

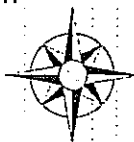
Southern Discourse

Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



Winter 1999

Volume 2, Issue 2



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Charleston: A Celebration, An Invitation

by Philip Gardner

There is a lovely symmetry in Tom Waldrep's having hosted this year's SWCA conference. As a founding member of the association, Tom's successes are indicative of what writing centers are intended to be: progressive, vital centers of thought and action. Today, at The Medical University of South Carolina, he heads the only writing center of its type in the country. So as we approach the end of the century, we will remember Charleston—Old South, New South, tradition and vision—and appreciate the work of those who have preceded us, and anticipate the promise of those who will lead us into the future.

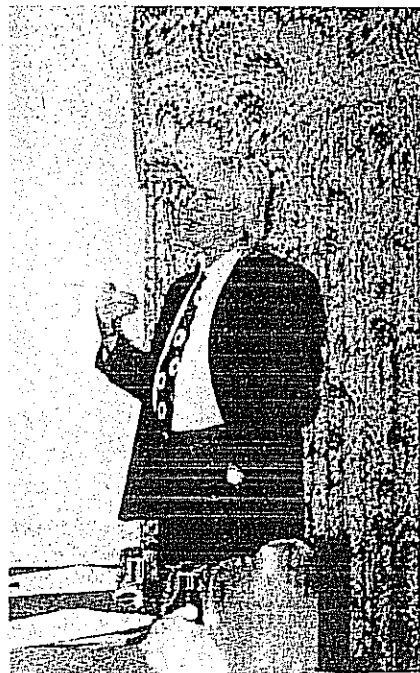
If validation was once a compelling consideration, the presence of David Bartholomae and Tilly Warnock puts a close on that conversation. And if the credibility of our work was once questioned, Josephine Tarvers' presentation on writing center accreditation illustrates our commitment to self-assessment and evaluation.

And so we look ahead. We can never really separate genuine vision from revision; recursive thought carries us back to the best in us and asks us to

build on that. The conference theme, *Conversations About Teaching and Writing: Where Are We After Two Decades*, invited us to take the best from our collective past and to contribute our best to our collective future, to face its challenges and to celebrate its possibilities.

This note, then, is a salute to the past and a call to a new generation, an invitation to new and current members to revise our association, to take the best of what we've been and to create what we might become. To give voice to our evolution, the Southeastern Writing Center

(article continued on page 3)



Phil Gardner, SWCA Vice-President,
presenting at the Charleston
Conference.

Southern Discourse Needs Writers!

I thought if I put it boldly in the title, I just might grab your attention.

The teaching of writing in the classroom and in the writing center has always benefited from free and constant sharing. After Charleston, as after every regional conference, we all came back to our centers and began to implement our versions of ideas we gathered from colleagues. This kind of exchange can continue all year long in *Southern Discourse*, if you will join your voice to the chorus.

The word *discourse* in the name of our newsletter means "communication of thought by words, talk, conversation"—everything we value most in good writing, good teaching, and in writing centers, where good writing and good teaching come together. The word *Southern* whispers Eudora Welty, Mark Twain, Alice Walker, Flannery O'Connor, William Faulkner. Over the last year writers have emerged all over the region to revive *Southern Discourse* and help it live up to its name. I'm very grateful to all of you who have taken the time to write for the newsletter. Many have even been willing to accept assignments; others have come up with original, helpful, well-written pieces to fill our pages. My assistants Laura Brandon and Lee Hayes have cheerfully spent long hours designing, assembling, and mailing each issue. Thanks to all who've contributed in the past and to this issue in particular. You are *Southern Discourse*.

But let it be known that *Southern Discourse* always needs writers and always need ideas for articles. To serve the writing centers in our region (and beyond), we need to hear from all of them on a regular basis. If each writing center in the southeast determined to send in one article per year of any length or type, we'd have a very substantial body of work

to present to our community, and each of those centers would have the opportunity to make its work known to a wider audience.

To help you plan your contributions, we are publishing in this issue a list of submission deadlines through 2000. Let me know ahead of time that you are thinking of writing an article; then I can plan the issue and perhaps offer suggestions to make your job easier. We are interested in all kinds of short articles related to writing centers including book or software reviews; opinion pieces, short versions of full-length papers or presentation; letters to the editor, case studies, tutors' stories, tutees' stories; and personal accounts. In my first year I've grown hungry for copy, and realized how valuable beat reporters and columnists can be in feeding that need; if you have an area you want to cover or an idea for a column, let me know. And if you don't particularly want to write but have ideas about the newsletter and how it could better serve the SWCA, please send those along, too.

Good talk and good writing—that's what writing centers and *Southern Discourse* are all about.

Christine S. Cozzens
Agnes Scott College

Send all submissions to *Southern Discourse* to

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Southern Discourse is published three times a year in the fall, winter, and spring.

Tutors and Director Collaborate In Hiring Process

Each spring we face the same challenge: hiring qualified tutors using the combined insight of the director (that's me) and the current tutors. In the six years that I've directed the Writing Center at Hollins University, the tutors and I have worked together to create a collaborative system that contributes significantly to the hiring process.

This year we've been discussing interviews. The interviewing of tutor candidates has evolved a great deal from when I first came to Hollins. At that time, the tutors screened all candidates on the front end, deciding which ones would eventually be interviewed by the director. Tutors interviewed all potential tutors themselves, using a large group format where all applicants and all current tutors met and talked together.

Because of the lack of collaboration with the director on narrowing the pool of applicants and the rather threatening dynamics of group interviews, I worked with tutors to revamp that system. Team interviews are now conducted by groups of three or four tutors, in which each team interviews several candidates independently. In addition, individual interviews are conducted by the director with each candidate. The teams report back at a staff meeting in which tutors share their opinions and impressions of candidates. The tutors vote on each candidate, and I take their votes into consideration when making my final decision.

This system includes the tutors in the hiring process in a significant way. Their impressions of applicants as peers are an important addition to my knowledge about these candidates. Collaboration really does work!

Marcy Trianosky
Hollins University

How to Submit Articles to *Southern Discourse*:

Articles should be sent to Christine Cozzens via email (in the body of the message), disk (MS Word preferred), or fax. Please note the following deadlines:

Spring 1999: May 1st Winter 2000: February 1st
Fall 1999: October 1st Spring 2000: May 1st

Charleston (continued from page 1)

Association will create a new journal, one that reflects, promotes, and questions the work we do. Its success will depend upon your participation in defining its purpose and shaping its design. What should the journal be? How can it reflect who we are and what we do? What will make it uniquely ours? What should it include? How should it look? What do we keep from the past? What do we look to for the future?

Consider your idea of the perfect writing center journal. Ask your colleagues. Solicit ideas from students. Share your thinking with the whole. We have won some tough battles; now is the time to look ahead, to build, to draw upon the energy and creativity of writing center folks with new and exciting ideas, and to provide a forum for that energy and those ideas. Your journal is yours for the making.

This newsletter is one place to begin the collaboration. The SWCA listserv (see ad in this issue) can serve as another forum for the discussion. I hope that you will consider this a personal invitation to participate in the creation of the journal and the revision of the association.

So I will close with a statement of celebration, a thanks to those who helped create and sustain our organization, and an invitation to those of you who will chart its future. See you in the next century.

Phillip Gardner, SWCA Vice-President
Francis Marion University

AASU to Host SWCA 2000 Conference in Savannah

Ahhh, Savannah—sultry, sexy, southern to the core, set apart by attitude and style. A lush, garden city punctuated by steeples, spires, cornices, and cupolas. A city created around azalea-filled squares, adorned with ornate ironwork, welcoming visitors with southern haute cuisine. For generations Savannah has inspired poets, playwrights, composers, authors, and screenwriters. Next spring, Savannah will have the opportunity to charm writing center folks near and far when Armstrong Atlantic State University hosts the 20th annual Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference. While more specific information regarding dates, accommodations, and next year's conference theme will appear in the spring issue of *Southern Discourse*, please contact Christina Van Dyke at christina_vandyke@mailgate.armstrong.edu or 912-921-2330 with immediate concerns or suggestions.

Christina Van Dyke
Armstrong Atlantic State University

SWCA Membership Form

Members of SWCA receive a copy of *Southern Discourse*, access to the SWCA listserv, and an annual writing center directory. In addition, new center directors are paired with a member who will mentor via email and, where possible, visits to the centers. Beginning with the SWCA Conference 2000, members will pay a reduced registration fee, and only members will have the opportunity to present at the conference. An institutional membership covers writing center administration and all tutors. Become a member now to enjoy these benefits.

Name _____ Institution _____
Telephone _____ Position _____
Address _____ Email _____

Membership Rates:
Individual (regional) \$15.00
Institutional (regional) \$25.00
Combination (national and regional)
Individual \$45.00
Institutional \$55.00

Mail this form to
Peggy Ellington
Wesleyan Writing Lab
4760 Forsyth
Macon, GA 31210

Writing: Good? Effective? Progressive?

As I sit here and work on yet another revision of this article, I can't help but wonder why my previous drafts haven't appealed to me. This new opening paragraph seems *effective* to me because it takes a more direct approach than my previous one did; I still don't think it is very *good*. What really led me to start thinking about labeling writing as good or effective was a session presented by Agnes Scott's tutors at the SWCA Conference in Charleston last February.

As a component of their presentation on adaptive tutoring, the Agnes Scott tutors asked the audience to participate in determining constants that should exist in a tutoring session, such as respect, collaboration, or good writing. Interestingly, an audience participant suggested that perhaps "good writing" was ambiguous and proposed that "effective writing" might be a better description. At the time, I wondered whether "effective" was even the best word choice. After all, a student can bring in a piece of writing that is effective, meaning that it accomplishes the task of producing an effect or being influential upon the reader, but that could still benefit from plenty of revision. The question of how to best phrase this constant remained in my mind even after I left the conference.

When I got back to Savannah, I still didn't have an answer. One morning while working in the writing center, I happened to glance up at our center's proofreading policy and noted our motto, "Better writers, not better papers." I realized that perhaps I was concentrating on the wrong issue. While the writing aspect is crucial to the purpose of a tutoring session, the main emphasis is on collaborating, exchanging ideas, and trying to build a trusting relationship with the student that

will be ongoing. The focal point of a tutorial is the writer more so than the writing.

Perhaps this sounds ludicrous since it's the "writing" center students come to for help with their assignments, so both faculty and students may think that our primary focus should be on the final product. Writing encompasses more than mechanics; it greatly involves the thinking of the writer. Learning how to write, how to communicate on paper, whether the result is good or effective, will always be an ongoing process because thinking and learning are lifelong processes. So we are left with the question: who actually makes a student's writing "good" or "effective"? It's certainly not the tutor; it's the writer.

While trying to expand this thought, I recalled an interesting comment an audience member made during Tilly Warnock's opening session. This audience member emphasized how we should refer to students who come to writing centers as developing writers. Her statement reinforces the idea that learning how to write well is a continuous process, so getting students to write at their maximum potential, if such a notion is even possible, would take more time than what even numerous sessions could allow. We, as tutors, can only provide students with the knowledge of how to evolve and improve their writing.

Finally, after much thought on this subject, I've decided that instead of working toward "good" or "effective" writing in a tutoring session, our true goal is to work toward "progressive" writing. We should try to help students understand the developmental process of writing. Hopefully, they will learn something from each session that will empower them to become more independent writers.

Christina Grass
Armstrong Atlantic State University

Making the Oral Journey: The Talk Between Writing Lab Consultants and Clients

Writing lab consultants often become mindful of two truths: our clients come to the writing lab with differing academic abilities and experiences, and each tutoring session tries to accommodate these different clients. We also recognize that our flexible writing sessions allow us to open up new avenues for less experienced writers. In fact, client and consultant can become two on an oral journey, exploring the exciting path towards good writing. For this oral journey, consultants and clients use four kinds of talk: guiding, reading, oscillating, and compacting talk. The talk flows naturally in and out of the draft of a paper, varying with the client's needs.

Guiding talk. While clients are often anxious to guide the initial talk towards loose or lost commas, clients and consultants might best begin by wending their way through that sometimes mystical document—the writing assignment. Sharing guiding talk about the assignment helps a client to think critically and to reckon with writing in an academic context.

Reading talk. Once the two collaborators have cleared up possible misunderstandings about the assignment, client and consultant can then become active, careful readers of the client's text. The client-as-reader often discovers the "listening power" for his own text, as he naturally stumbles over gnarled passages or becomes bothered by his pretentious language. Reading talk sometimes reminds clients that good writing moves beyond acceptable grammar and correct spelling. Clients often need the assurance that their professors—their final readers—will consider organization, idea development, sentence maturity, and the other high order operations that make writing successful.



Presenters Chris Railey, Caitlin Jorgenson, and Chris Nesmith, from USC – Columbia, chat at the Charleston Conference.

Oscillating talk. This talk weaves in and out, with the client struggling as reader and writer to understand what the draft is supposed to say. Client and consultant share this often thought-provoking talk about the expectations of readers and the revising needs of writers. Together the two can explore meaningful possibilities for a revised text.

Compacting talk. These precious seconds of talk hover above the client's bookbag-packing in the last seconds of the tutorial session. The compacting talk often becomes an agreement for the revising road ahead, a kind of covenant for the writer's new work, offering another opening for writing reflection.

Creating an oral journey works well in the writing lab's informal, energetic setting. It seems to me that good writing talk and reflective writing practice enhance learning for both clients and consultants—the best incentive for taking the oral journey.

Mary-Jane Ogawa
College of Charleston

Students at USC Learn to Be Communication Specialists

"It's all about theory and practice," says Dr. Carolyn Matalene, referring to her University of South Carolina course, "Rhetoric for Writers." "Rhetoric for Writers" is a course in which after finding an internship in a local agency, business, department, or nonprofit organization, students spend the semester analyzing the documents produced at their job and producing work for a portfolio suitable for use on the job market. The course meetings include brief oral presentations from students who summarize their writing experiences on the job and discussions of rhetorical theory intended to help students analyze and evaluate documents in a variety of contexts.

The syllabus announces, "This course is intended to turn you into a Communication Specialist." To further this goal, Matalene has students produce five major writing assignments during the semester:

1. a description of the internship, including history, funding, purpose, and organization;
2. a survey of documents produced at the agency and a description of the production process;
3. an analysis of actual documents from the job, relying on Edward P. J. Corbett's rhetorical strategies in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*;
4. a portfolio of all documents that the student creates or edits during the semester, such as press releases, conference announcements, newsletters, grant proposals, etc.;
5. a final oral presentation in which students describe what they learned from the internship, both about professional writing and about themselves as writers.

Chris Fosen, a USC English Department graduate student, is writing his dissertation on the project. Fosen and Matalene received a grant from the USC Office of Community Service Programs to further their work. They plan to use the grant money to develop a database of places where interns have worked, contact names, and genres of writing done at specific agencies. They also plan to create a web page with hotlinks to organizations who have had interns and to show examples of projects and types of writing done in previous semesters. The agencies that students chose this semester include the South Carolina Commission for Minority Affairs, the South Carolina Arts Commission, the University of South Carolina Center for Business Communication, and the Palmetto Project on Race Relations.

The students are learning about real-world documents, and the writing at the agency is getting better.

This is the first semester that the course has been offered since 1995, and Matalene hopes to increase the enrollment to fifteen or sixteen students next time. The name of the course will also be changed from "Rhetoric for Writers" to "Writing Internship," and a prerequisite of writing-intensive majors only will be introduced. Students who take the course must make a significant commitment of time, as the internships require six to ten hours per week, but the rewards are numerous: among other benefits, students create their own writing portfolios and develop valuable connections in the South Carolina community of professionals. As Matalene notes, "The students are learning about real-world documents, and, ideally, the writing at the agency is getting better."

Deanna Ramey
University of South Carolina

Through the Eyes of an Intern

Once again, I sit before a glowing screen in the writing center computer lab, tapping away. Winter break is almost upon us, and the center is winding down its final days of the semester, but I take these last minutes to reflect on a semester largely spent in the writing center. I started working as a peer writing consultant a year and a half ago, but this semester I have gotten a truly behind-the-scenes look at the writing center, its changes, and its place on campus as I have worked not only as a writing consultant, but as a student intern as well.

The Rollins College Writing Center exists as one entity within the larger Johnson Student Resource Center (TJ's), which provides content tutoring and academic advising in many areas in addition to writing consulting. As a writing consultant, my view was limited to this one area of TJ's, but as an intern, the many facets of the center have come together for me as I have worked with staff from all areas and with projects extending beyond the bounds of the writing center. Our center has undergone major changes in the past few years and through my internship, I have come to appreciate how those changes affect TJ's as a whole as our different areas meld into one community reaching out to the campus.

My main project as an intern has been to consolidate scholarship information from files into an easy-reference booklet for student and faculty use. Not only did this give me a chance to acquire much more computer know-how than I ever thought I'd need as an English major, but it provided an opportunity to work with staff in editing the book and exploring the extensive resources our center offers to make them even more accessible.

Another project was to develop a new tour script to keep up with the changing center. Teaching new consultants about tours and introducing them to the staff made me even further aware of the various resources at TJ's, and as I grew familiar with the different groups working within this department, I tried to pass on a sense of community to the new consultants.

Besides projects, the time spent with staff has shown me the many levels on which TJ's operates. Sitting in on a staff meeting I learned that the staff not only seeks to serve students by providing convenient consulting hours, but they also work with policies and appeal processes, trying to make them as fair as possible, considering individual cases, and working as a team to create the best solution.

Space does not permit me to expound on other projects and experiences which have illuminated the depths of TJ's, but as I finish my last hours here and head home for the holidays, I understand how my work as a writing consultant fits into the much bigger picture of the Johnson Student Resource Center.

Allison Mains
Rollins College

In the Lap of Luxury

Attending the SWCA conference for the first time this year in only my second semester as a tutor, I came away feeling extremely fortunate that I attend Armstrong Atlantic State University. Until the 19th Annual Conference in Charleston, I had no idea that writing centers are considered luxuries by many college and university administrations: desirable, perhaps, but not necessary. I took for granted that schools provide writing centers, that they are well-staffed, that they are given a decent operating budget, training, and adequate space to serve their students.

I realized just how good we have it here while listening to writing center directors who also act as the entire staff, who work out of broom closets and basements, whose budgets expire long before the semester does. Even thriving writing centers may become victims of their own success. In Michael Strickland's case, the administration at Guilford College dropped a basic English requirement, expecting the writing center to pick up the slack without increasing the center's staff or budget. While the AASU Writing Center looks for ways to expand and improve its services, many find themselves in the unfortunate position of defending what they have.

Fred Peterson
Armstrong Atlantic State University

Conference Focuses on Student Success in First-Year Composition

The Department of Writing and Linguistics of Georgia Southern University sponsored the first Student Success in First-Year Composition Conference on February 26, 1999 in Statesboro, Georgia. Designed to promote the success of students in the first-year composition sequence, the conference offered a series of workshops featuring writing teachers from around Georgia and neighboring states. Teachers and tutors shared strategies aimed at the effective instruction, assessment, preparation, and motivation of students during their first year of college. The goals of the conference are to facilitate communication among college composition professors as well as among college-level and high school teachers in an effort to insure student success in college-level reading and writing.

Dr. Larry Burton, Chair of Georgia Southern's Department of Writing and Linguistics presented the keynote address, *Success in the Key of F*, at the opening session. Four concurrent sessions offered the 150 participants the choice of twenty-one different workshops. Conference workshops focused on typical problems faced by students when making the transition from high school to college, teacher responses to student writing, African-American discourse patterns and code-switching, as well as rethinking the composition program at a two-year school within a university system.

Included among the sessions was a presentation by tutors in Georgia Southern's University Writing Center. The session featured Anita Coleman-Webster and Rachael Pigg, graduate assistant tutors, who presented *The Writing Center's Role in First-Year Composition*. In this session, the

Contact Information for Student Success in First-Year Composition Conference, 2000

When: February 11, 2000

Where: Georgia Southern University,
Statesboro, GA

Who to contact:

Dr. Larry Burton
Dept. of Writing and Linguistics
Georgia Southern University
P.O. Box 8026
Statesboro, GA 30460

tutors described the University Writing Center as a site for change since the Writing Center helps students achieve a level of critical reflection that is difficult to achieve in traditional classroom interaction. In the center, tutors work with students who struggle to work with the voices that inform their writing. Coleman-Webster and Pigg discussed how Writing Center tutors help students without compromising student ownership of the papers.

Next year's conference is scheduled for February 11, 2000, on the campus of Georgia Southern, and planners hope to see more writing center offerings from members of the Southeastern Writing Center Association. For additional information, please contact Dr. Larry Burton in the Department of Writing and Linguistics, Georgia Southern University, P.O. Box 8026, Statesboro, GA 30460.

Ellen H. Hendrix
Georgia Southern University

Are You Measuring What You Think You're Measuring?

Surveys may be the most common method of assessment for writing centers. They're relatively cost effective, easy to administer, and easy to interpret. Perhaps because of their ease of use, however, survey data are not always respected. For example, one writing center director explained that she stopped using surveys because it seemed she was "getting hundred of thank-you letters, but not much useful feedback."

While plenty of information has been published in the social sciences about survey research, you don't need to spend hours creating a publishable study. You can improve the validity of your questionnaire simply by paying attention to rhetorical content, much as you do when writing other texts. ("Validity" means that the survey measures what you think you're measuring.)

As with a paper, determining the purpose is crucial. What are you hoping to learn from the survey? We are likely to have a variety of different interests, and it can be tempting to simply throw all the interesting questions onto the survey. But surveys are not the best place to collect certain types of information.

Let me explain. As writing center directors, we might be interested in student or faculty behavior, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, values, and / or needs. These areas are hierarchically related (see the triangle diagram):

Behavior:

refers to what people actually do. How often do students come to the writing center? What types of writing do they bring, and in what stage

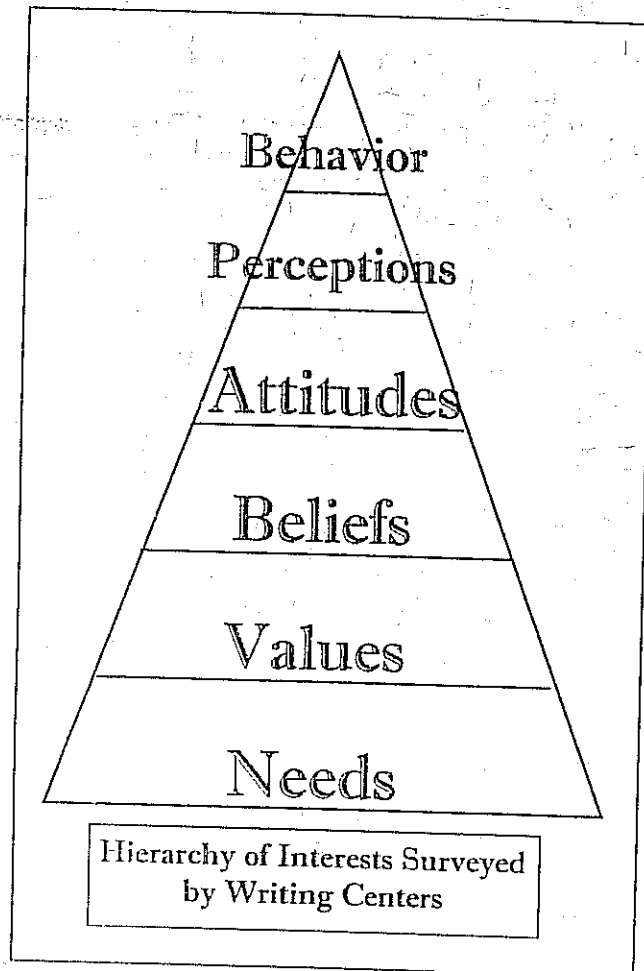
of the writing process do they bring it? Which students are faculty most likely to refer to the center and at what stage in the writing process?

Perceptions:

refers to what people perceive about what the writing center currently does. In which areas are students and faculty satisfied with writing center services? What do students and faculty perceive as the most useful features of the writing center?

Attitudes:

refers to the way people will react to a given situation. For example, what is a student gets a failing grade on the paper? Would that student turn to the writing center? Would his professor refer him to the writing center? What if the student always gets top marks on papers? Would she be likely to come to



the writing center? If she did come to the writing center, how would her professor react?

Beliefs:

refers to what people think the writing center should do. What is the ideal role for the writing center? What kinds of writers do students and faculty believe benefit most from writing center help? What aspects of writing do they believe writing centers can best help with? Beliefs are more abstract than perceptions; they refer to what the writing center should ideally be, not what it is in actuality. Beliefs are also more abstract than attitudes; they refer to what ideally should happen, not what might happen in a particular situation. Beliefs are notoriously difficult to assess.

Values:

refers to the values that motivate everything else. For example, students and faculty who value exploration and discovery may have different beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and behavior than students and faculty who value polished prose.

Needs:

What underlying needs lead people to the writing center?

All of these areas are worthy of study. But not all of these areas can be effectively assessed through surveys. Most behaviors, for example, are more reliably investigated through other means such as direct observation (you can count for yourself how many people use the writing center) or contemporaneous records (you can check your files for information on the sorts of concerns writers bring to the center). Needs are so basic they cannot be assessed at all through surveys (though you can assess

what people perceive their needs to be). In general, the more fundamental (lower on the triangle) the area you're investigating, the more difficult it will be to craft survey questions that assess that area and the more trust is needed between researcher and survey takers.

Of course, questions about, say, perceptions, give clues about the values that underlie them. But as you interpret and report on your data, be sure to keep the various levels distinct. Doing so will improve perceptions of your credibility as well as that of your survey.

Beth Rapp Young
University of Central Florida, Orlando



Keynote speaker David Bartholomae speaks with an audience member at last month's SWCA Conference.

Thank You!

Thanks to everyone who helped us update the SWCA directory by responding to the call for information at the Charleston Conference. We hope the upcoming directory will encourage members of SWCA to share ideas and keep in touch between conferences.

Look for the new directory to arrive by mail!

Southern Discourse

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The 1999 SWCA Directory will be mailed separately!

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For engaging conversations about writing center
practice in your region, you can join

SWCATALK

the listerv of the
Southeastern Writing Center Association
based at Agnes Scott College.

To join, follow these instructions:

- * Send an email message to: listerv@ascagnesscott.edu
- * Leave the "Subject" line blank.
- * In the message body, type: `subscribe swcatalk`
- * Be sure to turn off your signature.
- * Make sure there are no additional spaces or characters in the message.

You will get an e-mail message welcoming you to the list. Once you have joined, address all correspondence to SWCATALK@ascagnesscott.edu