

# Southern Discourse

Newsletter of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



Summer 2000

Volume 3, Issue 3



## Free to Revolutionize (or Evolutionize?): Our Writing Center in the Year 2000

When Thomas Jefferson wrote "Where they are free to think, speak, and write, they will declare themselves," he could not have known that he would strike a chord in the hearts of writing center tutors in a small land-grant university in west Georgia in the twenty-first century. But strike his words did, and they have become our theme in the always evolving writing center at the State University of West Georgia in Carrollton.

In 1995, with the planning of a Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement underway in the College of Arts and Sciences, Dean Richard Miller, Associate Dean Pauline Gagnon, Dr. Rob Snyder and Dr. Judy Halden-Sullivan (both of the English Department) realized that the foundation of a good Writing Across the Curriculum program is a good writing center. They also knew that the current center was not up to par: a good WAC writing center needs a full-time director, more tutors, better facilities, and much support from the entire College of Arts and Sciences. In the spring of 1996, I was named director, and I began plans for a philosophical and physical renovation of the former Writing Lab.

My first step was to update the physical location of the center from a dark, dank old classroom filled with books published in the 1970s and 1980s-vintage computers. That summer, through special funds allocated for semester conversion, we received much needed money for new computers, equipment, books, and supplies.

My next challenge was to find, choose, and train tutors who were knowledgeable about writing, and who were also creative, caring, and congenial. As we studied and talked, we began to envision a place where students from all disciplines could discuss writing with friendly, knowledgeable tutors. We felt, however, that the writing center should not be a refuge just for students; it should also offer faculty from across the college a place to meet and discuss writing.

That fall, my new peer tutors and I began to advertise the center's presence, mission, and services to students and faculty. Our continuing goals are to inform everyone in the university community that the writing center strives to help all students see writing as a tool for learning and to make students of any major comfortable with the process of writing a paper. But we also wanted to achieve WAC goals: to help students make the connections between writing to learn and writing to communicate and to assist their journey from first to last draft in that writing project comfortably and successfully, whether for a professor or an employer.

In the winter of 1997, we moved from that formerly dank classroom (which we had turned into a cheery room filled with plants and art) to a larger lecture hall space with blue (as opposed to orange) carpet, twelve computers, internet connectivity, and a phone! We covered the walls with art, sponge painted a Van Gogh starry night on one wall, and brought in couches and a nice big wing chair. We began our habit of burning candles and brewing nice teas and coffees to fill the air with homey touches.

-continued on page 5-

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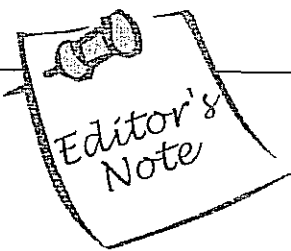
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## Writing Under Pressure

The last two issues of *Southern Discourse* were produced under perilous conditions. Just as we were about to put together the Spring issue, our Information Technology Services inadvertently wiped the hard drive that held the template and all past issues (not to mention all the writing center's files). Yes, we had a back-up—two of them, or so we thought—but no one could find either one. After ten days of terror and frantic searching, we were able to scrounge copies of most of the missing files and get back in business, but some things were lost forever. ITS then set us up with a new, foolproof system—a network drive that contains other vital college files and is backed up automatically everyday. The copies are even stored off campus—in case of fire, I presume, or other possible disasters. We thought we were safe until just as we were about to put together the Summer issue, the I LOVE YOU virus struck the campus and put that drive temporarily out of reach. Fortunately, we eventually found a way to carry on while the drive was disinfected.

To most of us editors and writers, students and teachers, writing under pressure is nothing new. With our backs against the wall—confronted by deadlines or computer disasters, or sudden, unforeseen necessity—we may even do our best work. In this issue, Twila Yates Papay asks us to accept the reality of work completed hours before the deadline. She has good reason to ponder this subject. With the Spring issue coming so late and final exams, annual reports, and other end-of-the-year responsibilities piling up, *Southern Discourse's* columnists and contributors—and its editor—were all caught off guard by the May 1 first deadline for the summer issue. We may have had problems accessing the newsletter's template last week, but a more serious problem was the absence of copy to fill the issue.

An eleventh hour reminder brought responses from our columnists in a remarkably short time. A call to the SWCA board turned into a couple of the year's best articles. And a few other miracles—including some very long stints at the computer by my assistant editor Caroline Murnane—resulted in the issue you now hold in your

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

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

Fall 2000: October 1st  
Spring 2001: March 1st  
Summer 2001: May 1st

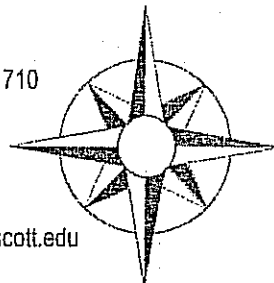
hands. To paraphrase King Lear, something did come of nothing.

When I worked in the Expository Writing Program at Harvard, the director Richard Marius used to remind all of us on the staff that "Writers write." This issue is proof of that maxim. It might also be taken as proof of writers' abilities to reach down inside themselves and find words for ideas worth hearing, even when that act may have seemed impossible. Many thanks to those whose heroic efforts under all kinds of pressure helped *Southern Discourse* go to press this spring.

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## Kukujumuku A tribute to the SWCA

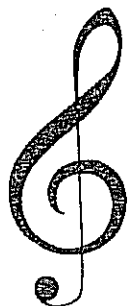
The title of this song by Jerry Mwagbe of Morris Brown College is taken from the Mende language of West Africa. His translation: "If you're not within, how can you have a gist of what's going on?" Or, in Liberian English: "If you are not inside, you don't know it." Jerry performed the song on his guitar at the SWCA Conference in Savannah in February.

Kukujumuku

We do all the hard work, when no one else wants to do so  
Although it has taken us two scores years, yet we continue to grow  
After all we've tried for these many years  
It's just know we've started to relief your fears  
Kukujumuku

Yeah, I'm talking to the academic community and especially the skeptics  
I mean those who considered us the "tire repair shop"

Those who will not give us the right funding, Yeah, I mean the cynics  
Kukujumuku



Look at what Tom Waldrep has done  
I mean look at Twila and Marcy, the entire SWCA  
The hardworking center directors and innovative tutors  
Transforming the academic milieu of higher education  
Kukujumuku

Can't you see we're completing a metamorphosis?  
From mere writing labs, to writing centers  
We've been there and done that  
Talk about technology, we're right there with you  
Kukujumuku

Computerize? Yeah, we've gone computerized!  
Digital? You bet, we are digital

Most of us have developed into full-blown owls  
Not the hooting bird you all have come to know  
But an electronic online writing lab that transcends geographical and limiting boundaries  
Kukujumuku

Need help with Frost and Descartes  
Or is it the senior research project  
Or you a foreign TA with speech problems  
You name it, we do it- so RESPECT US!!!  
Kukujumuku

Jerry Mwagbe  
Morris Brown College



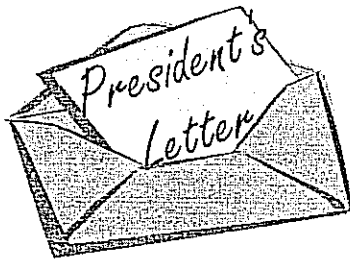
Announcing...  
The SWCA 2001 Conference:  
Collaboration at the Center  
February 16-18, 2001  
Auburn University Conference  
Center  
Auburn, Alabama

Collaboration is at the heart of nearly every activity involving writing centers. If you start to consider all the ways in which writing center people collaborate, your imagination will travel not just to your center, but all over your campus and even beyond.

For instance...

- Tutors collaborate with writing center patrons over course assignments and other written texts.
- Tutors collaborate with one another over their own writing projects and also about their tutoring methods.

-continued on page 14-



Dear SWCA Members,

The Spring 2000 issue of *Southern Discourse* is a wonderful example of the range of issues and diversity of voices that comprise writing center work. I commend Christine Cozzens for prodding us all—in our roles as tutors, teachers, administrators—into expressing our thoughts and revealing our practices with the common goal of improving our writing centers. I would like to join this dialogue by considering the ways in which the Hollins Writing Center, which I direct, has entered the institutional conversation around general education reform, and what this might teach us about the role of writing centers in our institutions.

As I read the article "The Nouveau Poor" by Phillip Gardner and Bill Ramsey in the last issue of *Southern Discourse*, I recognized assumptions about writing center practice and the place of writing centers in our institutions that had been dismantled right here at Hollins. As Phillip and Bill state, writing center theory has often centered on philosophies and strategies of resistance to the academy, sometimes resulting in the very marginalization that we seem to be trying to escape. This leads us to questions crucial to the survival of writing centers: What is the common ground between writing centers and the academy? How can we work within the academy without compromising the principles upon which writing center philosophy and practice are often founded? Phillip and Bill suggest that "the academy invests great energy in developing students' higher order cognitive skills" (6), and that in so doing it is already supporting the spirit of writing center theory and practice. I would like to affirm the validity of this position by sharing my own experiences at Hollins with you.

Like many others at small institutions, I find that my position as writing center director has expanded to include many other writing-related responsibilities. Recently, I was asked by the administration to propose changes in the writing requirement as part of

Hollins' general education reform. This proposal became the catalyst for the first major change in the writing requirement at Hollins in about thirty years. But strengthening the writing requirement was not achieved without struggle, and that struggle has led me to think about how writing centers can and should be an integral part of the curriculum of an institution and what assumptions are sometimes made about the compromises writing centers need to make to position themselves in this way.

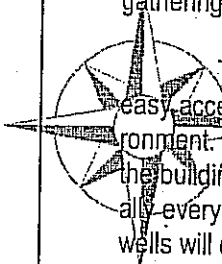
As we all know, in an academic setting any changes to writing requirements inevitably create turf battles that often have more to do with politics than with issues of writing pedagogy. There is a reluctance to change—the inertia of the status quo—that writing centers and writing programs often struggle against. But it was obvious to me during this change process that our writing center needed to be connected to the academic mission of the institution, not just to ensure its viability, but to ensure the kind of student support that a writing center is uniquely positioned to offer. I wondered, though: am I a sellout? How does fitting into a Gen. Ed. program mesh with the idea of a writing center as a site of resistance?

Well, believe me, there was certainly resistance to the changes I proposed! I was moving against the status quo. Inertia was strong. But then came the surprise: the new Gen. Ed. structure and the proposed writing requirement passed with an overwhelming majority of faculty votes. And I realized something about my colleagues: they did get it. They supported me, and they supported the writing center. They rose to the challenge of resisting a program design that had been untouched for three decades. This is just what we often tell ourselves will never happen! But isn't education at its best always about resistance, about constantly reseeing ourselves, our students, our teaching philosophy and our practice? Why should we believe that such resistance is limited to writing centers and their practitioners? Change is always a challenge to the status quo, whether the status quo is represented by administrators or by our own colleagues. And change is based on reflective practice, something that all good teachers incorporate into their teaching, not just those of us who are affiliated with writing centers.

-continued on page 8-

Free to Revolutionize  
-continued from page 1-

Since 1997 we have been working to fulfill the goals stated above, and with a new location in the Technology-Enhanced Learning Center, which will be completed during fall of 2000, the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum will see more plans and goals materialize. The college of Arts and Sciences has integrated state of the art technology into the 110,000 square foot, three floor structure, which will house departments from seemingly disparate disciplines on campus—all joined by their stated commitment to this new technology and to WAC. The core curriculum departments of history, English, computer science, and chemistry will call the "TLC" home. The Writing Center will be located on the first floor, next to computer classrooms and a huge atrium that will be a gathering space for students.



This new building is unique in three areas: easy access, evident technology, and personal environment. With approximately 2600 connections within the building, computer network connections are literally everywhere. Benches placed on the huge stairwells will enable students to use laptops even on the landings.

The technology in the new writing center, along with each classroom and studio in the "TLC," will include a VCR, a SmartBoard, ceiling mount screen, and a SmartPanel audiovisual control system, all of which are easy to operate and will allow faculty to use standard audiovisual systems in any room without the assistance of technicians. The writing center's suite will boast a large L-shaped tutoring space, the director's office, and a conference room, which is similarly equipped with technology and allows for small group workshops and discussion sessions. Televisions outside the center will even declare the "Gospel of Writing" to all who walk by.

One of the most futuristic instructional tools available in the writing center is the SmartBoard. What appears to be a plain white dry erase board is actually a giant mouse controlling the computer image projected to it. Rather than point and click with a traditional mouse, the instructor can just touch the four-by-

five-foot screen to change files, control software or hand write information on the screen and save it to the computer. The information can then be printed for the student, emailed to them, or saved to a web site. In the center and in its conference room, this technology will be available to students, tutors, and faculty through workshops on topics such as constructing an essay or a web site, tutoring on the web, integrating writing into classes, integrating technology or managing technology in classes.

*The writing center's space will boast a large L-shaped tutoring space, the director's office, and a conference room.... Televisions outside the center will even declare the "Gospel of Writing" to all who walk by.*

Through all of these advancements, we strive to hang onto our university's mission statement, "academic excellence in a personal environment," which finds true fulfillment in our writing center. Early each fall and spring, we invite all students and faculty to tour the center either individually or with a class. We want everyone to see that we are nonthreatening and to feel at ease in the center and—sooner or later—to come for writing help.

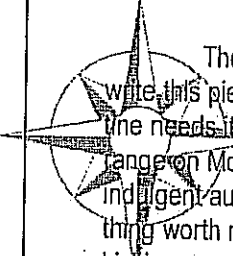
We now employ twelve to twenty tutors per semester, and they are intensely involved in bettering their skills through a tutor training class and program. We have a wonderful, developing web site for students and faculty, plus handouts, computers, and books to help students and faculty learn more about writing. But most important, we offer friendly, knowledgeable, and innovative peer tutoring for every person who wishes to come for writing assistance, from freshmen to grad students, any class, any major.

We think the UWG Writing Center has come a long way since the spring of 1996. We will officially christen the new center at the TLC's dedication on February 24, 2001.

-continued on page 15-

## Writing to Schedule, Right on Time

Announcing: the birth of Eleanor Meredith Young (daughter of Beth and David Young), on Monday May 1, 2000 at 8:49 am. The time of day is not surprising, given that her night owl mother, our own SWCA board member and director of the writing center at the University of Central Florida, so frequently labors into the wee hours with her very best productions. More remarkable to me is how Beth spent the weekend just before her daughter's birth. As the pain increased and excitement surely mounted, Beth completed a series of writing projects, finished off her term's work, prepared her annual reports, and got out her CCCC proposal. (With a week to go before the deadline, mine still meanders about my subconscious.) In short, Beth determined her priorities, figured out what no one else could do, and got it finished in time to head off to the hospital. Now it's Eleanor's time.



There but for the pregnancy go many of us. I ~~wrote this piece on a Sunday evening because Christine needs it on Wednesday and I'll be out of email range on Monday and Tuesday.~~ And I know you're an indulgent audience, but still, I want to give you something worth reading. I even have an idea that's been kicking around for the past month. . . ever since CCCC in early April, to be precise. But I haven't written this piece, and I'd like to argue that's for all the writerly reasons I could cite: I'm a think-write writer, it's been gestating in my head, I've been gathering resources and chatting about it with others, I've been noting my students' practices in the waning days of the term. . . .

Well, all of that is true. But the real reason I sit down to this article just this evening, less than an hour before the fiftieth birthday party of a close friend, is that I've been busy. Over the past month I've written a faculty manual for a new first-year writing program, helped new teaching fellows look for housing, conducted an assessment of this year's students. With the writing center coordinator I've devised an English 101 Enrichment Project. Then there was planning for next week's WAC workshop, a Women's Studies development project, a draft of a new course design. Ahead of all that have come my students. . . papers, portfolios, clubs. (Did I mention search com-

mittees, end-of-term festivities, awards ceremonies?) Sound familiar? On my desk is a pile of would-be writing projects awaiting the summer—too large a pile, too many disparate possibilities.

We are busy; our writing weaves itself around and through and among the pieces of our lives. So too the lives of peer writing consultants, who are busy taking courses, working and worrying, leading campus activities and applying for summer jobs. Why are we surprised, then, when our clients delay their writing? Who in a writing center has never done the same? Granted, some clients may be less skilled, more needy, facing high stakes and the daunting specter of low grades. But they're leading busy lives. Oh, I don't mean to imply here that no students fritter away their days in a thousand ways more creative than what I might invent on this screen before me. Nor do I believe all students are as busy as we. But I do contend that, given their level of development, their inexperience with time management, they are perhaps as busy in their own heads, feeling as great a sense of urgency with little assurance that they really can negotiate the term and emerge with GPA intact. (Not to mention those who actually are working full-time and perhaps giving birth or parenting as well.)

*The question isn't whether six hours is enough. It's how the writer intends to use those hours...and what guidance we can offer that might help.*

Which brings me back to the CCCC session where I began mulling all this over. A new writing center director remarked that her peer consultants wanted to forbid clients from bringing papers to the center less than a week before the due date. This familiar issue brought smiles and nods, along with some reflection on just what can be done for those last-minute writers. Many of us despair of papers we see but an hour before they are due. Others complain of our having to teach a process that faculty neglect to discuss.

-continued on page 7-



## Writing to Schedule -continued from page 6-

Herein lies the crux of the matter. We aren't teachers in the writing center, where we happily avoid such obligations as assessment or the force-feeding of better attitudes! It is, in fact, our focus upon the writer's needs, the writer's intentions, the writer's comfort zone in working with a given paper, that sets us apart and enables us to succeed. We can suggest and cajole. Faculty who want to see better papers can urge students to come in early; those who assign the use of the writing center can specify a deadline in keeping with their intentions. We can propose that they do so. But we can't change the fact that writers are busy, that writing is never particularly tied to the ideal schedule, that papers will be brought to us as late as the writers choose to bring them.

What we can change is our own pattern of response to those papers. "Face it," one director remarked at that CCCC session. "Most of the papers will be coming in six to eight hours before they're due. That's what we have to work with. That's why we so often fail."

Someone else disagreed: "There's a lot you can do with a piece of writing in six hours." She was right. The question isn't whether six hours is enough. It's how the writer intends to use those hours. . .and what guidance we can offer that might help.

What we need, then, is a new pedagogy, based more upon our own experience as writers, as well as the practices of our clients. Of course we want to encourage drafting and revising, rethinking and moving deeper, revisiting and conversing. We want to remark that we wish we had seen the paper sooner, that requesting an extension might be in order, that the paper surely reflects the actual time and effort expended. And certain things cannot be done in six hours—like extensive research or reading the textbook, conferencing with a teacher or workshopping with peers, learning the practices of deep editing or developing the question from which good writing will emerge. But that still leaves us a lot to explore.

What can be done in six hours? (Or four? Or three?) A paper can be restructured, especially after a

conversation on focus and thesis, the distinction between idea and evidence, how sources do and do not support contentions. (A student of mine in Writing about Literature successfully restructured her paper in forty-five minutes after such a conversation last month.) Reasoning can be clarified in six hours, new evidence located, inappropriate examples abandoned and others built upon. Coherence can emerge from pointing to the need for topic sentences and transition phrases, or clear explanations between statements and examples. Sentences can be combined to highlight connections among ideas. Attention to diction can clear up vague references, sharpen the focus, reduce the clutter. And of course there is editing, that overlooked skill that can clarify the meaning even in the smallest gestures of shifting a comma or modifying a verb. Not all these items can be covered in a single session, nor all of them considered in six hours. But so many options, surely, can suggest the appropriate next step so that peer consultant and client together can shape a plan. What else can be done in six hours? I challenge each reader to send me a list for our next newsletter!

"Ah, well," I hear you contending, indulgent reader though you be. "But that assumes the writer will spend the six hours on the paper after bringing it to you. She's more likely to have lunch and a couple of classes, to attend a sorority meeting or go to her job. She may have another paper to write, a test to study for." And I'll grant that you may be right. But I guarantee you she won't work on that paper if we conclude in the writing center that there's no reason to offer her help. If we limit our suggestions because we feel frustrated. If we offer a lecture instead of a conversation. If we are less than frank.

Besides, we owe it to our clients to be honest. Life is fraught with disruptions, rife with occasions for "writing to schedule," or submitting a piece "just in time." We might as well prepare students for tight deadlines. Like death and birth, taxes and the inevitable conclusion of pregnancy, the vicissitudes of writing come unbidden. Even I must email this piece in the morning. . .what can I do with it in the next hour before I fall asleep?

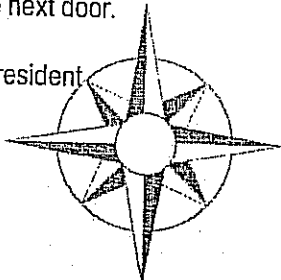
Twila Yates Papay  
Rollins College

President's Letter  
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The unexpected support of faculty on my own campus has proven that there are many folks out there who are interested in the kind of change represented by writing center practice, change based on the kind of collaborative, dialogic model that we prize so highly.

So, bravo Phillip and Bill, for reminding us to recognize the opportunities for resistance that include rather than exclude our colleagues at the academy. While there are and will continue to be opportunities to resist the practices of intractable administrators and close-minded faculty by promoting writing center pedagogy and theory, let's remember that we have allies out there, too—not just each other, but our faculty colleagues in the office next door.

Marcy Trianosky, SWCA President  
Hollins University



## Joe's Truck: Making a Hiring Interview the First Hour of Training

*Fiat lux* is the official motto of our college; the unofficial one is *Do more with less*. At the writing center that translates into streamlined training for new peer consultants—twelve hours of crash training at the beginning of fall semester (worth one semester hour of credit) and then a weekly staff meeting (worth another hour of credit for every semester a consultant is working). With ample time and endless training, many undergraduates could develop consulting skills. Given our limits, however, we have to hire consultants who are already halfway there.

We start by asking (later begging) faculty for recommendations. *Wanted: strong writers, excellent readers, attentive listeners, all around people persons.*

As the names trickle in, we mail and email a congratulatory note with a one-page application and job description attached. The trickle narrows: Out of eighty-two nominees this spring, thirty-one applied. Applicants from many different majors submit a writing sample and short-answer a few questions: *Why would you like to become a peer writing consultant? What experiences have prepared you for peer consulting? How would you describe the difference between a peer writing consultant and a professor?*

On paper, applicants all sound wonderful, so we rely on a forty-five-minute interview with a role-play to distinguish who's halfway there from who has a long way to go. I do these interviews with my colleague and collaborator, the tutor coordinator. Warming up, we ask about classes, activities, experiences with writing centers and workshops. We explain our consulting notes form, through which we both communicate with faculty and emphasize to students that writing is a process. Although many clients come here looking for a quick grammar fix, we explain, consultants often need to broaden the scope to global concerns such as thesis and development of ideas. We're prepping applicants not just for the role-play, but for the job: the more groundwork we can lay during hiring, the deeper we can delve during training.

Then I slip into the role of Joe, an insecure twenty-five-year-old freshman who has an appointment with our applicant. Joe brings a paper, a first draft he  
-continued on page 9-



Rollins College writing consultants and peer tutors break the ice at their crash training session.





## Joe's Truck -continued from page 8-

hopes is his last. Although Joe is my creation, the essay is genuine, from a 1987 state assessment test. I've spell-checked it, entering "change" at every suggestion. The first paragraph runs twenty-nine sentences, the next three, the next one. *Well its kind like this, Joe writes. I am a truck freak. I like any kinda pickup truck especially Fords.*

Our "consultant" shifts uneasily in the chair: all of a sudden we have moved from tidy hypotheticals to messy reality—a needy human being with even needier prose. My colleague takes notes. Does the applicant acknowledge Joe before turning to the paper? Does he ask about the assignment, the due date, the professor's previous comments, or Joe's concerns? Applicants inclined toward copy editing read two sentences and reach for a pen, correcting—painstakingly and sometimes incorrectly—Joe's horrific spelling and syntax. Some gasp. Some giggle.

Joe cringes. "It's really dumb, isn't it, to write about how fixing up a truck changed my life? I just suck at writing."

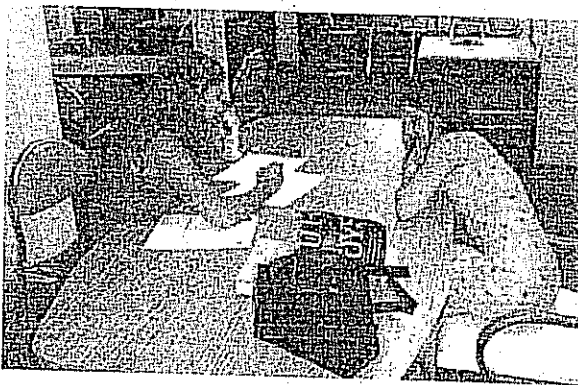
"No, no," most applicants protest lamely. "You just need to get all the verbs the same tense."

One woman didn't even try to reassure Joe. As she read, she tsked.

Born consultants, on the other hand, zoom back from telephoto to wide lens. Often they locate Joe's thesis, his last sentence: *...the truck change from a piece junk to a beautiful truck I change from a boy to a man.* "What if we make two lists—how you changed from a boy to a man here and how your Ford changed from a rust bucket to a beautiful truck there?" That woman we hired on the spot.

Good consulting instincts vary along similar themes. Some applicants point out the few things Joe does well—"I like your metaphor about the front fenders looking like Swiss cheese"—while others shepherd him through an outline. Everyone we hire in some way draws Joe into a conversation (although

we practice affirmative action with our scarce male applicants, who often seem relationship-challenged). Having played Joe 100 times, I can supply plenty of back story. "You should put that in," the best applicants say when Joe describes finding the Ford like Moses in the bulrushes. Mice were nesting in the front seat; a snake slithered out when he lifted the hood. "Details like that will make readers excited to read this story."



Rollins College peer writing consultant Andrea Frederic works with a student.

After the role-play, we debrief applicants. *What were the unspoken thoughts going through your head? How would you spend the next twenty minutes with Joe?* Besides giving students a first taste of consulting, we're also figuring out what we need to highlight in training.

Joe's usefulness extends behind hiring. He serves as a touchstone for the writing center, as consultant Catherine Bacon remarked in a recent email to our listserv:

"I was talking with one of my co-workers from my job down at the museum today about artwork and learning. She mentioned to me that one of the most difficult but probably the best experience a teacher may ever have is to receive a piece of work from a student that has so many problems, it's hard to see the work for what it is. The challenge, though, is not to crush the student when telling them this, but to see something beyond the little mistakes and help

-continued on page 15-



# The OWL's Nest

## Access: A Central Issue in Web Design for OWLs

In this issue and the two following, we would like to begin to sketch practical issues for readers to consider in designing and implementing OWLs. In this column, our emphasis is on World Wide Web site design, and our subsequent emphases will be on electronic mail tutoring and MOO tutoring.

Web design, as many readers know, is a complex and sometimes frustrating process, but the rewards can be considerable, like writing support for nontraditional students and increased access for all university stakeholders. The decisions writing center professionals make in design can be the difference between success and failure, between dynamic use and stagnation, and even between celebration and embarrassment. We suggest, with the following three design principles, that one key term can help writing center professionals maximize the benefits of their work: *access*, what Charles Moran calls "the A-word."

**Principle One: Think about your target population's hardware and software options.** Too many times writing center professionals fail to think about the computer hardware and software options of their university and other service communities, or they make hasty generalizations, not taking into account more reliable numbers that might be available. Before anyone begins designing a Web site, she or he should talk to the appropriate information technology offices to learn more about local computer use. At Furman University, for instance, James would talk to the Office of Computing and Information Services, and there he'd learn that Furman supports multiple platforms (PC and Mac) and that students make extensive use of networked space, saving many of their files to the network, instead of to disk. It only makes sense, then, that he'd customize his design to such local conditions. Uploading handouts in Microsoft Word format, to offer an example, would not be a particularly useful practice, unless files were saved in Rich Text Format, ASCII text, or another form read-

able by both Macs and PCs. A much more reasonable practice, given students' extensive use of Furman's network, would be to convert those files to hypertext mark-up language, or HTML as it is commonly known.

**Principle Two: Think about the way people use the Web.** Knowing that a community uses the Web is not knowing how a community uses the Web, and it's a distinction very important for writing center professionals who are thinking about Web design. First, learn how users connect to the Internet, and think about the connection speeds they are using. A graphics-intensive page that loads somewhat quickly on campus may be a ten- or fifteen-minute download operation for dial-in users, and every minute of that operation may be costing them money, if they are dialing in to a service provider and paying by minute. Not a satisfactory result. Also, why not test the usability of a design before releasing it? It's always a good idea to invite three or four people from different backgrounds and with different levels of education and experience to explore the site design while the designer watches, if the designer can sit on her or his hands and refrain from making comments or offering guidance. Understanding where users get lost before the site design goes public can really be an invaluable base of knowledge, as can knowing particular strengths of the design.

**Principle Three: Think about browser diversity.** Readers would be astonished at the number of writing center professionals who design Web sites, but then do not test them with multiple browsers. Yet, browser capabilities often determine the way information is transferred online. A beginning would be to test all design pages in the two most popular browsers: Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer. But Web designers should do more. Why not test the pages in multiple versions of a browser? In its few years of existence, Internet Explorer has already been through a number of releases, including 5.x, 4.x, 3.x, and 2.x, where x is sometimes several numbers, and

-continued on page 11-



The OWL's Nest  
-continued from page 10-

Netscape Navigator has done the same. It is not a fair assumption that most computers users have the newest version; in fact, such is rarely the case. And, of course, other browsers exist, like Mosaic, Cello, and Lynx, and these are sometimes used.

While these three principles do not on their own constitute a holistic guide to Web design success, we believe they are an excellent start. Moreover, we think the emphasis on access is an apt means of grounding all Web design decisions, whether relating to the principles above or not.

As always, we invite your comments and questions—we can be reached at

<dsewell@valdosta.edu> and  
<james.inman@furman.edu>.

Donna Sewell  
Valdosta Univeristy

James Inman  
Furman University

The 17th Annual National Conference on  
Peer Tutoring in Writing

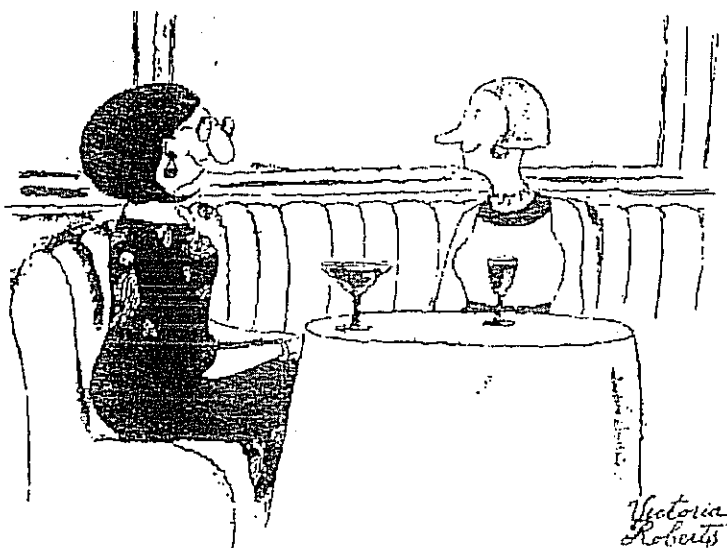
Merrimack College  
North Andover, Massachusetts  
October 13-15, 2000

\*\*\*PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF DATES\*\*\*

Peer Tutoring 2000:  
Looking Ahead, Looking Back

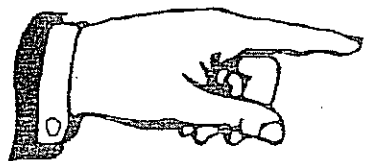
This year we are presented with an ideal moment to explore questions of where we are going and where we have been. Peer tutoring practices over the years have reflected many philosophies, among them remedial, collaborative, facilitative, generalist, and discipline-specific. Relationships between tutors and student writers, faculty, directors, and larger communities vary according to philosophy, as do relationships among writing centers, tutoring programs, and traditional academic programs. As we move into a new century, what can we learn from past practices? What philosophies will inform future practices? How have relationships within and among programs evolved, and how will they continue to evolve? How have developing theories of composition, writing centers, and peer tutoring affected our practices?

For further information, contact Kathleen Shine Cain,  
kcain@merrimack.edu.



*"I got married once—to avoid writing."*

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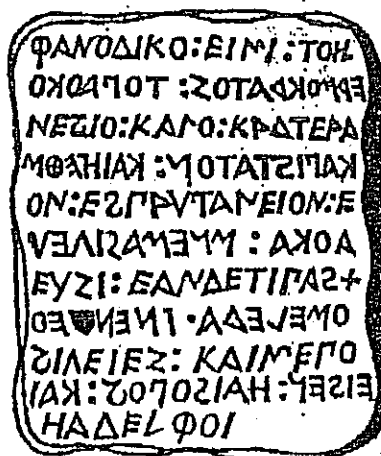
# What's the Point?

## Pointing Toward Sense

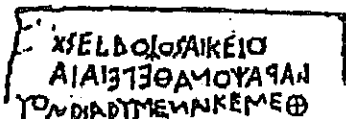
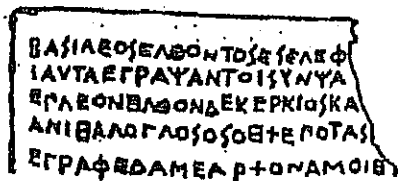
Pointing, or what we now call punctuation, has a history about which we can make some interesting points. For example, one of the first attempts to appoint a manuscript occurred with a leap of faith that led a brilliant (not to mention reflective) scribe to suddenly realize how much easier reading might be if writing could be separated into actual words. What a humbling moment in the history of written language! Poised as we are at the beginning of a new millennium arguing over the efficacy of retaining the distinction between the restrictive and nonrestrictive clause in comparison to that monumental idea!

Of course, it would have been too simple just to separate the words out and leave it at that, so our insightful scribe decided that two dots, or points, would best indicate to readers the separation among words in a manuscript. A brilliant innovation, but, according to T. L. And M. F. A. Husband in their 1905 book *Punctuation: Principles and Practice*, in the Christian era was some centuries old before

the practice was commonly adopted by scribes and copyists (3). Even so, what writing idea (outside of this column) has come along in the twentieth century to rival that one? I'm hard pressed to think of any.



DOTS SEPARATING WORDS FOUND NEAR TROY: from Benjamin Martin's *Institutions of Language*, 1748.



ANCIENT GREEK WRITING WITH NO WORD SEPARATION: from J. Hambleton Ober's *Writing: Man's Great Invention*, 1965.

And whatever happened to the virgule? According to the OED the virgule is a thin sloping or upright line (/, |) occurring in Mediaeval MSS. as a mark for the caesura or as a punctuation mark, frequently with the same value as the modern comma. Some of us may not lament the passing of the virgule, but with its demise English lost a mark that would rival Ben Jonson's definition of the comma as a mean breathing, or the definition from the *Orthographie and Congruitie of the Britan*

-continued on page 13-

¶ Thus entred this noble and joyous booke entytled to meane  
 Dardanus/Nocturnall/and yonge is treated of the birth/lyfe/and  
 actes of the sayd kynge Arthur/of his noble knyghtes of the  
 rounde table/their merueylous conquestes and adventures /  
 the charyng of the fangrales/ & in whiche he doctours with e  
 departing out of this world of this al/ which booke was w  
 duardus to englyssh by Syr Thomas Malory knyght as afore  
 is sayd/ and by me translated in to our booke chapterd and  
 enprented/ and fynysshed in the city of Westminster the last day  
 of July the yere of our lord /m/CCCC/lyxxxv/

¶ *Enthus me first fait*

THE VIRGULE AS COMMA: Plate IV of *The College Survey of English Literature*, 1951.

What's the Point?  
 -continued from page 12-

*Tongue* that the comma must be pronounced with a short sob. The OED tells us that one Orozco Y Berra defined the virgule as representing the verb to blow or to hum. @ What we have obviously lost with the marriage of punctuation to grammar is the incalculable entertainment value of punctuating our reading with mean breathings, sobs, puffs, and hums--just how can these losses be replaced?

An etymological analysis of the virgule indicates that it came from the Latin *virgula* meaning Arod@ or Atwig,@ sometimes used to suggest a Adivining rod.@ When I see students struggling with the overwhelming number of Acorrect@ uses of English punctuation marks, I can=t help Adivining@ that our over-regulated punctuation system might be resuscitated by a return to vocal outbursts. People might even begin to attend readings. For (pant, pant) if writing cannot be entertaining to the ear as well as the mind (pant, pant) then tell me (sob) what=s the point? Hmmmmmmm?

Peter M. Carriere  
 Georgia College and State University

SWCATALK

Join in engaging conversation with other SWCA members on the organization's listserv,

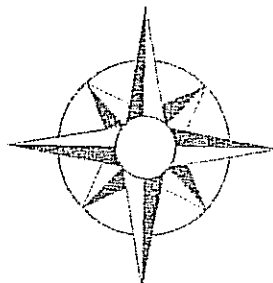
SWCATALK.

To subscribe, go to the web page

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Remember, you must be an SWCA member to subscribe. Fill out the membership form on page 15 to join today!



2001 SWCA Conference  
-continued from page 3-

- Writing center administrators collaborate with tutors in order to continue building a shared understanding of what it means to tutor writers in an academic setting.
- In addition, writing center administrators collaborate with English faculty in joint efforts to improve first-year writing instruction.
- Administrators of writing centers collaborate with faculty across the curriculum in efforts to understand specific writing goals within disciplines. In turn, administrators collaborate with tutors in developing strategies for working successfully with students who are writing for disciplinary courses.
- Writing center administrators collaborate with campus administrators regarding facilities, budgets, accomplishments, and goals.
- In recent years, many writing center practitioners have found a gold mine of collaborative knowledge-sharing on electronic discussion lists

such as Wcenter, the listserv of the National Writing Center Association.

- Finally, and sometimes only once a year, both administrators and tutors get the chance to collaborate face-to-face with writing center personnel from other campuses.

The 2001 Conference of the Southeastern Writing Center Association promises to offer a multitude of opportunities for collaboration among writing center personnel from throughout the southeastern region. As any previous conferee will attest, the SWCA conference has a reputation of being one of the friendliest and most professionally enriching meetings around.

Presentation proposals are invited on any subject related to practices and theories of tutoring writing—but particularly from writing center practitioners who wish to celebrate, analyze, challenge, and interpret the role of collaboration in writing center work. For proposal submission guidelines, see the Call for Papers below.

Glenda Conway  
University of Montevallo

**Call for Papers**

**The 2001 Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference**  
*Collaboration at the Center*

**February 16-18, 2001**

**Auburn, Alabama**

**Cosponsored by Auburn University and the University of Montevallo**

Proposals are invited for 50-minute sessions and for 20-minute panel presentations. Proposals should include a title and a 200-word abstract along with the proposer's name and contact information, including email address. Please specify whether your proposal is for a 50-minute session or a 20-minute presentation.

Proposals may be sent via mail, fax, or MS-Word email attachments to:

Glenda Conway  
Station 6420  
Department of English  
University of Montevallo  
Montevallo, AL 35115  
conwayg@montevallo.edu  
205 665-6425  
Fax: 205 665-6422



## 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. Members will pay a reduced registration fee for SWCA conferences, 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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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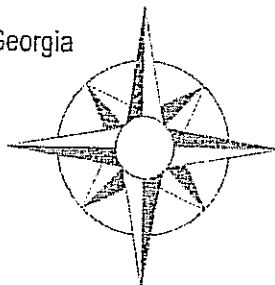
Membership Rates:	
Individual (regional)	\$15.00
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Mail this form to  
 Glenda Conway  
 Harbert Writing Center  
 Station 6420, Dept. of English  
 University of Montevallo  
 Montevallo, AL 35115

### Free to Revolutionize -continued from page 5-

Needless to say, our center is ever evolving and changing; always for the better, I think. I must also always consider Jefferson's words when I get too excited about new furniture or more advanced technology: our focus is on the freedom students seek to be themselves as students and as writers. Our real value lies in his words, and we continue to follow them, granted in ever new and challenging ways.

Sonja S. Bagby  
 State University of West Georgia



### Joe's Truck -continued from page 9-

them to bring out the good so far buried. She said that that is a real teaching experience.

"... I thought about it and realized that's the main idea behind the WC. Ideally, we have to see what's really good about even the worst papers and help the student to see how they can improve their work. I kept thinking about the interview and how the infamous truck paper honestly needed quite a bit of work. It's just a shame that sometimes we can't use that main idea because of time constraints or attitudes. Still, it's a nice thought that, when everything goes right, not only our clients are learning but so are we."

Sylvia Whitman  
 Rollins College

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AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE  
THE WORLD FOR WOMEN

## What's Inside *Southern Discourse*

*Revolutionizing the Writing Center in 2000*  
by Sonja S. Bagby  
page 1

*Kukujumuku: A tribute to the SWCA*  
by Jerry Mwangbe  
page 3

*SWCA Conference 2001*  
by Glenda Conway  
page 3

*Writing to Schedule, Right on Time*  
by Twila Yates Papay  
page 6

*Making a Hiring Interview the First Hour of  
Training*  
by Sylvia Whitman  
page 8

*The OWL's Nest*  
by Donna Sewell and James Inman  
page 10

*What's the Point?*  
by Peter Carriere  
page 12

Call for Papers, Auburn, AL in 2001  
page 14