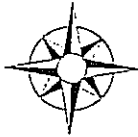


Southern Discourse

Publication of the Southeastern Writing Center Association



Fall 2001

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Wendy Bishop to Speak at 2002 IWCA/SWCA Conference in Savannah

By Hillary Harshman
Agnes Scott College

Wendy Bishop has quite a road map of accomplishments to her name, both literally and figuratively. From Arizona to Alaska to Africa, this multigenre writer (chiefly a poet) has traveled extensively on four continents and held several teaching positions. Currently, she serves as the Kellogg W. Hunt Professor of English at Florida State University, though previously she taught at such diverse places as Bayero University in Kano, Nigeria, and Navajo Community College in Tsaile, Arizona. Her poetry has appeared in a variety of publications including *The American Poetry Review*, *The Yale Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *College English* and three chapbooks: *Touching Lilianna*, *Mid Passage*, and *My 47 Lives*. She has also published short stories and nonfiction, including the collection *When We Say We're Home*. Yet, her work does not end with creative writing. Her repertoire also includes several works on writing itself and approaches to teaching writing. Bishop's multitude of experiences and perspective as a creative writer make her a fitting selection for keynote speaker of the upcoming IWCA/SWCA conference, themed "The Art of Writing Centers."

As a creative writer, Bishop has especially interesting views on the art and science of the tutoring process. She herself takes "pleasure in an artfully conducted tutoring session," though she does not see the process of writing as leaning more towards art or science. "Writers need to be engaged, to want to write, and also need to think systematically about their practices to improve them," she contends. Artful and systematic thinking are both necessary for successful writing, though the combination of the two varies from

person to person. Tutors, she points out, must be attuned to these differing balances in order to help writers make strategic decisions: "The tutor helps the writer know such constraints and opportunities are at play and also responds to them, providing new tools or refining old ones."

Of this year's IWCA/SWCA conference topic, *The Art of Writing Centers*, Bishop comments, "I like the topic particularly for the way it metaphorically gives a boost to the actual diversity and breadth of writing center work." She stresses the progress that writing centers have made in moving away from such stereotypical perceptions as "fix-it" shops. Instead, she uses Joseph Har-

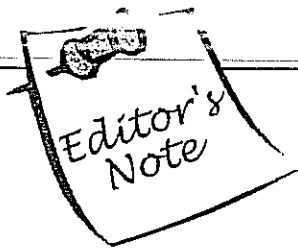


Wendy Bishop, keynote speaker of the 2002 SWCA Conference.

ris's analogy of the writing center to the Boston Common or the common green space of a city or university, where diverse ideas get represented. "To see our work as artful is also to see it as broadly humanist," she says. Bishop embraces the idea of the writing center as a community, a place where both students and teachers can go

for support and feedback, a space to share ideas and texts.

The year 2002 sees the SWCA celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. Bishop looks towards the future of writing centers, composition and creative writing, and is optimistic, citing their growing membership and increasing numbers of theories and practices and "subcommons where individuals talk about what they care about." She concedes that often more voices lead to more contention but says, "I'd like to reap the benefits of enrichment, of course, and downplay the contention, so celebrating twenty-five years of writing center work is a nice common space for doing so, I think."



Creativity and the Writing Center

By Christine Cozzens
Agnes Scott College

As a writer, a teacher of writing, and a writing center advocate (first as a tutor, eventually as a director), I have always been nervous about the use of the word *creative* in the phrase "creative writing," though for simplicity and convenience, I use it just like most people do. In writing centers, we observe on a daily basis the creativity that goes into all kinds of writing. Leaps of imagination, creative choices, even figurative language and elegant turns of phrase characterize the best writing in any genre. It seems awkward and wrong to say that only writing in certain genres—dramatic writing, fiction, poetry, the personal essay, for example—is *creative*. What about a stirring speech or sermon? What about a thoughtfully argued report? What about blurred genres?

But the use of the word *creative* in a writing assignment or a call for manuscripts does seem to open the gates to a greater range of subjects and forms, especially forms. The word encourages risk-taking, multiple or multiplied meanings, unusual paths to the point the writer wants to make—all of which you will see in this first "creative writing" issue of *Southern Discourse*.

This creativity emerges in fascinating and original ways. Note how creatively *Southern Discourse* staff writer William V. Sinski applies a metaphor from the art world to describe a way of thinking he wants writers to grasp. Sylvia Whitman's tutors at Rollins College give us glimpses of writing center realities crystallized in the deceptively simple form of haiku. Thanks to the creative insights and observations of E. Burt Carbia, we see how the events of September 11 unfolded in a writing center and a classroom that day. As most of know to our chagrin, creativity often arises from some kind of obsession: Darren Crovitz and our regular columnist Peter Carriere let us in on their writerly obsessions with spelling and punctuation marks. Creative writing center practice is the subject of articles by Sherry Robinson and Barbara Szubinska and *Southern Discourse* staff writer Paula Payne. And finally, from long-time SWCA member Phillip Gardner, a short story from his new book that takes us far from the writing center only to show that we are not so very far after all.

How to Submit Articles to *Southern Discourse*:

Manuscripts should be sent to Christine Cozzens via email (MS Word). Please note the following deadlines.

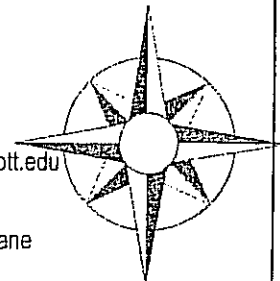
Spring 2002: February 1st
Summer 2002: May 1st
Fall 2002: October 1st

These works have one thing in common: they show what a wealth of creativity and writing ability is lurking in our region. Reading over the submissions has given me a host of new ideas to take back to the writing center and the classroom, some of which are going to surprise the tutors and students with whom I work. I would like to see every issue of *Southern Discourse* have that same effect on its readers.

Over the next several months I will be drafting a statement of editorial policy or mission for this publication, and the success of this issue's call for creative works has convinced me that our discourse ought to include the word *creative* and the practice of accepting a wide range of *creative* works for every issue. I don't yet know how to define or phrase this call, but I want to thank this issue's contributors for showing me and the readers of *Southern Discourse* the viability of a new and exciting direction for our little magazine.

Send all submissions to *Southern Discourse* to

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Electronic Discussions as Opportunities for Tutor Development and Community Building

By Sherry Robinson and
Barbara Szubinska
Eastern Kentucky University

Training is one of the most crucial as well as one of the most problematic issues faced by writing center administrators. Beyond the initial training that may occur at the beginning of a semester, some centers have developed credit bearing courses for all tutors. Other centers encourage weekly staff meetings. Other centers, for whom these options are impractical, may be able to provide effective ongoing training and to maintain a sense of community by using course management software.

In the Eastern Kentucky University Writing Center, we have begun using Blackboard—a course management program by Blackboard, Inc.—to facilitate discussion of theories and practices of one-on-one conferencing in writing centers. We introduce Blackboard-mediated discussion in our intensive training prior to the beginning of the fall semester. This strategy fulfilled the primary goals of focusing the discussion on writing center pedagogy, allowing all tutors to participate and contribute to the discussion in meaningful ways, as well as familiarizing the staff with the software that would be used throughout the next year.

To stimulate the continuous discussions on Blackboard, we select articles that espouse different theoretical viewpoints, as well as different strategies for tutoring. After providing these articles to the staff and allowing them enough time to read, we post a question on Blackboard. All tutors are then required to respond in some worthwhile manner within the specified time structure. They are welcome to do so while on duty during quiet times. We have noted that even after completing their required responses, some tutors continue the dialogue. Additionally, we have created open forums to facilitate discussion of any issues of concern specific to our center and the students we serve. We anticipate that the staff will appropriate this forum for themselves in order to share successes, failures, as well as other operational issues. For example, one tutor posted the following question at the end of his discussion of dealing with a difficult client:

So what do you do? When you are sitting with a client and get the vibe: 'I don't like you, and I am not going to listen to you.' My method was to discuss the issues I thought needed to be discussed, the session did last about a half hour, and let it go. C'est la vie.... what does everyone else think?

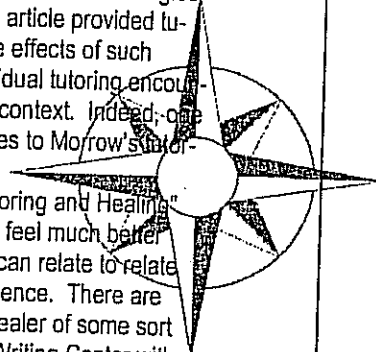
This dialogue allows tutors—who might not otherwise have an opportunity to share their experiences and seek input from their colleagues—a platform for interaction.

The electronic discussion board also encourages reflective activities regarding the application of broader theoretical perspectives to actual tutoring experiences. For example, one of our readings was an article focused on similarities between a writing conference and a patient encounter with particular emphasis on different strategies of involving the patient or client. The article provided tutors with opportunities to consider the effects of such strategies as well as place their individual tutoring encounters and styles in a larger theoretical context. Indeed, one tutor connected her recent experiences to Morrow's tutoring pedagogy:

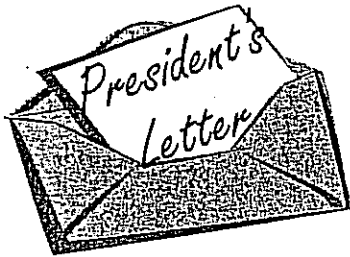
After reading Marrow's "Tutoring and Healing" article, I must confess that I feel much better about my tutoring habits. I can relate to relate very well to Marrow's experience. There are moments I have felt like a healer of some sort when a student leaves the Writing Center with a huge smile on her face saying "I feel much better." What is interesting is that in some of the cases the student has actually healed herself with me acting only as a facilitator. This is what Marrow calls "guidance-cooperation." Tutorial sessions organized along these paths thrive of mutual participation. "Activity-Passivity," the opposite of "guidance-cooperating" makes tutoring a dead-end activity. It does not empower the student to claim ownership of his own writing but rather makes a student a passive recipient of knowledge—an overwhelming task for the tutor. Mutual participation is healing, both for the student and the tutor.

The electronic discussion forum not only allowed this tutor to relate her tutoring style to a specific pedagogy, it also prompted her to articulate her response to the reading and to elaborate on her practices.

Aside from encouraging specific, insightful commentary, electronic forums become repositories of ideas. Unlike ideas expressed during a staff meeting, electronic forums transcend boundaries of space and time. For instance, the



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By Marcy Trianosky
Hollins University

To Do:

*write thesis

*plan life

*sleep

*not freak out

(list found on WC front desk)

Laura has two senior theses to write, one in Econ and one in History. Erin and Kate are doing original poetry for theirs. Syreeta is doing a film analysis. Anne's doing hers in German. It's better not to talk about graduation right now; it makes everyone feel panicky. But going to grad school or getting a job hangs over everyone. Decisions about "life after Hollins" are too big, too important. Sleep is virtually nonexistent or indulged in deeply and sensually into the afternoon. Panic over the thesis chapter due tomorrow but not yet begun pulls them together, either with each other or with friends outside the writing center. They play canasta, watch *The Producers* again, get off campus to El Rodeo for nachos and margaritas.

"Database of Sept. 11 victims"

(on-line news headline)

Computer screens left up between sessions reveal our mutual obsession with CNN online and its macabre headlines. *The New York Times* lies splayed across the coffee table, forcing on us more headlines, maps of the Middle East, monstrous cranes in clean-up photos of the Twin Towers. Mostly we don't talk about it. The first two weeks after it happened we were immersed in it, talking about it whether we wanted to or not. Those who couldn't stop reading, listening to, or watching the news described details, plot twists, to those of who couldn't do any of that. We all knew more than we thought we could stand.

But then Nicole died. One of our seniors. It was very sudden, some kind of "aggressive" stomach virus. The college emails to everyone that Monday seemed too cool and factual. All of us wanted to crawl in a hole—faculty, students, staff. On top of September 11th, we had our September 21st, the day we lost Nicole. I found one tutor crying

at the computer a few days later—the computer in the corner, where no one could see her from the door. Another tutor worried about missing her shift. We ran into each other on Front Quad, and she told me she had to drive a van full of students to Nicole's funeral the next day; there was a last-minute paper to write, laundry that needed to be done. Did I know where she could find a one-hour dry cleaner for her only black dress? She cried, and I put my arms around her.

It's hard to pigeon-hole where the stress goes, how it gets handled—or not. Some days it seems we work together more easily, putting aside pettiness, resolving personal differences. Other days we talk very little to each other, try to bury ourselves in tutoring, teaching, writing that paper, that proposal, that thesis chapter. The writing center feels safe for all these expressions of grief, avoidance or fear. There's even room for small acts of courage when we reach out to each other. One tutor writes a little "love poem" and puts it in my box. The funny, cute "Tutor of the Week" cartoons on the white board celebrate what they value most about each other. Instead of a staff meeting, we have a birthday party where we give garish, more-than-a-little obscene cards to all the tutors who had birthdays over the summer. We eat the chocolate cupcakes I made and laugh a lot.

Separating our personal selves from our writing center selves has never been so difficult, or so necessary.

In talking to one of my tutors about writing this, she said, "Well, I don't know about other writing centers, but ours is like a family." Families are complex and ambiguous. They never hold still for the camera the same way twice. They create grief, but they assuage it as well. They support us, but at times they are our undoing. So must our writing center be, with the necessary intermingling of duty and friendship, responsibilities to those we serve and to each other. Separating our personal selves from our writing center selves has never been so difficult, or so unnecessary. We'll be here again tomorrow, to begin again.



Tutoring and Teaching through Tragedy

By E. Burt Carbia
Appalachian State University

Those of us in the word business may have found Tuesday, September 11, 2001, an especially challenging day. Words seemed inadequate to carry me beyond my shock as I witnessed passenger jets exploding into the World Trade Center first thing in the morning of an eerily pastoral preautumn day. I remember being surprised that students, with their paradoxical blend of innocence and invulnerability, kept me grounded and functional, both in Appalachian State University's writing center, where I am half-time codirector, and in my expository writing classroom. On that day, perhaps more poignantly than on other days, I became a careful, engaged listener.

"How can students want to come in here to have papers looked at in the face of what's happening today?" I asked myself and my tutors almost as many times as we saw the footage of the WTC Towers crumbling to dust. The point of contact and explosion riddled my closed eyelids strobe-like as I tried to concentrate on a paper dealing with the Ruby Ridge incident. The irony, a favorite concept of us English folk, did not escape me. My 10:00 a.m. student writer, determined to clutch normalcy, even if in the form of a tutoring session, expressed her fears in asides as we stumbled through her essay: "What do you think our government is going to do now? Are we at war?"



Burt Carbia works with Stacia Sanders in the University Writing Center at Appalachian State University.

I asked her what she thought the proper response should be. I admitted that I shared her fear, but tried to offer hope that our government would take a prudent course. Her paper on Ruby Ridge lay between us, the scar of an old wound, possible portent of our future. She decided that she had to trust the people in power to do the right thing; I told her I thought her decision was wise. Meanwhile, her essay was shaping up nicely. Her response to the article she'd been instructed to address was thoughtful, logical, well organized. We found a few spots that could use further development or textual support, but overall, both of us were pleased.

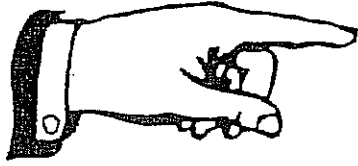
The student writer felt compassion for the Weaver family and righteous indignation toward the U.S. Marshals, but she concluded that those not present at Ruby Ridge may not be able to offer a clear verdict about anybody's actions. She didn't blame Sammy Weaver for taking aim at the guy who shot his dog, yet she understood that everyone at the scene had acted impulsively. She saw clearly the way the conflict escalated the following day as FBI agents surrounded the Weaver cabin.

Then she made the connection between Ruby Ridge and the present morning. Her eyes welled with tears, but she held them back. I wasn't sure what to say, so I said nothing. Good decision. The student told me that she was glad to have someone older and wiser to sit beside for a little while. If I had spoken, I might have blown the latter image, but I was able to offer comfort by being a quiet, safe presence for her. She pulled herself together, thanked me for helping with her essay, and went on to her next class.

Some of the professors in our department opted to cancel their classes for the rest of September 11. The university's policy, announced midway through the afternoon, left the matter to individual instructor's discretion. My department chair had encouraged us to meet with students and allow them to talk about what was going on. I think that he was speaking out of his own wisdom. I wasn't sure I'd be able to pull off hanging around until 3:30 to meet with my class, nor whether I could offer a worthwhile encounter. I decided to let my students lead on this one.

When I arrived in the classroom, I noted that eighteen of my nineteen students were sitting in the customary circle. I wondered how influential my strict attendance policy had been on their decision not to cut, how much they felt like gathering together, how much they needed to talk about the day's horrors. By the end of class, I had become convinced that the last option ruled their presence in 204 Sanford Hall that afternoon.

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What's the Point?

By Peter M. Carriere
Georgia College and State University

In a scathing satire on James Fenimore Cooper's fiction, Mark Twain observed that out of a possible 115 offenses against literary art, Cooper had scored a record 114. Twain's essay, entitled "James Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," refers to the author's use of *deus ex machina* salvations, characterizations that include improbable skill and heroics, absurd coincidences, and ridiculous descriptions of physical things—for example a scow or "ark" only a foot or two wider than the meandering creek it was trying to navigate.

Had Twain been more of a mechanical purist, he would have noticed that Cooper scored an additional 114 offenses against contemporary grammar and punctuation rules. Such an improbably high score does not seem to have tarnished Cooper's reputation as a great early American novelist, however. Cooper's infractions diminish neither a reader's understanding nor the reader's ability, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge put it in *Biographia Literaria*, to willingly suspend disbelief and become immersed in Cooper's tale. Which is precisely the point.

Below are several of Cooper's sentences from which I have removed all punctuation. Punctuate them according to your favorite contemporary punctuation rules, and compare your results with the actual sentences as set down by Cooper. Your score and corresponding rank is listed at the end of this article. All sentences come from the Signet paperback edition of *The Last of the Mohicans*.

1. When Uncas had brained his first antagonist he turned like a hungry lion to seek another.
2. He enumerated the warriors of the party their several merits their frequent services to the nation their wounds and the number of scalps they had taken.
3. The Huron laughed in their faces and told them women struck so light!
4. What then have I to do or say in the matter of your mis-

fortunes not to say of your errors?

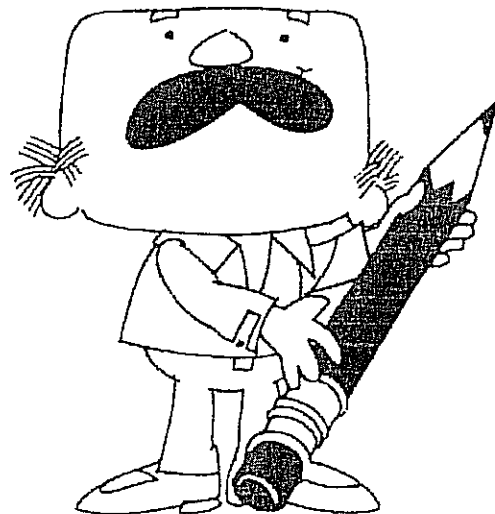
5. Go to the dark-haired daughter and say Magua waits to speak.

Answers:

1. When Uncas had brained his first antagonist, he turned, like a hungry lion, to seek another.
2. He enumerated the warriors of the party; their several merits; their frequent services to the nation; their wounds, and the number of scalps they had taken.
3. The Huron laughed in their faces and told them, women struck so light!
4. What then have I to do, or say, in the matter of your misfortunes, not to say of your errors.
5. Go to the dark-haired daughter and say, Magua waits to speak.

Rank Based on Similarity to Cooper's Punctuation:

- 80%-100% similar to Cooper. . . Pointedly Offensive
- 60%-79% similar to Cooper. . . Pointlessly Offensive
- 40%-59% similar to Cooper. . . Hopelessly Pointed
- 15%-39% similar to Cooper. . . A True Pointilist
- 0%-14% similar to Cooper. . . . Pointing Toward Sense



"Dr. Picasso Can Chew on My Left Butt Cheek."

Van Gogh, Fall 2000

By William V. Sinski, Georgia Military College

"I just can't please Van Gogh. Nothing I do is good enough for her. And this time she is wrong," a student said upon coming into our writing center to be tutored. The student continued, "And I told her so. Picasso taught us so last year in his class Contemporary Grammar in Society Today."

"Gee," I said, "I sure hope you didn't quote Picasso in Van Gogh's class."

"I did," the student replied, "and she was not very nice. Her exact words were, 'Dr. Picasso can chew on my left butt cheek; you are in my classroom now, and you will be sure that your pronouns agree with your antecedents, even if it means using the ever redundant, politically correct he or she and him or her.'"

I felt for this freshman. It seems the ones who try the hardest and care the most all go through this frustration until they understand one truth about writing. Writing is not an exact science; writing is an art form.

I requested some composure from our guest, and I said, "I don't think Dr. Van Gogh would give Picasso an 'A' if he had to take her class." I went on to explain that our Dr. Van Gogh is a published author and poet. She is known for her diligent research projects and has written books on exotic cultures. The influence of foreign lands and her poetic nature have taught her lessons of impressionism. "Soon she will teach you how to use the gender less singular noun," I told the pupil, "and you won't have to concern yourself about he/she, him/her." The educatee went on to praise Dr. Picasso, and I agreed.

At first, I had trouble relating the fact that I enjoyed taking courses from every professor in the department. I told the young writer how exciting I found Picasso. His ability to show two variations for the same noun phrase used as the subject in one sentence makes a weird but very enlightening sentence diagram. It is almost like looking at the front and the profile of one object at the same time. I told the able apprentice how lucky we were to have so many fine professionals to teach us the art of writing. "Some may feel that Dr. Seurat, our master of pointillism, may take his punctuation too seriously," I said, "but he is right: 'a misplaced comma can be a very big deal.' Many of our professors have doctorates and are published," I continued, "and they are happy to share with us what they worked so hard to accomplish in their lives. You can submit a copy of the same essay to four different English professors, and you might get a 'B' from each of them. But, it will not be the same 'B' you get from each of them." Our new aspiring writer was half way to understanding but now had another frustration.

"But if they don't agree on what is proper grammar," I was asked, "who decides what is right and wrong?"

For this student, my answer, "The people who wrote the book you are using, and the people who wrote the book your instructor learned from," was not so reassuring. It was time to make as clear as possible just how lucky we are to be exposed to so much diversity instead of the dull consistency we assume writing will be when we first begin to study the art.

"Look at it this way. Each professor does recognize the artistic talent of his or her fellow faculty members. But professors don't earn doctorates by copying each others' style. Van Gogh did not get hired to teach us what made Picasso successful. Picasso is not here to teach us to write the way Van Gogh and Seurat do. And, we are here to learn from each instructor, to take from each what works well for us, and to develop a writing style of our own. While we are here and learning, there are two categories of grammatical errors we will be held accountable for. One category of grammatical errors we have control over. The other category we have little control over. The grammatical errors we have control over are the errors we learned about in grammar school: comma splices, subject verb agreement, run-on sentences. The grammatical errors we have little control over are the errors we will make because we have not attended the same school and have not earned the same language arts degree from the same graduating class as our instructor."

Students are relieved when I share my writer-artist metaphor with them. Suddenly they have a new flexibility in their appreciating of writing. From every professor they study under, students can incorporate the techniques they feel comfortable with and create a written voice of their own that will serve them well today and can always be improved upon tomorrow. And every English professor I have met so far has chuckled in agreement—sometimes relating to me the most incredible tales about his or her own education—when I talk about the grammatical error of not having the same language arts degree from the same graduating class as my instructor.

Wrecker
Marion Walker

By Phillip Gardner
Francis Marion University

Regarding the connection of "Wrecker" to writing centers, Phillip Gardner says "The story is about someone who struggles to tell the truth about 'the world.' The truth, he says, is not so hard to know, but getting it said, well, that's another thing. Then when he can't say it, he begins telling us a story—a kind of dialectic—which takes him to a place he didn't think he could get to. The comparisons to what we know as writing center folks are, I hope apparent, though embedded in the story."

The truth is complicated. I don't mean knowing it. Knowing it isn't so hard, sometimes. But getting it told can be next to impossible. The more you try to say it, the farther from it you get. Like pushing the same ends of a magnet towards one another, the more words people say to one another the farther they get from what they are trying to say, until you hear stuff coming out of your mouth and you say to yourself, where the hell did that come from? Or the other person says, what do you mean? And the fact is, you don't have the slightest idea what you mean. Then you get into the explaining, and before it's over the two of you are pushing each other across Colorado when you both know the truth lives in Carolina. Sometimes it's just better to keep your mouth shut.

It's not that you don't know the truth. It's just that when you do know something, and you know that it's true and somebody tells you to explain or to give examples, it just ruins it. We all know some things that are true. It's the telling that gets in the way. But when you love somebody, and you know it's true, and still she wants you to explain to her what love is, the telling screws up the thing you're trying to say. Everything goes wrong. Before it's over you hear yourself yelling things you never intended to say, things that aren't even in the least bit true. Things you'd never say. Things you can never take back.

I want to get it right.

Let me try to give you an example. I've gotten calls from the Highway Patrol at all hours of the night when it's so cold a dog would jump a cat for no reason. So cold I'd have to use ether to get the engine started. I'm hun-gover sometimes. I leave a warm bed and dress in the

dark. If she knows I'm gone, she never says so.

I climb in the cab of my wrecker, and even through the cushion I feel how cold the seat is on the backs of my legs. My breath fills up the whole cab. Sometimes I'm still a little drunk. The gear stick sends an ache through the palm of my hand. When I pull them up from under the seat, my gloves look like chopped off hands. It's that cold. I'm feeling like hell. And I know what I've got to look forward to. I ain't about to get warm. And I'm thinking about what I'm leaving behind. I'm thinking of my wife and the things I don't know how to say to her.

Then heading out east, out to Lamar or Timmons-ville there are breaks in the sky, and I know that later the sun will be coming up. I have a cup of Sav-Way coffee. Everything is quiet, the way it is in the South when everything is covered with snow and the moon is full. The blower is hot on my knees now and I can turn it down, too. For a second, I'm not thinking about anything or anybody.

Then I start up a hill and the sky is the color of the ocean just before a storm, gray or bluish, maybe slate colored. Then, at the very top of the hill, the moon is right there, sandwiched between the white land and the sky that's like a tide. And for a second you can't catch your breath, and you're glad as hell to be there, and you feel like the whole damned thing was planned just for you, or that you've slipped into a moment not meant for a human to see. And you forget about what waits for you eight or ten miles up the road and about what you've left as many miles behind.

There's just you and all this white world around you. It's early in the morning. You're warm, and there's the sky and the moon and the snow everywhere. What I'm trying to say is it's a feeling. That feeling is what I'm trying to say is what true is. It is that feeling, that thing I feel for her, that I can't get across. It all gets lost in the explaining.

I wish I could tell you what it's like at that time in the morning when you come to a flat stretch before the final curve and see the red and blue lights dancing over the snow way up ahead. I feel a little sick, because of what I know way down deep. But at the same time the lights on the snow, red chasing blue, blue chasing red on the ice and snow, and way back the beginnings of the sun and the receding tide of slate sky above, there is a feeling there. Still, I get that churning in my stomach on account of knowing and not knowing for sure what I've got ahead of me.

She says there's something missing.

When I was a boy, before I knew what those lights really meant, I would've sat at the top of the hill and imagined they were lights on a flying saucer or the second coming of Christ. Now I know what it means if the EMS guys are still there when there's snow. It means somebody's dying, dead, or damned near it. Sometimes it means I've got to move some steel before they can finish their work.

I leave the truck running and the blower on high. We, the EMS guys and me, we take turns aiming the lights mounted on the cab and warming our hands. Sometimes we see it, the way people go out of this world. The cold doesn't make it any easier. Sometimes it is so bad that we have to look for bodies thrown from cars. People don't drive as fast in ice and snow, you'd say. But the ice means they don't slow down either.

Sometimes they aren't all there. Parts of them, I mean, are lost.

I don't get paid for helping the guys look. My job is to haul away what's left of the plastic and steel. That's what I get paid for. But I just can't drive away while the others are out there looking. I couldn't do that. I'm not like that. You would think that it didn't matter, not to the dead person. But those EMS guys, they just won't give up looking.

It's what we have in common.

Even when a thing is dead it has its parts, and you owe it to make a broken thing whole, even if you can't give it life again. You and I, we have obligations. We take oaths and say vows. Or at least that's what I think.

I take my turn looking for the parts. Nobody talks. We all know what we have to do, and we know that we have to look close, and we hope that it is somebody else who finally says the search is over.

You would think the parts would be found near the point of impact. You'd be surprised. So you look and you think. Even with the bright lights it is hard to see.

You are always walking in your own shadow.

Sometimes I just want to close my eyes and get down on my hands and knees. Feel for what it is I hope I don't find. I wish I could just come out and tell you. If I had words, I'd tell you.

You can either take people at their word or not. It is a choice. It is a real hard choice. Believing some-

body's word takes trust on both sides. It means that one person knows what she is saying and is willing to say it. It means the other person can hear through to the meaning and can take it. Both sides are hard. It comes down to this. When somebody tells you something, they either mean what they say, or they mean something else, or they mean nothing at all. The problem is when they say it straight out. The straighter it is, the harder it is to take sometimes. You would think that the hardest thing would be when someone says, "I don't love you." Worse is when she says, "I love you, but . . ." It can make you say and do things you'll regret the rest of your life. It'll make you want to get down on your knees.

If the job isn't done when the sun really starts to get up, the EMS guys will go back to the van to warm. Nobody says anything. They just know that in the time it takes them to get warm they'll have the light of the sun to see by. It's true that it's coldest just before the sun comes up.

They are doing the right thing. If there is anything to be found, waiting a half hour won't make any difference now. Still, after I've been looking I can't go back with the others. They always feel a need to talk. I can't blame them. I feel it too. People feel uneasy when they are together like that and there is nothing but silence. They feel like there is something they ought to be saying. I understand that. But I can't do it. So I search alone, looking down at the snow, moving slowly, worried I'll bury under my boot the thing I'm looking for. Worried that somehow I already have.

Sometimes after staring down at the snow for a long time in the night, my eyes will play tricks on me. I'll be looking down, and suddenly I'm seeing into nothing at all. I'm not saying this right. I'm seeing the very place where the snow and the night come together, see. I'm looking down from high up and everything just goes down and down, forever. I feel dizzy. I stand very still, and the cold seeps into my bones. I get that numb feeling everywhere. I know I have to bring myself out of it.

So when I feel this way, I sometimes think about the warm place I've left and wish with all my heart I could go back to it, and that it would somehow be there when I get home.

["Wrecker," reprinted in *Southern Discourse* by permission from the publisher, appears in *Someone To Crawl Back To*, a book of stories by Phillip Gardner, published in 2001 by Boson Books both in print and online. For information, go to www.cmonline.com or write Boson Books, 3905 Meadow Field Lane, Raleigh NC 27606.]

Tickling the Funny Bone in the Writing Center

By Paula H. Payne
Georgia Military College

Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont, sponsors a summer graduate school called the Bread Loaf School of English. This summer program earned its unusual name because it is located on Bread Loaf Mountain just a few miles from Middlebury in the Green Mountains. Although this recognized graduate program for English teachers offers challenging courses, the children of the faculty are called the "croutons," and the weekly newspaper is *The Crumb*. Just a few feet from the main administrative building for Bread Loaf is a road sign that reads "Students Beware."

Because of my experiences at Bread Loaf and the fact that my last name is "Payne," I learned early in my career that humor would also be an asset when working with young people. I could only imagine the moans and groans voiced when my students looked for the first time at their college class schedules and saw "Payne" listed next to the English 101 they selected.

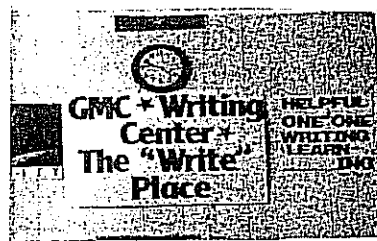
Research indicates that humor can enhance learning. In a 1994 study, Mahboub Hashem explains: "The ability to laugh at one's self and to laugh with others is a priceless tool for effective teaching" (Wilcox quoted in Hashem 16). A Johns Hopkins Professor, Ronald A. Berk, conducted a three-year study evaluating the effectiveness of ten systematic strategies for using humor as a teaching tool. Berk reports, "The research literature is replete with evidence of the psychological and physiological benefits of humor and laughter" (72). Berk offers seven conclusions based upon his research:

1. Students view humor as an effective teaching tool to facilitate learning;
2. A wide range of low-risk humor techniques can be very effective in reducing anxiety and improving learning and performance;
3. Strategies for using humor must be planned well and executed systematically to achieve specific outcomes;
4. Both content-specific and generic humorous material tailored to the characteristics of each class can be effective in appropriate applications;
5. Humor tends to be more effective when two or more of the senses, especially visual and aural (written and oral);
6. Offensive humor should never be used in the classroom; and
7. The strategies for using humor in this study are adapt-

able and can be generalized to any discipline and course content (88).

If humor in the classroom impacts in a positive way a student's ability to learn, then some of these same strategies can also work when tutors work with students. Here are some suggestions for incorporating humor when establishing a writing center:

1. Educate faculty and train tutors by acting out skits exaggerating what tutoring will and will not involve.
2. Display posters and cartoon characters to advertise hours for center.
3. Instead of numbering, give computers and printers ridiculous names like "Big Bertha," "Speedy Gonzales," and "Cookie Monster."
4. Have tutors relate humorous examples of problems with writing.
5. Use modifications of games to help students review academic skills like *Trivial Pursuit*, *Scattergories*, *Jeopardy*, *Bingo*, *Monopoly*.
6. Take photographs of tutors and students and post them in center.
7. Keep photo album of previous tutors and students.
8. Draw caricatures of average student/teacher having trouble writing.
9. Use humorous cover sheets and sign-in slips for center. (Example: Title for publication of freshmen writing is Georgia Military College PupPages, with picture of puppy paw-prints walking through spilled ink and a turned over ink bottle.
10. Decorate bulletin boards, walls, and doors with colorful images acronyms, and mottos to attract student attention. (H.O.W.L. which stands for "Helpful one-on-one writing and learning.")



11. Humorous answering phone messages when center is closed. (If your writing assignment or math homework is due before three o'clock on Wednesday, you waited too late. Leave your name and we will call you for a tutoring appointment as soon as the center re-opens.)

Of course humor-izing a writing center depends on the type of student that uses it. Some of these techniques may seem too juvenile. A few of my favorite cartoons come from the Charles Schulz's Peanuts Cartoon, and

I like to enlarge them and hang them in our center. In one cartoon, Linus and Lucy are walking along the sidewalk. Lucy says, "Is that the school bus coming?" Linus replies, "No, it's a regular bus." In the next frame Lucy says, "I think I'll get on it, and go to another state and live in the woods and eat berries." Linus concludes by saying, "Having trouble with fractions again?" In a second Peanuts Cartoon, Charlie Brown is in bed with Snoopy lying on his stomach. Charlie says, "Sometimes I lie awake at night and I ask, 'Is life a multiple choice test or is it a true or false test?'" In the next picture, Snoopy has turned over and the caption reads, "Then a voice comes to me out of the dark and says, 'We hate to tell you this, but life is a thousand word essay.'"

One final example of a poster I have found suitable for a writing center is a spoof on a father-college aged son correspondence.

Dear Dad,

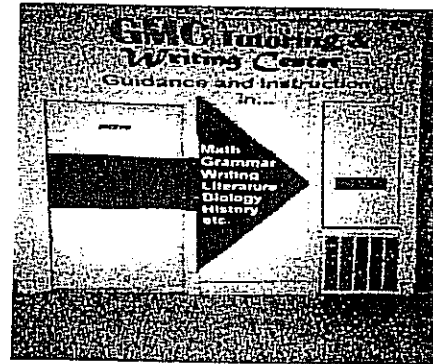
School i\$ really great. I am making lot\$ of friend\$ and \$tudying hard. With all my \$tuff I \$imply can't think of anything I need. \$o if you would like, you can just \$end me a card, a\$ I would love to hear from you.
Your loving \$on

Dear Son,

I kNOW that astroNOMy, ecoNOMics, and oceaNOgraphy are eNOUGH to keep even an hoNOR student busy. Do NOT forget that the pursuit of kNOWLEDge is a NOble task, and you can never study eNOugh.
Love Dad

I incorporated humor into our writing center in the form of a sign we designed for our location. When our center at Georgia Military College first opened in the fall of 1998, we worked in a building ready for demolition. The art students had been decorating the halls outside our room with their designs for several years. Painting tropical fish had been an assignment the previous quarter, so I felt like I was walking through a giant-sized fish bowl every time I opened the lab. I wanted our students to feel welcome and be able to see our presence in the hall, and I was a little dismayed that the men's bathroom, painted school board green, stood opposite our door. The only way to salvage any turf and self-esteem meant picking up the paint brush and adding a bold, humorous sign to indicate our presence in the building. The tutors got involved, and within a few days we had a floor to ceiling arrow painted across the bathroom door and pointing to our domain.

The humorous technique I use most often to relax students and emphasize the importance of the writing process involves my own damaged ego and a class I



took many years ago. During that first summer on Bread Loaf Mountain, I enrolled in Dixie Goswami's writing class. As a final project, she wanted us to complete an essay and send it off for publication. I carefully explain to my students how I struggled to put the essay together, and on the final day of class, Dixie took a look at my work. After several anxious moments of my watching her and trying to gauge her reaction, she took a breath and dropped my paper into her lap. She looked at me intensely and said, "Paula, do you have scissors?" I replied slowly not sure of where she was headed, "Yes." Not missing a beat Dixie responded, "Do you have paste?" I felt like a completely confused kindergarten student assigned to cut out flowers and animals. Next she smiled and laughed while instructing me to "cut out all the garbage and paste together the good stuff." As I walked away from our meeting, I was devastated and wanted to give up, but once I allowed myself to think about what she said, I knew she was right.

That day I learned that a sense of humor can lighten any mood and communicate the need for perseverance. Learning means making mistakes and having the courage and strength of character to try again and again. When humor is added, students can have fun, learn more about themselves, and acquire skills to ensure their academic success.

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The Missing Link

By Darren Crovitz
University of Central Florida

All readers and writers are interested to some degree in the nuts and bolts of language. Sure, when we read, there are larger things we're looking for—a controlled focus, cohesive organization, an engaging style. But for each of us, there are certain issues of diction, syntax, grammar, punctuation, and usage that snag our attention, like thorns snatching and unraveling a sweater.

One of those pet peeves for me is hyphens. Or rather, the lack of them.

Why the hyphen? After all, it's such an innocuous-looking thing. A tiny half-line, barely visible on the page, joining words together like the cars of little toy trains. There are a thousand other more obvious issues I could have with writing. But for me, a missing hyphen is like a hole in the universe, a white void, a yawning nothingness, an empty space crying out in need.

Okay, maybe it's not that bad. But generally, when reading college-level writing, one is far more likely to find a hyphen omitted than added. What's up with this?

A hyphen joins words into a compound form. Essentially, a single construct or idea is formed through a linkage that melds previously individual terms. One common use for hyphens is to create a compound modifier of a noun. For instance, "a blue-green sky" doesn't mean a sky that is half-green and half-blue, or striped or mottled, but a sky of one consistent color, a "new" color that emerges from the combination of those two adjectives (maybe "turquoise" works just as well, but never mind).

If a writer omits the hyphen in blue-green, chances are we can figure out that it doesn't mean the sky is divided into blue and green sections. But in other situations, legitimate confusion can easily arise. Omitting hyphens in this case implies that the two adjectives are functioning separately on the noun that follows, and the result can be confusing, misleading, or embarrassing.

Take the hyphenated descriptor "easy-going," for example. With the hyphen, it means mellow, relaxed, possessing a type B personality. But without the hyphen, we might end up with a sentence like "Sara is an easy going woman." Now, maybe we can deduce that Sara is mellow from this statement, but what it actually seems to be saying

is that she is promiscuous and on-the-run. Big difference. Run the same test through the sentence "Dave is a hard-working guy" and you get similarly bawdy results.

This no-hyphen confusion occurs more than you might think. I see it in almost every student essay I read. Check out these other examples:

1. Early-bird dinner: with the hyphen, you're just eating dinner early at a restaurant. Without the hyphen, you're eating early, and you're eating chicken.
2. Last-minute decision: with the hyphen, it's a decision made immediately before some deadline. Take out the hyphen, and you have a final, very small decision.
3. Old-fashioned: hyphenated, and you've got a style from a previous era. Nonhyphenated, and you've just got something ancient that's been shaped.
4. Dirty-blond hair: with the hyphen, it's an attractive color. Without, and it just needs to be washed.
5. Long-winded speaker: with the hyphen, and it means someone who is pompously overindulgent in speech. With no hyphen, the person is just out of breath and, well, long.
6. English-speaking diplomat: with, and it describes a diplomat who can speak English; without, and it describes a Brit who can talk.
7. Fast-track career: hyphenated, and it's a job track with plenty of growth and income potential; without the hyphen, and you're running the 100 meters for a living.
8. High-powered attorney: with, and you've got Johnnie Cochran; without, and your lawyer is a stoner with a battery pack.
9. Thirty-story building: with, and you've got a skyscraper; without, and you've got a building full of anecdotes, tales, and narratives...

In the grand scheme of writing, maybe these ambiguities aren't enormous issues. But then again, writing is the making of meaning, and meaning starts with the building blocks of word choice. A hyphen isn't just another pointless burden of punctuation that students have to be worried about; it's a tool for constructing and clarifying and creating sense. A hyphen connects, creating something

larger than the sum of the parts. Suddenly, two unrelated words have evolved into something higher.

And evolution—in writing or anything else—is a good thing.

[Editor's Note: *The Chicago Manual of Style*, published by the University of Chicago Press and now in its fourteenth edition, has an excellent and very comprehensive section on the hyphen, including a table of hyphen usage that provides many examples.]

Announcing...
the Slate of Open Positions for the
Southeastern Writing Center
Association Executive Board:

Nominations for the following positions are open:

President (Term: 1 Year)
Vice President (Term: 2 Years)
Treasurer (Term: 2 Years)
Secretary (Term: 2 Years)
At-Large Members: Four (Term: 2 Years)

Nominations are to be sent via email or snail mail to

Sonja Bagby
sbagby@westga.edu

Sonja S. Bagby
Writing Center
Parkman Room
TLC 1201
State University of West Georgia
Carrollton, GA 30118

All nominations must include a brief biography. Deadline for nominations is March 1, 2002, for all email and snail mail nominations. Voting will take place at the annual SWCA meeting to be held at the 2002 IWCA/SWCA Conference in Savannah, Georgia on April 11-13, 2001. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor at that time. Ballots will be distributed with nominations made previously; those accepted from the floor at the executive meeting may be written in. At the business meeting, changes in the bylaws affecting elections will be proposed to lengthen then president's term to two years and to stagger the at-large terms.

Tutoring and Teaching
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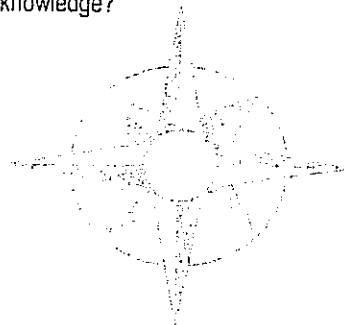
I asked my students to write in their journals for at least ten minutes. I said simply, "Write about what you're feeling today; then we'll talk." When they finished writing, we went around the circle one by one. I gave them permission to pass on speaking if they wished. I told them that they could either read what they had written or say what was on their minds contemporaneously, and I asked that they listen to each other without interruption.

It was an incredible experience for me. Not that I'm a big lecturer or anything. I have always thought of myself as a facilitator in my classes, but this meeting was different from any other I'd sat through. It wasn't, obviously, a new method of communication or a new structure for discussion, yet the atmosphere of the room sustained a unique quality. Each person's dignity and compassion were palpable in the room. My tangible role was minimal: I mostly listened. In fact, any individual's role in the discussion bowed to the larger presence that the students created with their talk.

Each person's dignity and compassion were palpable in the room. My tangible role was minimal.

It wasn't that everyone in class agreed or felt the same way about what had happened, either. They offered diverse opinions about who might have committed the atrocities and why. They also disagreed about what America should do next. But they had evolved into a community of the concerned, and they honored a tacit pledge to hear each other out. They were engaged in active, cooperative learning. They discovered truth, they watched its shading change, and they confessed that their present perspectives could also change.

What more could a teacher hope for than to witness eighteen human beings in the collective glory of their capacity to seek knowledge?



The 2002 Southeastern Writing Center Association Achievement Award

The Southeastern Writing Center Association Achievement Award is presented annually on a competitive basis to a member of the Southeastern Writing Center Association for his or her outstanding contribution to the writing center community.

Eligibility

Any member of the SWCA is eligible to receive the award.

Process

To nominate an eligible candidate, send a short letter of nomination to the address below. The nominator is also responsible for informing the candidate that he or she has been nominated.

The candidate should submit supporting documents, which may include letters of support from students, tutors, faculty, administrators, colleagues from other institutions, syllabi, publications, and local writing center materials, etc. to the address below by February 1st.

Nominations and supporting material should be sent to:

Karl Fornes
The Writing Room
University of South Carolina Aiken
471 University Parkway
Aiken, SC
karlf@aiken.sc.edu

A committee of SWCA members will review the nominations.

Deadline for Nominations: February 1, 2001

The winner will be announced and presented with the award (a nifty plaque and a check for \$250) during the 2002 IWCA/SWCA Conference.

Award Committee

If you are interested in serving on the committee that reviews the nominations, please contact Karl Fornes at the above address as soon as possible.

Instant Poetry

By Sylvia Whitman
Rollins College

We try to start every weekly staff meeting with five minutes or less of writing spurred by a prompt. "Write a haiku about consulting," I told the group.

The rush of freshmen—
My brain falls out of my nose
By the fourth paper.

Rhea Mendoza '04

The student walks in
--No thesis and no structure--
And says, "Check grammar."

Shaun Arsenault '02

Freshmen visit us
Often confused and unsure.
We help, we consult!

Kate Greenberg '03

Conjugating verbs
In the midst of a train wreck
Brings no one an A.

Rhea Mendoza '04

Con-sult-ant, please help.
Read my paper thoroughly.
Tell me I am through.

Jamie Morris '02

"Just make this an A."
I'll keep looking at my watch
While I waste your time.

Keira Keeley '04

Commas rush past my
Weary eyes—pausing, pausing.
Why stop now, I ask?

Marlo David, Master of
Liberal Studies program

Writing center means helping.
So does 911.
Therefore, writing center is...

Aimee Johnston '03

Don't Forget...
the 2002 IWCA/SWCA Joint
Conference
"The Art of Writing Centers"
April 11-13, 2002

The conference will be held at the Savannah Marriot Riverfront Hotel. For more information, contact 2002 Conference Chair Traci Augustosky at taugusto@scad.edu.

Report from the SWCA Board

Submitted by Glenda Conway
SWCA Secretary

SWCA Board members met on June 30 in lovely Savannah, Georgia, site of the 2002 conference of the International Writing Center Association and Southeastern Writing Center Association. A significant portion of the meeting involved some very lively discussions regarding conference matters (budget, site, keynote presenter, session arrangements, meals, social events, etc.). Members also spent time dealing with several important organizational objectives, summarized below.

1. Board members voted unanimously to approve a proposal from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte to host the 2003 SWCA Conference.
2. Proposed bylaw changes will be distributed to the Board by Marcy Trianosky, SWCA president, for discussion and voting at the April 2002 IWCA/SWCA Conference. Conference organizers will have a table set up for members to vote on bylaw amendments.
3. Officer nominations and voting for the 2002 election cycle will follow procedures outlined in the current bylaws. Specifically, nominations will be sought from the floor at the April 2002 annual SWCA meeting. Board members proposed a modification to the bylaws, however, that will call for nominations in the future to come in advance of annual meetings in order that candidates' names may be published in *Southern Discourse*.

4. Board member Bryan Moten, with assistance from President Marcy Trianosky, will write to prospective new SWCA members.

Electronic Discussions - continued from page 3 -

comment as a starting point to a new discussion. Even if we choose not to reuse a past comment or discussion, we will be able to maintain a record of the academic and professional discourse of our writing center.

Moreover, exposing tutors to the new technologies in a nonthreatening environment gives them additional tools for success in the classroom, both as students and as teachers. Indeed, last fall, very few of our new tutors were familiar with blackboard or any similar course management product; however, most had to use blackboard in the courses they were taking the very next week. Early practice acquired during the presemester writing center training helped them negotiate their class assign



Three tutors from the Eastern Kentucky University Writing Center share a relaxing moment.

ments. Some also adopted the software to enhance the courses they were teaching. Participating in the electronic discussions prompted them to use similar discussions in their composition courses as a means of encouraging more student writing, as well as more facilitating interaction among students outside the classroom.

The use of electronic discussion boards provides an effective and efficient method of ongoing training, particularly for those writing centers that have few other options. Not only are tutors' skills sharpened and the pedagogical underpinnings of writing centers recognized, but overall communication among and between administrators and tutors is also strengthened.

Southern Discourse

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Decatur, GA 30030-3797



AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE
THE WORLD FOR WOMEN

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