had adequate time (a double period) to complete something they had started and could have an active part in determining what they did in the class. No one referred to student-centered classes at that point, but we were doing exactly that kind of teaching, and students selected the texts from samples, determined how they would meet the objectives of the course and even learned collaboratively across disciplines. They also taught me compassion for one another and how they could have a passion for learning. For example, we allowed them to choose their research topics from their questions of interest—what happened the year they were born, what are the causes of sexual abuse, how do I know if I have fetal alcohol syndrome, did William Jennings Bryan die of natural causes or was he murdered, why does Dougie have a brain tumor and how can we help? These were actual questions they researched with as much passion as any of my honors or AP students. Not only did they get me involved in their research, but they interviewed faculty, conducted surveys at a nearby mall, and made phone calls. “Hey, Miss Barnard, did you know the Center for Disease Control doesn’t have any records of epidemics for the year I was born.” Remember, their research took place long

before the Internet! So, my first lesson was probably that we teachers should never assume our students are not capable of doing research as important as that of top academic students. We need to challenge them all and give them the power to be responsible for their own learning.

When I became Pamela B. Farrell, I earned a few more degrees in English and writing and thought I knew so much more about my students. That’s when the idea of a high school writing center surfaced as part of my second graduate degree because of our school’s commitment to writing across the curriculum, partnerships with colleges, and the idea of writing as process. I had no idea what I was doing, but my students did. I tried out peer response groups in my college prep classes, applied some writing center theory based on college models, and decided to open a writing center. I conducted a national survey, and we opened a little space under the stairs in the library during lunch. We moved to a small room at the top of the stairs, and my students volunteered to staff the center during their free periods. I didn’t have to train them because they continued doing peer response groups and asking questions not giving answers. We had one Osborne computer which they quickly learned and taught me, and together we learned how to use this tool to teach writing. David, Kris, Terry, and Michelle helped move that center to a large area in the middle of the English pod the next year, and they staffed it. I learned that when students value something, they will do anything to make it possible and make me work twice as hard to see that it happens. That determination and sense that a writing center with a few computers would be a great equalizer, offering technology to all students, especially those who could not afford to have it at home. Without them, I would not have collaborated with the director at a nearby college to host a statewide writing conference that provided us enough money to each purchase a printer for our writing centers. The students of all academic levels wrote with us, shared their work, and participated in evening readings, the Dodge Poetry Festival, and other events because they felt as if they were part of a bigger world. And, their work paid off as we had state and national winners in a variety of writing competitions and publications that none of us will forget. We were truly a writing community.

After I moved to and all-boys’ school in Tennessee, became Pamela B. Childers, and earned my doctorate, it was the boys who helped set up the computers in the writing center, volunteered to staff it and became interested in changing the way they wrote. They taught me that I could not assume anything, they had been used to turning in one draft the day it was due. We had to lock horns a few times, write collaboratively, and teach others before those changes would take place. It helped that they saw me as a writer, often working collaboratively with

colleagues in the same way that I wrote with them, and they also saw the multiple drafts that I shared when I was working on columns such as this one, chapters, articles and even books. We learned that it takes focus and a common goal when working on writing as part of a team. The ones who have published before they graduated return as alumni to say that having a piece of their writing published was the most life changing experience in their academic lives.

We really are no different from one another. In fact, in each life of mine students have somehow let me know that we are a family of writers. I remember a student in poetry class saying at the end of the course, "You are just one of the guys, and that's a compliment." As long as I have my memory and a link to the Internet, I will not lose touch with these special women and men who have taught me so much about teaching, learning and writing. They have, in fact, taught me much more than I have probably ever taught them, and I still have much more to learn in this next chapter of my life in Colorado! I look forward to reflections from there from this new compass point.

SWCA Membership Application 2010-2011

Name: _____

Center or Department: _____

Institution: _____

Mailing Address for copies of Southern Discourse: _____

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- 2010-2011 Membership
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"Is Ignorance Bliss" continued from page 5
 understand the argument the student is making" (27). To be truly collaborative, knowledgeable tutors must be mindful of this tendency to take over the student's paper.

Despite these drawbacks, we feel it is important to have knowledgeable fellows attached to courses with specialized writing requirements. Knowledgeable fellows can help a student who is stuck on a paper and has no idea of where to go, or the student who is writing about a theory and has to use curriculum-specific language, as well as the student who has a long list of unfamiliar formatting requirements.

The Generalist Fellows Respond

Those of us serving classes outside of our majors feel strongly that it is more advantageous for fellows programs to include generalist fellows rather than to omit them completely. Generalists are broadly knowledgeable; we know how to read and respond to student writing—assessing strengths and weaknesses and providing strategies for revision—but we are not necessarily subject-matter experts. Subject-matter knowledge is not always a necessity when working with students because the generalist can provide questions that will jumpstart the students' thinking as opposed to the knowledgeable fellow who may try to provide answers. Sometimes students turn to us to provide the answer, however, because we cannot supply the material, we make students think for themselves.

We have noticed that most students do not know the difference between generalist and knowledgeable fellows unless told. Many of the classes that we serve, including art appreciation and educational psychology, require students to write about and analyze their experiences, reactions, and field observations. While we may not be familiar with the course material, we as generalists try to educate ourselves by paying close attention to the syllabus, watching assigned films, reading excerpts from assigned books, and discussing content issues with the instructor. While we may have to do a bit more outside work in preparation for our conferences, we have the opportunity to explore subjects outside of our own majors, and because we are learning ourselves, we find our conferences are truly collaborative.

"Is Ignorance Bliss" continued on page 14



Courtesy of Carrie Hachadurian

Back to the Center: The Rapid Growth of the University Writing Center at St. Thomas University

Kevin Dvorak and Karen Mejia, St. Thomas University

St. Thomas University, a small, Catholic university located in Miami Gardens, FL, is known for having a diverse international population and a rich Hispanic heritage rooted in Cuba, its original location. Approximately 40 percent of STU's 2,500 students (1,200 undergraduates; 600 graduates; 700 law students) are of Hispanic descent, which classifies the University as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI).

In spring 2007, STU opened the University Writing Center, its first writing center, which was staffed by an interim director and five undergraduate tutors. The UWC's space consisted of sixteen computers, in two rows of eight, that faced a whiteboard, and there were conference tables in three of the four corners of the room; the room doubled as a computer classroom.

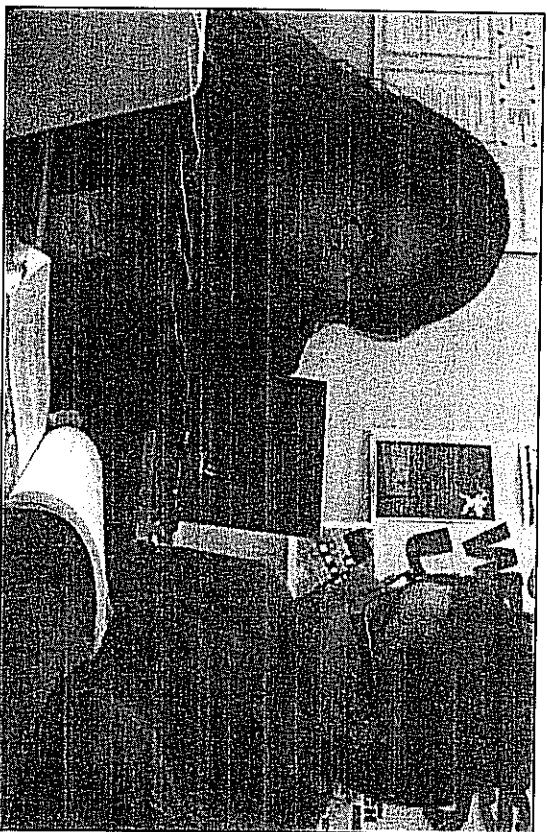
The following fall, Kevin Dvorak took over the directorship and was faced with the task of finding a completely new tutoring staff. Faced with an unexpectedly tight budget, Kevin determined the UWC would only be able to provide the campus approximately twenty-five available tutoring hours per week. (Each hour a tutor works is considered one available tutoring hour. So, for example, if we are open from 1-2 p.m. and have two tutors working, that is considered to be two available tutoring hours.) This meant the UWC would be open four or five hours per day, four days per week (Monday-Thursday), with only one or two tutors

working per hour. Surely, the UWC was going to need to be open more hours, more days, with more tutors available each hour. This dilemma was going to demand a creative solution.

During that first fall semester, the staff worked diligently to spread the word about our new services, and we conducted approximately 325 session hours. We had one Web page with basic information, several writing handouts developed mainly by other centers, and a few advertisements around campus. We were, in short, one simple thing: new.

The UWC is now in its sixth semester, and, as expected, the demand for our services has grown—and so has our ability to meet these demands. In fact, statistics from the fall 2009 show that, in only two years, almost every facet of the UWC has more than doubled. During fall 2009, we provided the campus population with approximately 850 session hours of tutoring, and we had a staff of ten tutors, fifteen pages of web information, and over twenty Directed Learning Activity handouts that were created in-house. In addition, over half of the fall 2009 staff was engaged in some type of writing center-based research, and at least seven are expected to present at this year's SWCA Florida Statewide Conference. We have also redesigned our interior space: the sixteen computers now line the walls, and there are three rectangular tables in the center of the room where students can use laptops or have computer-less conferences with tutors. The space is much more open and inviting—much more student-friendly.

So, two years later, we consider our initial dilemma to be solved; well, partially solved. Though we have doubled the amount of tutoring hours we offer per week, though we have almost tripled the number of sessions we conduct per term, and though we have doubled the size of our staff, one essential aspect of our work has remained exactly the same—our budget. While the budget may seem more limited now than it did two years ago, we are able to do much more due to a combination of good fortune, ingenuity, and hard work.



Students at St. Thomas University

Table 1. A Tale of the Tape: Charting the Growth of the UWC @ STU

	Fall '07	Fall '09
Autograph Hours Offered	50	100
Pen Weels		
Tutors	5	10
Total Sessions Conducted	370	850
Web Pages	1	15
IDEAS	0	26
Satellite Centers	0	1
Non-Uniform Based Events	0	6
Budget	SAME	

Professional Writing Internships

During Kevin's first semester, fall 2007, the dean of Biscayne College (Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences) asked him to develop an English: Professional Writing major to complement the existing English: Literature major and grow alongside the nascent UWC. It was in the development of this new track that a potential answer to the initial dilemma—How do we grow and operate with such a tight budget?—emerged.

Working with other English faculty, Kevin developed a fifteen-credit core curriculum for the new track; the curriculum required a three-credit professional writing internship, designed with the idea that some Professional Writing majors might want to intern at the UWC. The internship can also be taken for six additional credits as part of the major's electives, so students can take up to nine internship credits. The goal of the UWC internship is to provide Professional Writing majors with an opportunity to work as quasi-professional writing center practitioners. The internship allows students to peer tutor, study writing center literature, perform writing center-related research, and take on various other professionally-related tasks.

The first internships began in the fall 2008: one intern simply worked as a tutor, and another worked as a UWC liaison to the ENG: Developmental Writing courses. The following spring, six tutors worked as interns, though two were only for one credit. This past fall, there were seven internships for a total of twenty-one credits. A three-credit intern works approximately ten hours per week

in the UWC, so more than half of our available session hours were covered by this crew.

Our interns have collaborated with our non-interns to contribute to the growth and development of the UWC. With this growth, the concept of "professionalism" in our center has evolved. Kevin now works with interns and staff members to designate "professional" positions that highlight each individual's skills and provide them with opportunities to better develop their professional identities. Table 2 lists these job titles and descriptions.

Table 2. A List of Tutors' Professional Titles and Job Descriptions

Professional Title	Brief Position Description
Athletic Dept. Liaison	Promotes UWC throughout the Athletic Dept.; meets with coaches and administrators.
Data Entry	Assists Office Manager in transferring the UWC's paper-based data to electronic files.
Environmental Specialist	Explores ways to make the UWC more environmentally friendly; informs staff.
Managers: Office/Assistant/Night	Watch over UWC's day-to-day operations; make sure all forms, emails, and data have been appropriately filled out and filed; conduct nightly closing procedures.
Public Relations Specialist	Designs advertising materials, including staff business cards, bookmarks, and brochures.
Research Assistant	Researches discursive practices between bilingual (Spanish/English) tutors and students.
Satellite Center Coordinators	Tutor writing at a local high school, both during and after school.
Teacher's Assistants	Work in classes with composition faculty; act as liaisons between students and UWC.
Web Writer	Develops informative, student-friendly UWC web pages.

What's the Point?

Just Explode the Suckers!

Peter M. Carriere,
Georgia College and State University

Those of us who work with language gradually develop a rather warped sense of it. For instance, about fifteen years ago, I was musing on the phrase "a watched pot never boils" when I had a brainstorm: what if we simply inverted the language? Then we would have "a watched boil never pops!" Voilà: a rather cute phrase that, despite its low humor, carries a ring of truth (though I really don't believe that watching something would stop it from either boiling or popping).

Here's another instance. A while ago, during one of our on-going cold snaps, I walked into a colleague's office and, in an ironic gesture of exaggerated grandiose language, said, "I must now wend my way across the frozen tundra toward my Inuit abode." My colleague Dr. Megan Melancon stared at me for a moment and then said, "Or . . . just go home."



Pete Carriere

So when I found a book by a too-serious grammarian published in 1843 entitled, *A Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature: Comprehending the Principles of Language and Style, the Elements of Taste and Criticism; with Rules for the Study of Composition and Eloquence: Illustrated by Appropriate Examples, selected Chiefly from the British Classics, for the use of Schools or Private Instruction*, I naturally found myself drawn to it like a dog to a fire hydrant. Why couldn't the author have titled it something short and gripping, like *Life and Death Struggles of a Grammarian*, or even something like *Usage Stripped and Revealed*?

The book was written by one Alexander Jamieson, and our university must consider it a gem from antiquity, because it was locked away in the Special Collections section of the library where I had to request it. Then I had to take it into a room that exuded a sepulchral atmosphere, and—while it crumbled away on the desk I sat at leaving crumbs that looked like I had eaten peanut butter crackers—take notes with a penknife (no pens allowed, because pencil is erasable,

whereas ink is not, and I naturally looked like one who would scribble all over an antique manuscript).

The book was printed in font small enough to create myopia, the pages were covered in measly brown spots, and the ideas were verbosely presented. But there were occasional gems lurking amid the spots. Here's one: The student "should be taught, [sic] that . . . an ostentatious and deceitful display of ornament and pomp of expression, [sic] must be exploded from his compositions" (Intro III). I think Jamieson could have applied this rule to his title. Furthermore, my students have a difficult enough time writing simple sentences, let alone ones deceptively ornamented, ostentatious, or displaying pomp of expression! And what about Jamieson's little Bang: "Theory? Today we could not get away with exploding student work, and even if we could, how would we do it—firecrackers, RPGs, plastic explosives? I think I'll leave my students' work unexploded."

It amazes me how many times observations from history seem to have had my students in mind. Here's one by Jamieson: "the author has dwelt very fully on the principles of Grammatical Purity, [sic, sic, sic] as it respects barbarisms, solecisms, idiotisms, vulgarisms, impropriety in phrases" (Intro V). Here, at least, Jamieson hits the nail on the head: my students often exhibit barbarisms, especially when they slurp drinks and eat Rubber McMuffins in class (though these behaviors might also be classified as vulgarisms). Impropriety in student writing is a given, but let the person among us who has not been subjected to written idiotisms sit down and shut up.

I don't know who Dr. Blair was, but Jamieson evidently thought his observations on the period were lofty: "No writer has yet excelled Dr. Blair, [sic] in luminous views of the Harmony of Periods," and these views we have embodied in the Grammar. I've heard of the Harmony of the Spheres, but I had remained woefully ignorant about the Harmony of the Periods until this book. Frankly, even though Dr. Blair obviously had a thing for period harmony, I still don't know what it is, although I am familiar with the discord of the semi-colon, especially as my students use it.

I have to be fair, however. Jamieson could sometimes be very profound: "Composition in prose could not be well executed, [sic] till writing was invented."

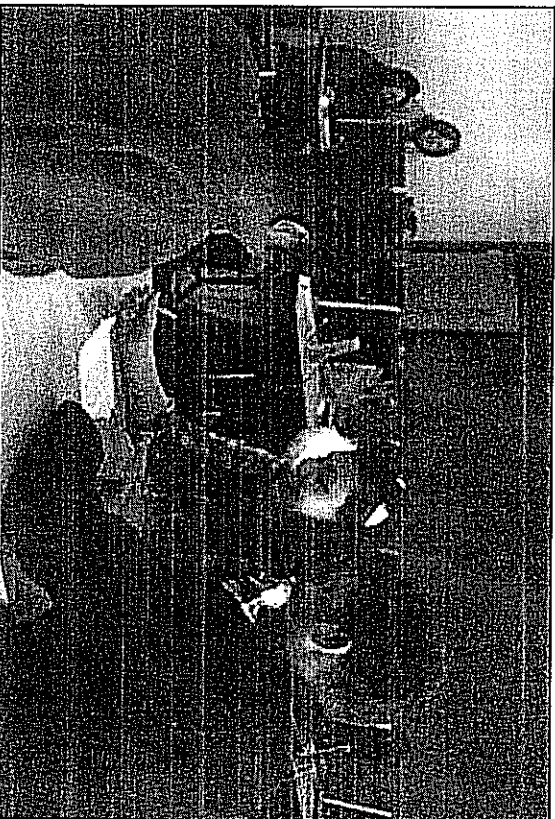
Duhhhhhhh!

Sorry, I got carried away. Besides, Jamieson wrote his spotted tome before graffiti replaced writing as the preferred mode of communication by railroad car.

In fact, Jamieson wrote the introduction to this wonderful masterpiece in 1818! Wasn't that the year Hannibal crossed the alps with elephants? Anyway, for this article I have covered only the introduction and the first 42 pages. Since the entire work covers over 300 pages, replete with hundreds of awe-inspiring insights, I am beginning to wonder what's the point? ✨

"Learning to Teach Writing" continued from page 4

- "I was surprised to find most of the tutors were not English majors and a lot of them weren't upperclassmen."
- "I am not afraid to go in there with questions. It made things a little less intimidating."
- "I was very interested in the way the session was set up. I was expecting to go in, watch someone read a paper, mark it, and send us on our way. I was surprised when Linda asked what the paper was for, who it was for. . . she seemed interested in the paper. After observing in the writing center, I will re-think taking my own papers there. . ."
- "Even though the help from the tutor was good. . . more important [the student] got some confidence to continue [revising]."
- "It was more interactive than I thought. . . I was also wondering why I hadn't gone to the writing center yet to get help with papers. It seemed very relaxed and. . . even though the tutor didn't know the answer to a few of Pete's questions, she knew where to look. . . I know now that going to the writing center doesn't make me feel dumb, but it makes me that much better of a student. . . Now I think a good student is one that asks questions and uses their resources to their advantage."
- "To be honest, I probably never would have gone if it were not for this paper."



Students at the Grand View University Writing Center

Earlier in the semester one student who loves to write had found his way into the writing center, but he had not yet found his way into the conversation: "I have been there several times. . . (although I have never asked a tutor for assistance)." While he could see the value of the writing center—"I expected to see tons and tons of students flooding into the Writing Center to get help. College is tough, and I thought that everyone would be begging for help"—he said, "I'm not sure if it is because they are too afraid to have someone else read there [sic] paper or if they are too lazy." While he loves to write and had worked with me a couple of times, he seemed hesitant to work with another student. With "this assignment," he was finally able to sit close enough to hear a conversation

about writing that helped him see that "at the Writing Center, your work is truly valued."

Because of "this assignment," nearly forty first-year students enrolled in first-semester composition began to understand how "good" writers behave and to develop an awareness of audience, one that relies less on a discrete set of learned skills and more on making informed choices. Their comments suggest that shifting their role to observer allowed them to assume more authority both for their writing and their learning, a connection we who work in writing centers recognize but often find difficult to document. ✨

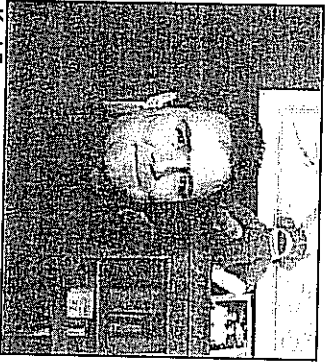
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Popcorn and Newsreels:

Urban Blight

Karl Fornes, University of South Carolina, Aiken



Karl Fornes

Eliza Dolittle's and Jamal Wallace's liberation depends on whether or not their newly inculcated literacy successfully unlocks the shackles of urban poverty.

Finding Forrester, in fact, is only one in a long line of "educator-liberates-students-from-urban-wasteland" movies that appeared over a period of fifteen years or so, including *Teachers* (1984), *The Principle* (1987), *Stand and Deliver* (1988), *Lean on Me* (1989), *Dangerous Minds* (1995), and *The Substitute* (1996). Robert Bulman describes the urban high school genre as "the fantasies of the suburban middle class" in which the middle class educator-rescues students "from their troubled lives not through significant social change, but by the individual application of common sense, good behavior, a positive outlook, and better choices" (255). To be fair, the genre has been around since public education became more accessible and the middle class emerged after World War II.

I was reminded of these movies on the evening of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day when I stumbled across *Blackboard Jungle* (1955) on American Movie Classics (AMC) in the middle of what must have been a Sydney Poitier marathon. Don't let the 1955 release date fool you, *Blackboard Jungle* rivals even the most recent films—including the Louisville Slugger-wielding Jim Belushi from *The Principal* and the Glock and shank-flashing folks from *The Substitute*—in hard core urban high school thuggery. The movie opens with Richard Daddier (Glenn Ford) wandering through the chaos of urban New York City to a high school job where

the utterly and completely out-to-lunch principal claims "there is no discipline problem." Early on, viewers learn that the school is crammed with students who spend their time trying to rape female teachers when they are not already busy beating male teachers in dark alleys. It's a nasty place. Daddier, of course, is the English teacher.

Bulman further describes the hero-educator's role in the urban high school setting as communicating the "middle-class ethic of individualism" (256) while simultaneously requiring "the student to conform to middle class values" (257). Teaching literacy necessarily reflects this difficulty negotiating the need for an individual voice while adhering to the standards of a discourse community. Not unlike Professor Crawford in *Finding Forrester*, Daddier begins one of his first classes by "pinpointing faults in grammar" by emphasizing conformity to the formal elements of language regularly associated with current-traditional pedagogies. He fills two blackboards with thirty-five sentences illustrating various syntax, verb ending, and usage errors and directs the students to correct each sentence. Later, perhaps acknowledging Bulman's "tension and ambiguity" (256) toward middle-class individualism, Daddier records a Latino student, Morales, explaining why he was late for school. The classroom brightens up a bit as the tape recorder captures Morales' individual voice sharing a short life narrative before the discussion deteriorates into racial name-calling. Daddier uses the racial epithets to discuss the power of language, specifically its role in shaping audience and purpose.

Daddier's class includes two leaders, Gregory Miller (Sydney Poitier) and Artie West (Vic Morrow). Daddier pays special attention to Miller, promising that he won't quit teaching if Miller stays in school. Both Daddier and Miller stay in school. In the end, viewers are left to presume that Miller ends up as a productive member of society, perhaps even repaying Daddier's confidence by becoming an academic and moral leader in his own classroom. And he does.

Well, it's a film, of course; there is no way of knowing what might have happened to a specific character once the credits finish rolling. That said, as *Blackboard Jungle* ended and I smuggled further into the sofa, *To Sir with Love* (1967) began. Sydney Poitier plays Mark Thackeray, an unemployed engineer who moves to London and secures a job at the North Quay Secondary School. *To Sir with Love* bears a remarkable resemblance to *Blackboard Jungle* in its introduction of middle class values to impoverished, delinquent teens. If you can handle the psychedelic soundtrack courtesy of the Mindbenders, a strangely discomfiting musical montage of a museum visit, and Sydney Poitier's dancing, *To Sir with Love* is an equally rewarding watch. 🌟

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"Back to the Center" continued from page 9

Writing Center Research

Many UWC staff members, interns and non-interns alike, are also involved in writing center-related research. During the spring 2009, six tutors—Aileen, Alexis, George, Juliane, Karen, and Lucas—delivered the opening plenary session at the 2009 SWCA Conference in Greensboro, NC. The session, entitled "The State of the Profession: Writing Centers and Student Success at Hispanic-Serving Institutions," examined the complexities of their work with our university's diverse, multilingual population, and focused a lot of attention on how they work with our Spanish-English speaking population. Though all six panelists are bilingual, they shared very different experiences and pedagogical insights into how they tutor. It was an amazing experience for them, as none had been to a regional conference before, and several had never traveled so far north.

In addition to this presentation, two tutors, Karen and Aileen, conducted a semester-long research project that resulted in the growth of our web presence. Another tutor, Denise, worked diligently to develop a business plan focused on creating a satellite writing center at a local high school. Denise presented her research at a writing center conference last spring hosted by the University of South Florida. Now that we have a satellite center in place, Denise is working with Leo, another satellite tutor, and Kevin on writing an article regarding this experience for *The Writing Lab Newsletter*.

Over the course of the summer, Kevin worked with Aileen on a proposal for an International Writing Centers Association

Research Grant. The two were awarded the maximum \$750 grant to research their proposed project: "Using Spanish while Tutoring English: A Study of Writing Center Tutoring Sessions Involving Bilingual Tutors and Students." This project is currently in the data collection stage with hopes that initial results will be presented at the 2010 IWCA-NCPTW Conference.

Daily Snapshot

Though we have listed many non-tutoring activities above, they do not take us away from our primary purpose—helping students become better writers. A typical hour at the UWC usually entails three or four tutors working, mostly with students, but sometimes on UWC projects or projects of their own (like Facebook pages), or having coffee from our own UWC-operated mini-café. We stress the importance of maintaining a strong personal relationship with students, so whenever the door opens, one tutor is responsible for welcoming the incoming person. Since we do not always have a receptionist-like person available, this sometimes means a tutor has to quickly interrupt his or her session—politely, of course—to help the newly arrived person. While this is not ideal, we have found it has not had a negative impact on sessions, and it has been especially helpful for students who are in the UWC for the first time.



Students at the UWC

Tutoring sessions typically last around forty-five minutes, with the last fifteen minutes of the hour saved for the tutor to complete paperwork, which often includes filling out Report for Faculty Forms that detail the session's accomplishments. We respect the confidentiality of a tutoring session, so RFFs are only sent upon a student's request. Several faculty have asked that we send them RFFs every time their students visit the UWC, but we respect that students may not always want to divulge this information.

Once a session is over, tutors often walk students to the door, recapping their sessions and suggesting Plans of Action (POA), which usually includes future appointments. We have hardcopy POA forms for students who prefer to have these plans in writing, and we take a few moments to work on them together.

The UWC also offers group tutoring to undergraduate and graduate students. Last semester, Kevin created a one-credit course—CAE 099—for students enrolled in ENG 100: Developmental Writing so they could receive credit by attending the UWC for one hour of group tutoring per week. Here, three or four students work with one tutor over the course of an entire semester, which can be especially helpful for underprepared, first-time freshmen, as it encourages them to get to know people on campus, and it shows them how much help we can provide them throughout their academic careers.

In addition, a Graduate Writing Skills (GRW 500) course visits the UWC several nights per semester to work in small groups with our staff, so they can teach and learn one another while learning from and working alongside a tutor. The tutors and the students work together to target areas of difficulty, discuss ideas, and practice writing. We have seen great growth in the writing skills and confidence of writers at both the ENG 100 and GRW 500 levels, and we are glad we can be a part of the growth and success of students at very different ends of the academic spectrum.

The UWC at STU has grown rapidly during its first three years because of the hard work contributed by all of our staff members. The UWC is not just a place to sit and work on assignments; it's a friendly academic environment where students can gather, get excellent writing assistance, use a computer, have intelligent conversations, drink coffee, and even borrow a stapler. And although we don't know what projects we might begin next year, we know one thing for sure: we will always be an ever-evolving, always-growing, professional work-in-progress. ✨

"Is Ignorance Bliss" continued from page 7

We find that our lack of course-specific expertise helps students explain themselves because the student usually knows more than the fellow. Haring-Smith points out that the generalist fellow "acts as an educated lay reader, who can honestly report when she is confused by what a student is trying unsuccessfully to say. She does not need to 'forget' what she knows about a subject to 'feign' confusion" (125). Because we cannot provide specific answers, students must realize we are a resource and they remain the authority. As generalists we can also see more easily where students have left out information because they think it is not worth repeating to the instructor.

Course-specific diction might become problematic for us because when students use specific terminology, we may confuse it with a more general meaning. In some sessions, we may have to devote more time to learning the students' material rather than focusing on the quality of writing. In these situations, we should take a step back from being in control and reassure students that while they are the content experts, we can still provide valuable feedback and suggestions for revision.

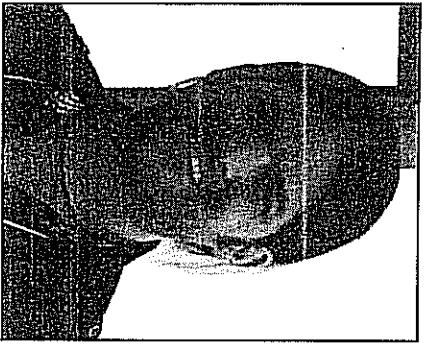
Both knowledgeable and generalist fellows are essential to WCU's program. The appropriate choice depends on the course. Some courses contain such highly technical language and subject matter that only majors can provide effective help, while other courses focus on more accessible language and subject matter. Either way, all fellows should practice proven strategies, such as allowing students to remain in control of their papers while providing enough specific feedback to address assignment guidelines. Generalist fellows need to familiarize themselves enough with content to help students, and knowledgeable fellows need to resist the urge to provide too much help. Both types of fellows provide a resource that empowers students and their writing. ✨

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Letter from the President

Kevin Dvorak, St. Thomas University



Kevin Dvorak

Hello SWCA Members,

As your newly-elected president, I would like to thank all of you who voted in the fall election, and I would like to welcome all of our newly elected board members—Laura Bokus (vice-president), Steve Price (secretary), Kim Abels (at-large), Rusty Carpenter (at-large), Teagan Decker (at-large), and Mary Lou Odom (at-large)—as well as our newly appointed webmaster, Shanti Bruce. I am excited to have the opportunity to work with all of these wonderful individuals, as well as Sandee McGlaun (treasurer), Christine Cozzens (*Southern Discourse* editor) and Beth Burmester (past president), each of whom remains on the board.

As an organization, we are off to an excellent start to 2010. In January, we launched a new Web site, thanks to Shanti's hard work and creativity, which can be found at www.iwca-swca.org. The new site already has a lot of materials on it, and we are looking to grow it even more. So, if you have any ideas, please contact Shanti. You can find her contact info, as well as contact info for all board members, on the site's "Contact" page.

In February and early March, we hosted four mini-regional statewide conferences, rather than one traditional conference, and it appears they were all quite successful—despite the snow that fell on several of them! The conference theme, "Back to the Tutor," proved to be a big hit with participants. I'd like to thank all of the conference chairs, as well as their institutions, for hosting these events. If you attended one of the conferences, I hope you will write a "Conference Reflection" and email it to iwca.webeditor@gmail.com by Friday, April 30, 2010. Five reflections from our 2009 conference were published in the inaugural edition of *IWCA Conference Notes* and we'd like to see even more this year!

I would like to congratulate two outstanding people for winning the 2010 SWCA Awards, which were both presented at the SWCA Florida Conference: *SWCA Achievement Award*: Kate Pantlides, University of South Florida; *SWCA Tutor Award*: Denise Pichardo, St. Thomas University. Thank you both for the great work you have provided our region! In addition, I would like to thank Shanti, Rusty, and Michael Pemberton for serving on the SWCA Awards Committee.

In mid-March, the new executive board members met for dinner while attending the Convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Louisville, KY. We discussed several key issues we plan to work on this year, including

- Strengthening our local networks;
- Refining our membership registration process;
- Researching ways to become an accrediting/licensing organization;
- Revamping the SWCA awards process;
- Promoting the 2011 conference; and
- Assisting with next year's *IWCA@CCCC* Collaborative in Atlanta.

For the first bullet, I would like to suggest that many of you take advantage of Council of Writing Program Administration excellent "Cuppa Coffee" program to get to know others in your region. For more info, check out their "Cuppa Coffee" Web page: <http://wpa.council.org/cuppa-coffee-participation>.

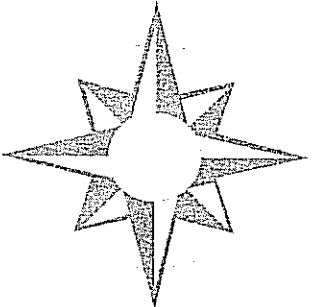
Finally, our membership has increased significantly in the last few months, and we are looking forward to growing this total even more as we work on the 2011 Conference at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Luke Miller, 2011 conference chair, has already gotten a great jump on planning for this event, so we are fully confident that it is going to be a success! Check out the Call for Papers on our Web site!

I look forward to serving you all for the next two years. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or suggestions, or if you need any assistance.

Wishing you the best,

Southern Discourse

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Executive Board Election Report

Kerri Jordan, Mississippi College

Elections for the 2010-2012 SWCA Executive Board were held in early December, 2009. Congratulations to the following newly elected executive board members:

President, Kevin Dvorak, Ph.D., St. Thomas University
Vice president, Laura Bokus, Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute
Secretary, Steve Price, Ph.D., Mississippi College

At-large representatives:
Kimberly Abels, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (two-year term)
Russell Carpenter, Ph.D., Eastern Kentucky University (two-year term)
Teagan Elizabeth Decker, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Pembroke (one-year term)
Mary Lou Odom, Ph.D., Kennesaw State University (one-year term)

Approximately 72 percent of the membership cast ballots in the December election, which was the first SWCA election to be conducted electronically. An SWCA election using paper ballots generally costs around \$100 in postage, printing, and supplies, but using the SWCA Board's free Survey Monkey account enabled us to conduct an expense-free election in 2009.

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