

# Southern Discourse

Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



Fall 1999

Volume 3, Issue 1



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## For Tutors Only

Are you tired of the same old conference drab? Bored with following your writing center director around to each and every meal at conferences? Chances are, you don't equate conferences with fun. This year, Armstrong Atlantic State University tutors plan to change that. In an effort to boost tutor involvement and attendance at the SWCA conference in February of 2000, we have organized an event called "For Tutors Only." AASU peer consultants want to interact and socialize with tutors from across the Southeast, and our excitement has motivated us to plan a casual night of fun so that we can show visiting tutors a night on the town.

There is no doubt that Savannah is a beautiful city, full of history, romance, and intrigue. The grandeur of the city's architecture and squares, filled with mystical oaks and trickling fountains, is breathtaking. Savannah is also a city full of young and diverse students from all over the country and beyond. Downtown has a bustling nightlife with an interesting variety of things to do. Having been to conferences in the past, we know that all too often conference attendees miss out on the life of the host city, spending free time cooped up in the hotel. This year, because the DeSoto Hilton is located in the heart of downtown Savannah, it will be nearly impossible for you not to get out and enjoy yourselves. You will be just a short walk away from the city's main attractions, River Street and historic City Market.


We plan on offering a number of "tours," highlighting favorite local dives, clubs, and hangouts, giving you the chance to

choose an excursion that fits your individual taste. There are so many great restaurants within walking distance of the DeSoto Hilton that even we, Savannah locals, will have trouble deciding where to go. From dining in the eclectic game room of the hip 606 Cafe to eating New Orleans style cuisine and enjoying the view at Huey's on River Street, we promise an entertaining and delicious dining adventure.

After dinner, wherever you decide to go, you will have the chance to choose from a number of activities, such as a late night ghost or graveyard tour, dancing at clubs like Hip Huggers or Velvet Elvis, or drinks at relaxing bars such as Kevin Barry's Irish Pub or Pinkie Master's Lounge. Savannah also has a good local music scene, so there is a chance of catching live music at downtown bars like Devon Michael's or Savannah Blues. If the bar and club scenes are not for you, don't worry. There are also a number of cool coffeehouses such as Gallery Espresso, where you can sit at covered tables outside and enjoy good conversation, partaking in some extremely interesting people-watching; you can also sit inside and listen to good tunes, checking out the work of local artists on display.

All of us at Armstrong's Writing Center are enthusiastic about this new edition to the conference's schedule, and we hope to see a large number of tutor attendees this year. We are looking forward to meeting you in February.

Erin Helmey and Seth Riley  
Armstrong Atlantic State University



## Editor's Note

### Still on Paper and Proud of It!

At the summer meeting of the SWCA board in Savannah, someone suggested that to save trees and money we put the newsletter online. If we did that we could go to full color, create interactive buttons and animated graphics, set up tie-ins with writing center websites, and do other cool things. But the suggestion quickly evaporated as others—including me—remarked that the wonders of technology aside, it is still very wonderful to have in your hands a stack of nice paper with good writing printed on the pages. Most of us would end up printing the newsletter out anyway. And there's still a bit of excitement left in getting a piece of mail that you actually want to read, tilting your desk chair back to a more relaxed position, and reading articles written by people you know—or soon will know—who love the work you love.

For now at least, we will continue the paper version of the newsletter and try to maintain the bit of intimacy and the reminder of friendships—past and to come—that each issue brings. One of the things I enjoy about editing *Southern Discourse* is the opportunity to get to know contributors from the Southeast a little better through their writing and the e-mails or phone calls we exchange as an article begins to take shape. I am grateful that so many of you are willing to put time and energy into writing pieces for this little low-tech publication—writing for which you receive no pay and probably very little direct praise. An audience eager for new ideas, reflections on writing center work, and good writing *does* read and appreciate your articles. Right now, writing center people all over the Southeast and a few beyond the region are tilting back their desk chairs and doing just that.

With this issue of *Southern Discourse* we welcome columnist Peter Carriere, who will regale us in each issue with tidbits of history and reflection about punctuation in *What's the Point?* Twila Yates Papay, back from a sabbatical in Africa, tells stories

### How to Submit Articles to *Southern Discourse*

Articles should be sent to the editor via e-mail (in the body of the message), disk (MS Word preferred), or fax. Please note the following deadlines:

Winter 2000: March 1st

Spring 2000: May 1st

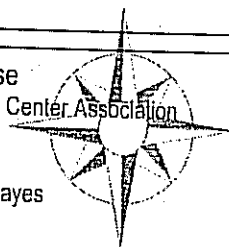
Fall 2000: October 1st

about her experiences with writing centers there. Several articles preview the conference in Savannah, city of elegant squares, live oaks dripping with Spanish moss, and gardens of good and evil. As an enthusiastic Georgian for the last thirteen years, I can only say to you, *don't miss this conference!* Marcy Trianosky and Karl Fornes report on the summer board meeting and the future of the organization, while Tom Waldrep takes us back in time to the founding of the SWCA. Veronica Henson-Phillips writes about some ways speaking centers extend and add to the writing center approach to teaching. Finally, Catherine Ramsdell and Lee Hayes give their takes on our favorite subject—tutoring writing.

Our next deadline is March 1. If you have an idea for an article, a column, or if you'd like to write something but don't know what, get in touch with me on e-mail, by phone, or at the conference, and we'll talk about writing. After all, that's what we do.

Christine Cozzens  
Agnes Scott College

### Southern Discourse Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



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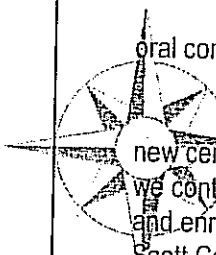
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## A Speaking Center Reaches Beyond the Classroom

Can speaking centers make a difference in the oral communication skills of college students?



Absolutely! As the coordinator of a relatively new center (three years old), I observe day to day how we continually impact the lives of our students in positive and enriching ways. The Speaking Center at Agnes Scott College is a peer tutoring organization that provides students with individual or group assistance in developing oral presentations and public speaking skills. To this end, the tutors and I offer individual tutoring in all aspects of speaking; we also devise activities and programs to support and facilitate learning in the center and in the classrooms around campus.

*Giving students opportunities to practice their public speaking skills outside the classroom is of utmost importance.*

With so many instructors requiring their students to give oral presentations, speaking centers and their programs enhance existing curricula. Many of our tutorials focus on classroom presentations. But students also have their sights on internships, graduate schools, and jobs. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (March 26, 1999) "when the National Association of Colleges and Employers asked 480 companies what qualities mattered the most to them, communication skills topped the list." Students have to hone these skills somewhere. We feel that giving students opportunities to practice their public speaking skills outside the classroom is of utmost importance. This past spring our center sponsored an Informative Speech Contest replete with judges, awards and prizes. The women who participated were inspiring to watch and appreciative of the opportunity. The event was so successful that a Persuasive Speech Contest is slated for this fall. We videotape such events and use the speeches for peer tutor training purposes and as an important archival resource.

Because of my background and training in voice and speech, our speaking center offers specialized tutoring in these areas and in accent reduction. This

kind of tutoring has proven to be in demand since we began doing it last fall. A saying that I am fond of quoting to students is "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." It seems that many students have taken this advice to heart. In light of the competitive nature of the intensive interviewing process most job applicants must endure (which now more



Tutors and international students chat at Agnes Scott College's English Speaking Roundtable.

than ever includes doing some type of an oral presentation), students are coming to the speaking center to learn and practice interviewing skills. Native English speakers not only come to varnish their vowels and clean up their consonants but to address the "twang" that is characteristic of the Georgia region. Non-native speakers are just as intent on improving their speaking skills; they want to build their vocabulary and improve their pronunciation. Last year I tutored students from Mexico, Korea, Viet Nam, Latvia, Nigeria, Ghana, and Japan.

This fall the speaking center has initiated an English Speaking Roundtable during lunchtime. During a conversation with six Japanese students who were making appointments for individual tutoring it became apparent that in addition to speech work, they really wanted to practice their English conversation with other English speakers. I first heard of the "English Table" concept from my colleague Rob Russell of East Tennessee State University while attending the NWCA conference this past spring. Rob and I shared a discussion panel entitled "Tutoring Oral Communication In (and Out) of the Writing Center," along with David Dedo of Samford University. The participants in the roundtable are excited about the

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## A Month in a New Writing Center Vineyard:

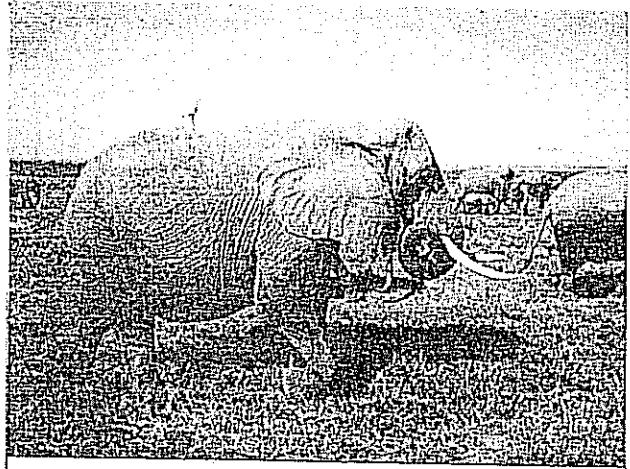
"But the trouble is," explained Hermine, "that even when you and the client really want to focus on ideas or the assignment, sometimes your language skills are too unmatched. I mean, I can have a basic conversation in Zulu, and most of my clients can talk about their class in some sort of English. But when you're talking about the writing, I only have concepts in English (or maybe Afrikaans), and they've never seen anything written in Zulu anyway. But they aren't ready for University language. So we resort to grammar out of context, but it doesn't help."

Thus spoke a senior peer writing consultant at University of the Western Cape (UWC), a traditionally "colored" university now accepting black and white students as well. Facing financial limitations, a history of inferior schooling for the nonwhite majority, and the national imperative for "redressing" past inadequacies, South Africa's post-apartheid writing centers are struggling to become the comfort zones their clients so desperately need. As a visiting consultant at UWC last spring, I found the stunning beauties of Cape Town (and the Western Cape) mirrored the stunning commitment of students and faculty alike.

At first I was apprehensive. Indeed, the very logistics of arranging my visit were complicated. For one thing, the regular breakdown of UWC's e-mail facilities rendered our communications partial and disjointed. Moreover, a massive peaceful protest of students desperate for an education but unable to pay their bills distracted the entire university during the time of my planning. Yet upon my arrival, I was struck at once by the friendliness of students who had never heard of the writing center but refused just to send me on my way. Keeping us talking, they ran around seeking directions. "You will not mind if I accompany you," a sociology major finally suggested. "If I give you directions, you would perhaps be lost. And my directions would not be certain."

Eventually we found the center, where peer writing consultants struggled to hold consultations in the midst of computer sessions. They paused at once to greet us and send for Showhaal, an administrative assistant who had been working in the coordinator's

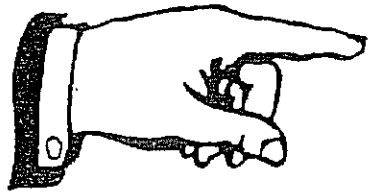
office. Herein lay the first problem: the writing center facilities were spread over small locales in two different buildings, while academic support was housed in yet another. Andrea Parkinson, the center's able coordinator, was on leave finishing her thesis, but in her office I was shown the center's impressive documents, which reflected a thorough knowledge of writing center pedagogy.



A herd of elephants in the Serengeti moves serenely toward water, unconcerned by our fragile safari vehicle a few feet away.

Someone phoned Andrea, who would be back at work the following week. When I asked what I could do first to help her, she decided to come in at once. The next day she told me the source of my contacts' initial hesitancy: the fifth or sixth American "specialist" to visit the Center, I was the first to ask for a task. As the others had presented their cards, talked briefly, and gone off to see the sights of Cape Town, her expectations were small. Within two days I was given an office, a computer, and an e-mail address. Over the next month I offered workshops and training sessions, met with administrators, taught some graduate students how to write up their impressive research on consulting practices, critiqued Andrea's thesis-in-process, and held private meetings with faculty. I was even given contacts with other writing centers and twice drove to Stellenbosch University to help the English department develop their center's plans for an immersion program for newly admitted black students.

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# What's the Point?

In September when I e-mailed Christine Cozens about the possibility of doing a column for *Southern Discourse* on the strange and tragical history of punctuation, I never dreamed she would leap on the idea so quickly. Her response reminded me of Jesse Ventura taking down a Minnesota senator.

"Peter, I love it!" she e-mailed back. "I'm sure we can come up with some kind of cool graphic for you, and all of us could brighten our teaching thanks to your column."

"Brighten our teaching," I mused, beginning to appreciate my own creativity. Her positive language had me in a headlock.

Over the next few days I wrestled with the idea of doing it or not doing it. To no avail, however: I was pinned to the mat. So here a month later is column number one on the meaning and history of *pointing*.

The use of the word *punctuation* to mean clarifying a piece of writing by inserting various marks between words is a fairly recent development. Even before Chaucer it was called *pointing*, and as late as 1899, *Notes & Queries* declared that abbreviations should be indicated by "a full-point." The word *point* survives today in *exclamation point*, and in numbers like 2.5, in which the period is read "point." The title of this column is a play on words between the pop culture phrase, "What's the point?" and the long-standing use of the word *point* to mean *punctuation*.

According to the *OED*, the word *point* originally had several meanings: "that which is pricked, a prick, a dot, a point in writing, a point in space, a point of time . . ." But one sense of the word in the Middle Ages was to pierce, to create a minute hole. From this image came the impression of a dot, or, in its now-obsolete form, "a minute hole or impression made by pricking; a prick, a puncture." Refined a bit more, it

became "a minute mark on the surface, of the size or appearance of a fine puncture; a dot, a minute spot or speck."

This "dot" became the mark used to indicate a full vocal stop. Chaucer used it this way in 1389 in the couplet ending the *Yeoman's Tale*: "And þer a poynt, for ended is my tale;/ God send euery trewe man boote of his bale." In this passage Chaucer was creating a double-entendre, since the "poynt" was both a visible mark ending the written tale and a point in time indicating the end of the story.

But the words *point* and *punctuation* are not really as discrete as they seem. In Latin the English word *point* is *punctum*. Furthermore, historical spellings and pronunciations indicate a close relationship between the two, as in *poynct* and *point* from the 1600s.

The "full-stop" mentioned in *Notes & Queries* is a reminder that "pointing" was until recently a way to reflect in written language the natural vocal pauses occurring in speech. In 1589 Thomas Nashe in the *An Anatomie of Absurdities* spoke of the "pause of a ful point," by which he meant that the voice should stop at the period.

The point is that the original point of pointing was to reflect the spoken word rather than grammatical relationships. Today, however, punctuation is tied to traditional grammar rules. The 14th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* lists fifty-nine rules and conditions governing the use of the comma, a number daunting to even the most dedicated absolutist. Confronted with an esoteric vocabulary, complex linguistic relationships, and points deducted from their essays for rule infractions, is it any wonder that students sometimes convey an attitude that seems to ask, "What's the point?"

Peter M. Carriere  
Georgia State University

## SWCA Board and Members Meet in July to Plan 2000 Conference

From July 14-16, SWCA officers and other interested members of the organization traveled to Savannah (at their own expense) for a retreat and board meeting to discuss the upcoming conference and other items relevant to the organization. Thanks to Glenda Conway of Montevallo University, a small beach house was obtained at Tybee Island, Georgia, which accommodated most of the group. On Friday evening Glenda cooked up a great dinner of fresh fish and other delicious goodies, and on Saturday Christina Van Dyke of Armstrong Atlantic State University hosted the group for lunch in Savannah to discuss the conference. The charming house and proximity to the beach and the opportunity to get together a second time during the year created an atmosphere of community that strengthened our resolve to support SWCA through active leadership. Phillip Gardner, Vice President, hopes that this will be the first of many such planning meetings when members of the SWCA who are interested in supporting the organization may assist in structuring its future.

On Saturday, Christina Van Dyke arranged for a tour of the conference facilities at the DeSoto Hilton Hotel in downtown Savannah where the next SWCA Conference will be held. Discussion followed regarding the activities of the conference, scheduled for February 3-5, 2000. Spacious meeting rooms and elegant decor promise to provide a professional and pleasant setting. The conference theme, "Vision and Revision: A Renaissance within the Writing Center," will be carried through in the conference topics as well as in the cultural activities that will be available to attendees in beautiful, historic Savannah. Many opportunities still exist for those who wish to help with the conference as organizers, moderators, and recorders for the conference proceedings. Questions about volunteering, the call for papers, and other information should be directed to Christina Van Dyke (christina\_vandyke@mailgate.armstrong.edu).

### SWCA Elections to be Held at the February Conference!

Submit your nominations for the positions of president, vice-president, and secretary to Christina Van Dyke (christina\_vandyke@mailgate.armstrong.edu).

Nominations will be accepted until December 20.

All SWCA members are eligible for nomination.

Tom Waldrep and Brian Moten of the Medical University of South Carolina reported on the revenue, expenses, attendance, and evaluation forms from the SWCA 1999 conference in Charleston, which by all accounts was a rousing success. One hundred and sixty-four registrants supported and attended the conference, with 51 presentations. Tom and Brian are assisting Christina as needed with planning for the 2000 conference; they had numerous useful suggestions to make regarding organizational details.

In addition to a discussion of the conference, the board considered several other topics. Christine Cozzens, editor of *Southern Discourse* (the SWCA newsletter), reported on the costs of producing the newsletter for the last two years and requested additional monies for the next two-year period. Her request was granted. Several members suggested that an intensive membership drive take place during the coming months, culminating in an end to all free subscriptions for nonmembers.

Karl Fornes has taken over the treasurer's job and reported on the new banking and federal tax arrangements.

Karl also volunteered to chair a nominating committee for the revival of the SWCA service award. Tom Waldrep and Glenda Conway will assist him in developing guidelines for nomination and selection. Phillip Gardner will be contacting other members who may be interested in being on the committee. The award will be presented at the February 2000 conference.

Members attending the Saturday meeting were:

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## Writing Center Vineyard

- continued from page 4 -

In all of this I encountered repeatedly the enormity of the task: providing university access to students so long denied an equal education that "redress" is both a pressing expectation and an undertaking for which funding is woefully limited. A staggering array of linguistic complications are evident: eleven official languages, a basically oral tradition, education-hungry university students who never even saw textbooks during the era of apartheid. I found writing centers operating without funds, extremely well-read peer tutors, and a deeply felt understanding of collaboration emerging directly from tribal consciousness. What I gave in my exchanges with these amazing people was a matter of translation: applying the theories they'd read and absorbed to the practical interactions of a busy writing center.



Twila Papay (left) and Andrea Parkerson (UWC Writing Centre Coordinator, right) with peer tutors Hermine Engel, Chernay Arendse, Angel Mzoneli, and Janine Turner.

Equally amazing in light of the challenges our South African counterparts face is the number of issues they share with Americans and their surprise in discovering the parallels. Beki, for example, explained that his clients wanted him to see them in the history lounge and not to mention them in the center's statistics, for fear someone would consider them stupid for seeking help. Yet the center's tenuous survival from year to year, based on a grant from the Desmond Tutu Foundation,

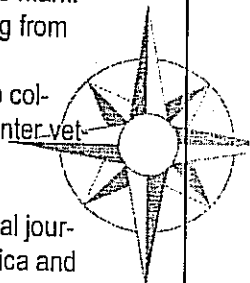
demands hard proof of quantity as well as quality support provided. In the eleven-language writing center, then, one faces not only the question of which language to converse in, but the usual issues we all encounter: content versus grammar, curricular needs, attitudinal problems, and shifting expectations.

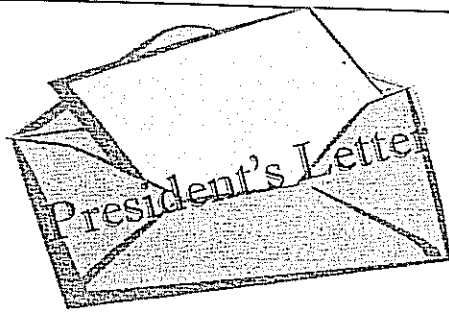
In short, my month in Cape Town allowed me to observe new levels of writing center complexity, as well as lovely examples of multicultural community. I heard stories of the antiapartheid struggle, met people of color who had been separated from family members because skin tone or marriage had led to reclassification or eviction from neighborhoods and schools. I learned to enjoy the multiplicity of accents and the embarrassed laughter of students discovering that because of language or accent differences their perceptions of a class assignment were widely off the mark. I helped sort out personality conflicts emerging from Myers Briggs type variations linked to cultural misassumptions. And I told my own stories to colleagues hungry for practical links to writing center veterans.

Of course, in my five-month sabbatical journey I traveled everywhere I could in South Africa and beyond, photographing animals and marveling at the geology of a continent so vast. But that is another story to be told another time. Back at Rollins I've begun work on a service learning course to take peer writing consultants to Cape Town, where they can easily become part of the solution to postapartheid education.

But if you're reading these words, don't wait for someone to arrange your own role in this amazing evolution of a culture. If you can get a grant, if you can beg or borrow the funds, if you can find a way to travel, the rest is easy. Your skills are needed, your collaborations welcome. There is great power and beauty in South African communities gradually evolving into a greater whole. So, too, the writing centers—comfort zones floating on a sea of good will, awaiting support, awaiting colleagues.

Twila Yates Papay  
Rollins College





## Writing Center Legacies

No one works in a writing center forever: any peer writing consultant can tell you that. After all, one of the glories of our profession is how the students pass their work on over generations. In a time of consolidation, though, other forces are at work beyond the happy one of graduation. From around the country—including the Southeast—we hear of centers diminished, their functions turned over to student service staff without the education, experience, or vision to use the power of peers. The thought of all those lost skills and opportunities is distressing.

And yet, as I promised my own students when our center was blended with a host of other services and the level of consultation declined, that which we create is never lost. To Tokyo and Arlington, Orlando and Erie, Boston and Tampa, Washington and Bern, Rio de Janeiro and other locales around the globe, our work at Rollins has spread, as former peer writing consultants in many disciplines report that the lives of students they're now working with are being touched, transformed, altered by the power of community in learning. This is the legacy passed on.

But let's not be overly dramatic; the personnel and practices of any particular center will be changing anyway. So it's not all bad news, perhaps, that writing center directors come and go. What we'd like, certainly, is to hire new specialists out of graduate school as long-struggling directors move into other positions, freeing more of their time for teaching and writing. Any program of such dimensions as our writing centers needs new eyes to peer through new lenses.

Still, as we witness less happy redirections, I'd like us to remember the power of negotiation, and the possibility that departments and programs may speak up to preserve some of what all writing centers have created. As individuals, as a profession, we can all help by contacting administrations where we know writing centers may be in jeopardy, and also by letting the

public know more about what we do. We need informed students and parents out there asking prospective colleges to describe their peer tutoring programs. I recommend that we publish the truths of writing centers in our local communities and not just in professional journals.

And for those of us (like myself and Steve Braye and a host of others) who have moved back into full-time teaching and writing, I think there's a larger mission. I see the need to write the work in which I've been so immersed, to document for a larger audience to expand what my student and faculty collaborators have taught me. The community we built in our writing center had some spectacular results over the years, including the evolution of a power base so firmly entrenched in the linked values of head and heart that a hierarchical administrator might see it as a danger to more orderly and controlling views. Writing centers, after all, are often based on feminist pedagogical models. Shared power and individual control transform those who work there.

This sort of collaborative learning is much larger even than the writing centers that point the way. Our obligation, I think, is to argue for the empowerment of every student through collaborations that transform. Such collaborations appear to produce the same powers and practices that make students and citizens come to value the other, the diverse. These practices lead to connectedness, to love. On sabbatical in Africa last spring, I encountered and promoted these same values at the University of the Western Cape and was delighted to learn about tribal collaborations in the contemporary world.

So we're far from alone in our faith in collaborative learning. That's the writing center legacy.

Twila Yates Papay  
Rollins College



## NWCA President Eric Hobson to Give Keynote at Savannah Conference

He has redefined the mission of the National Writing Centers Association. He has edited a book that has won the distinction of the 1999 NWCA Research Award. And you'll catch a glimpse of him at the February 2000 SWCA conference in Savannah—he will be the keynote speaker. For most of the decade, NWCA President for 1998-1999 Eric Hobson has invested his time and soul in the instruction, advancement, and discussion of effective writing. Formerly writing center director and coordinator of writing center programs at both Saint Louis College of Pharmacy and Southwest Missouri State University, Hobson is currently associate professor of humanities at Albany College of Pharmacy in New York. Although a pharmaceutical school may seem an odd place for a writer, Eric has made his mark by showing others that writing is applicable to everything from technical compositions to commonplace communication.

In this technological-driven era, Hobson has exposed hundreds of people to the appropriateness of discussing and improving writing through the use of computers and the internet. His book, *Wiring the Writing Center (1998)*, is a compilation of various perspectives on the advantages of and approaches to integrating technology with writing centers. "The motivation for the book was largely serendipitous," says Hobson. It began with a recurring conversation between Hobson and Michael Spooner, Director of Utah State University Press, about what kind of book it would take to create a market, a saleable niche, to justify the development of written material for writing center personnel. Curiously, Hobson claims to be "a cyber-skeptic on a lot of levels," but not on this one. His book contributes significantly to the dialogue on the theory and application of technology in writing centers and encourages collaboration and communication about the topic. Since technological information becomes dated so quickly, Hobson completed the entire book, from conceptualization to finished product in a mere 18 months. Even more impressive is the number of copies sold so far: Hobson says, "I'm very enthusiastic about the community's embrace of [the book]."

As daunting a task as editing *Wiring* has been Hobson's term as NWCA president. His involvement in NWCA's executive board began in 1992 when he became a member at large. During his presidency he has established a grant budget to encourage research, pio-



Eric Hobson, keynote speaker for the 2000 SWCA Conference.

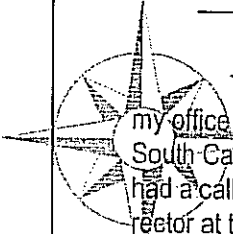
neered the first newsletter exclusively for NWCA members, and instituted a six-year presidential rotation system to instill more continuity in the board. But Hobson's biggest challenge has been to create a mission statement for the association: "You go back and look at the history of [NWCA] to see why we are here, and you conclude that we seem to simply exist to exist and to hold a conference.

But we paint ourselves as larger and more productive. I have tried to truly articulate what the mission is—it's not political, it may not even be pedagogical. It's probably social." Hobson dubs NWCA as the "Academic Club Med," a place where members new to the writing center community can come to a safe, supportive place to talk with like-minded people and then go away recharged. "That's invaluable. We just need to sell us as we are."

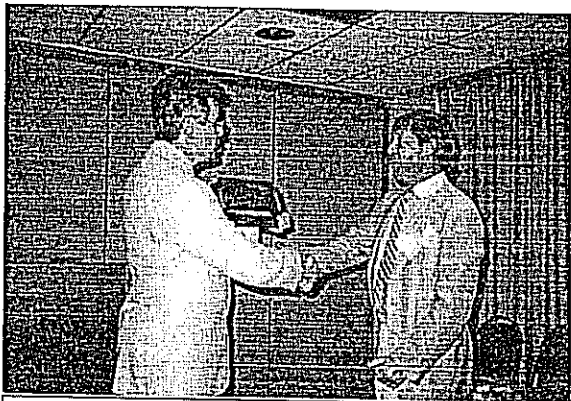
And about that keynote speech—will any of these ideas be the focus? "Well, I can't seem to shake it, this idea of the maturation of organizations," says Hobson, "but if I do concentrate on that, I need to find a way to make it upbeat. I don't want to be talking at people, because a keynote can get rather boring, especially after lunch when your stomach is full. It's going to be very interactive." And since Hobson's very first conference presentation was at an SWCA conference in Knoxville in the late '80s, the meeting in Savannah will surely be a special homecoming for him.

Kristen Toth  
Agnes Scott College

## Memories...the Way We Were: An SWCA Founder Looks Back at the First Meeting



Twenty years ago this month I was sitting in my office in the Writing Center at the University of South Carolina when the secretary buzzed me to say I had a call from Dr. Gary Olson, the writing center director at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Since Alabama was my home state and the University my alma mater, I eagerly took the call. Dr. Olson introduced himself and began telling me of his ideas to have a southeastern writing center meeting, maybe one where writing center directors could come together and talk about our place in the academy, share ideas and expertise, tell each other "what works for me," and begin a network in our region that would be supportive of each one's efforts. "Will you come and be one of the speakers?" he asked.



Tom Waldrep, one of the original founders of the SWCA, receives the first Annual Achievement Award of the SWCA, in 1987.

I was hesitant. First of all, I had only been in my position as writing center director since July 1. What did I know about the writing center's place in the academy? My place? Did I have any ideas worth sharing? What did work for me, what didn't? I told Gary I would think about this and call him back. I told my graduate students who staffed the center about this proposal. Of course, they thought not only should there be a meeting, but also that all of us should attend. I asked what could I say. What are we doing that others are not? What ideas and expertise could

we offer other writing centers in the southeast? They promised to brainstorm. "We'll help you with this; call Olson and tell him you'll do it." I did.

Olson organized the meeting and on February 7, 1981, the meeting was held at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. Speakers included Karen Spear from the University of Utah, Linda Bannister from the University of Arkansas, Tilly Eggers (Warnock) from the University of Wyoming, and Loretta Cobb from Montevallo State University.

Some excerpts from the text of my address, yellow, worn, frayed, pulled from my files, follow.

"Today our colleagues are calling for 'writing across the curriculum. . . .' Recently in the writing center at the university of South Carolina I sat with a senior student in our honors college whose history professor had told him, "Young man, if you don't learn to write a sentence before this semester is over, I'm going to fail you." This student, baffled, dismayed and distraught, had sought help in the writing center to learn sentence development. Is this an uncommon incident? Probably not. Just recently I told my dean at USC that we could not continue to graduate students supposedly trained to be teachers, engineers, nurses, accountants, etc. who cannot speak the language, much less read or write it. I had gathered my statistics before talking to him and found that during the fall semester the staff members and I had seen 842 students in one-to-one tutorials and 422 students in workshops, a large number of whom were preparing for the screening exam, an exit test for the seniors in the College of Education. When I learned that forty-five percent of all the seniors failed this examination in the first administration, that ninety percent of this forty five percent failed the writing section of the exam, and that it was these students who in a few weeks would be applying to teach in the elementary and secondary schools of South Carolina, I realized it was time for action.

Every teacher must be a teacher of writing, and all teachers from kindergarten to graduate school should accept the challenge to teach literacy. We, as college instructors, have blamed the high school teachers, and the high school teachers have blamed the elementary teachers, and the elementary teachers have blamed the parents, and the parents have blamed the home life and television. And we, as freshmen English instructors, have asked the freshmen directors, who have asked the department chairpersons, who in turn have asked the deans and vice-presidents, who in turn have asked the omniscient body—the state legislature—who supposedly can solve all problems - to solve the literacy problem. This body readily gives to all the solution: accountability through competencies. And as someone else has said, competency is somehow always equated to a test score. This is not the answer. Mandated standards will not teach students to be literate. Mandated standards will not do the task for us.

The 1980s is a time to face this realization head-on. We, as educators, as humanitarians, must... look closely at the successful student, whether he is in our classes presently or a dropout of the sixties and seventies. We must study and prepare a method that will make this person literate. We must implement holistic writing programs that stress both the basic and efficient uses of language. Such a program will provide the service we all want our writing centers to provide—and that service is literacy for all. . . . Being literate is being able to use language efficiently and effectively. Holistic literacy, as Winston Weathers has so aptly points out, is

a cultural and spiritual quest: toward verbal health, completeness, fulfillment. It is taking hold of the word, the whole word: it is the mutability of language, the flow...holistic literacy: an act of tolerance, sympathy, compassion, stepping closer to hear, making the best of it all, turning on lights, adjusting the lens, bending... the moral and ethical orientation; not afraid to fail; being gentle with imperfection; repeating ourselves again and again.

And the writing center must concern itself with all of this. . . . The writing center must offer a pragmatic articulation with the secondary public and private schools and two-year community and technical colleges in the state. The writing center must provide: aid for the students deficient in composition skills; aid for minority and

disadvantaged students. . . .

But the writing center must be more than a remedial service station, a band-aid station for papers due tomorrow. It must be more than the old developmental labs of the past where a peer tutor handed a student an English 3200 and told him to do the frames in this programmed text. The writing center, to provide real, worthwhile service, must reach back to the lower schools and into the community to get at some of the sources of writing problems we see in our freshmen English classes. . . .

Writing centers can provide off-campus and in-the-center teaching sessions and assistance for all levels of classes and teachers—in the university and throughout the state—through consultations, presentations, in-service programs, speeches, panels, workshops, and minicourses. . . .

*The writing center must be more than a remedial service station, a band-aid station for papers due tomorrow. It must be more than the old developmental labs of the past.*

The writing center needs not only to reach back but to reach beyond to the numerous citizens who are functionally illiterate. . . .

Extending the writing center beyond the remedial or developmental English program, beyond the student population to the community is work. It takes organization and preparation. It takes effervescent enthusiasm that fosters spontaneous creativity; such enthusiasm will hopefully spread throughout your whole department, the whole university, into the community. We know it can; we have seen this happen in Carolina. Our goal is holistic literacy: communication from one mind to another. And as Winston Weathers has said, 'All...involves our will, our good intention, our wanting it to happen. And, of course, our craftsmanship, our skill, our technique, our rhetoric, our style.' Holistic literacy will require energy: intellectual, spiritual, and social. Do we have it?"

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# Tutors' Stories

## Auburn Consultants Bring Reading into the Writing Process

At Auburn University, approximately one-third of all our English Center consultations involve students from the core literature survey classes (Great Books). In addition to writing issues such as organization or thesis development that many students need help with, many of the Great Books students have a problem that needs to be addressed before they even begin writing their papers: their reading skills. These Great Books students cannot read their assigned texts effectively. As a result, their thesis statements are often unarguable, and the bodies of their papers rarely amount to more than nicely phrased plot summaries. In addition, they are unable to select effective quotations because they fail to see the relevance of the passages. Worse, because Great Books students are at least sophomores, they are expected to be able to read well; when they cannot, they have few options for assistance.

Our consultants all have strong backgrounds in writing. Many are GTAs (graduate teaching assistants) who teach their own classes. Others are upper-level undergraduates who have excellent writing skills. Our experiences with tutoring Great Books students have shown us that writing skills may no longer be enough for successful sessions. Because of this, we are trying something new this year. In addition to the regular training sessions all new consultants are required to attend, we are adding five new sessions for both new and experienced consultants. These training sessions will be devoted to helping consultants work with Great Books students more effectively and will specifically address how we can use reading strategies that will eventually contribute to improved writing.

Because this is something new for us, before the training began we were a little nervous. Since these sessions aren't mandatory, we didn't know if anyone would even show up. We've had the first one, and based on this, our hopes are high that the entire

series will be a success. During the first session, we talked about some of the most common problems consultants encountered when working with Great Books students. Experienced consultants shared strategies they used when confronted with a paper that was primarily plot summary, that didn't have an arguable thesis, or that had been written by a student who didn't understand the text. New consultants asked questions, and everyone walked away having learned something.

The next three training sessions will continue to be discussion oriented and hands-on, but will focus more specifically on reading. One will look at reading strategies for poetry, one will be on the novel and short fiction, and one will look at drama. The last session will link reading strategies with assignment sheets and will give consultants suggestions for teaching reading strategies based on these assignments. We hope that all four of these sessions will mirror the first one and that everyone will not only learn something new but will also be willing to share his or her own experiences.

While our hopes are high that the remaining four Great Books training sessions will be as successful as the first, we are still thinking of them as experiments. Wish us luck, and we'll let you know how the rest of them work out.

Catherine Ramsdell  
Auburn University

## The Other Side of Tutoring

I must confess. Before I applied to be a tutor, I had never set foot in the writing center. The writing center was a wonderful thing—for those who needed it—but I could write well, thank you very much, and I didn't need a tutor.

Suddenly, however, my perception of the writing center changed. I was hired, trained, and indoctrinated with the idea that even good writers could benefit from tutoring. I could accept this theory easily, but I also had to act upon it, since every tutor at Agnes Scott must also come to the center for tutoring. I had to cross to the other side of tutoring.

My first step to the other side of tutoring was an emergency. Halfway through a paper for Early American Writers, I was lost in a tangle of loosely related ideas. My insight into Poe's short stories faded, and I felt like the

opium-addled narrator of "Ligeia." Sensing a serious case of writer's block, I wondered if perhaps I needed to be tutored. I brought my draft to Laura, a senior tutor. She forced me to discuss everything in my paper, then showed me how my tear-soaked draft could say the same things I was telling her. After one session my thesis was more focused, my ideas were better organized, and I knew that finishing the paper was more than a distant fantasy.

### *Being tutored helps me grow as a student and a tutor.*

Now, in my third year of being tutored, I enjoy the times when I see the writing center from the other side. I have discovered that tutors tutor each other with verbal shorthand, since talking about writing comes naturally and we share a common vocabulary. Often, because I have been trained to look for writing problems in papers, moving beyond superficial errors to communicate my ideas becomes difficult. I need another experienced reader to help me pull back from the writing and examine my thought process and organization. Other times, I just need someone to listen to my ideas as I develop them. A tutor, unlike my distracted roommates, gives me undivided attention and thoughtful comments. And I always benefit from being tutored during the final revisions of a paper, when only another person can notice what is unclear.

Being tutored also helps me grow as a tutor. By going to other tutors, I learn other tutoring styles that I can use in my conferences with students. I also am reminded of the tutee's fear of embarrassment. Experiencing the other side of tutoring helps me be more sensitive to making students comfortable in the tutorial.

In many ways, my growth as a tutored student mirrors that of many students who come to the writing center. At first resistant to the idea of tutoring for myself, I have learned the true value of discussing writing. Because of my experiences as a student in the student-tutor relationship, I have a deeper knowledge of what it means to be tutored, of what the writing center should do, and of how to be a better tutor.

Lee Hayes  
Agnes Scott College

## Memories

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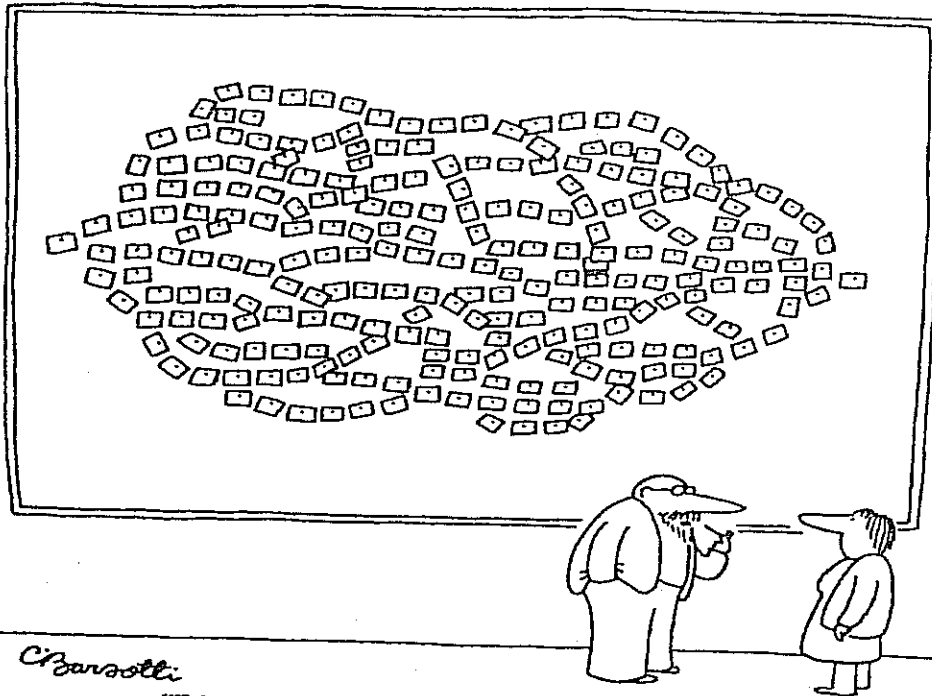
Thus, the Southeastern Writing Center Association was born on February 7, 1981. One year later many of the same group returned to Tuscaloosa to hold the second annual meeting. Gary Olson served as conference director and president of the organization for the first two years. Following Olson, I served as conference director and president in 1983 and 1984, moving the meeting to Columbia, SC to my university. In the following years, annual meetings were held in Charleston and Mobile, Birmingham and Atlanta, Washington D.C. and Knoxville, and a number of other southeastern cities.

The Southeastern Writing Center Association was up and coming. It had instituted in 1986 (in Mobile) the Annual Achievement Award given "in recognition of outstanding professional service to the community of specialists who direct and staff writing centers." The organization honored me with that first award, and in 1987 it was given to Art Young from Clemson University. In 1988 the award went to Joe Trimmer from Ball State University.

I am delighted that at the 2000 meeting in February the award will be reinstated with a cash prize and a plaque. I cherish the plaque, which hangs in my office today as a reminder of writing centers' place in the academy and my own place and history with this organization, to which I truly give credit for so much of my own professional growth and strength.

Come to Savannah in February. Start building your own memories and continue your journey toward a future in which you can look back and remember the way we were.

Tom Waldrep  
Medical University of South Carolina



*Charles Barsotti*

*"It's plotted out. I just have to write it."*

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### Speaking Center

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program. We have already outgrown our roundtable and are planning to expand to include a dinner hour session.

Even with the success of our speaking center, we are still experiencing growing pains. For instance, we are always looking for new ways to make sure that all faculty members are aware of what we do and know we can assist their classes with oral presentations. It is also a challenge to get our very busy students to slow down, stop by, and make an appointment. After all, we tell them, using the resources of the Center for Writing and Speaking is an investment in their future.

Veronica Henson-Phillips  
Agnes Scott College

### SWCA Meeting in July

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Phillip Gardner, Vice President; Christine Cozzens, *Southern Discourse* Editor; Brian Moten and Tom Waldrep, 1999 Conference Director; Christina Van Dyke and Bob Parham from Armstrong Atlantic State University, this year's conference host; Glenda Conway, Montevallo University; Karl Fornes, Treasurer; and Marcy Trianosky, Hollins University.

If you are interested in taking part in SWCA activities, please contact Twila Yates Papay (tpapay@rollins.edu) or Phillip Gardner (pgardner@fmarion.edu). We need your help to sustain and build on the momentum created at our July meeting.

Marcy Trianosky  
Hollins 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

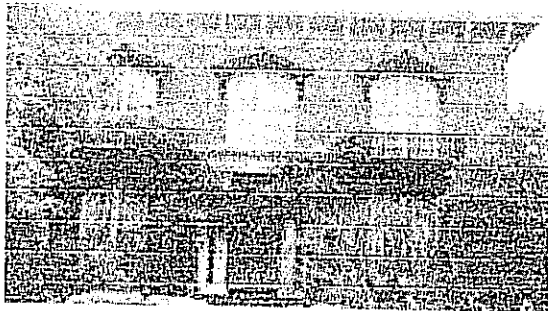
### Mail this form to

Peggy Ellington  
Wesleyan Writing Lab  
4760 Forsyth  
Macon, GA 31210

## 2000 Conference in Savannah

The first SWCA Conference of the new millennium (or the last of the old) is rapidly approaching. February 3-5, 2000, writing center professionals from across the southeast will meet in Savannah, GA.

In addition to discussing topics related to this



Historic homes like this one line Savannah's squares.

year's theme, "Vision and Revision: A Renaissance within the Writing Center," conference-goers will have ample opportunity to explore the historic city of Savannah. Armstrong Atlantic State University's tutors have planned several activities for peer tutors to enjoy Savannah nightlife. Conference director Christina Van Dyke has arranged cultural activities and outings for all SWCA attendees. This conference promises to fulfill Eric Hobson's estimation of writing center associations as both professional and social organizations.

To attend the conference, call the DeSoto Hilton at 1-800-445-8667. Single and double rates are \$109.00 plus 12% tax per night. The cut-off date for registration at this price is December 31, 1999.

In the words of Christine Cozzens, "Don't miss this conference!"

# Southern Discourse

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