

Michigan Writing Centers Association Newsletter

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the Michigan
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Association*

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Tutors test out academic waters

By Frances E. FitzGerald
Associate Editor

“The people who attended our workshop were all very interested and attentive, and it’s cool to know there are other people out there who are trying to do the same things,” said Katie Kramer, Writing Center tutor and Madonna University senior majoring in education and family and consumer sciences.



Katie Kramer



John Allasio Kramer was one of four presenters of the “Tutoring Students in a Writing Center-tied Course” workshop, Friday, April 11, at the East Central Writing Centers Association Conference at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. Other presenters were tutors John Allasio, sophomore majoring in English; Melanie Keyser, junior majoring in journalism, and Frances FitzGerald, Writing Center Coordinator. Ann Russell, Director of Writing Programs, and FitzGerald developed the PowerPoint.



Melanie Keyser

Also attending the conference were tutors Kara Davis, a junior majoring in language arts; Niketa Woodley, a senior majoring in

See New experience, page 2

Fall 2008 conference to be hosted by Madonna University

Editor’s note: The article below is a reprint from our winter issue. An official call for papers will be sent out via e-mail in early August.

MWCA’s next Bright Ideas Conference will be held on Saturday, October 4 at Madonna University in Livonia.

The 2008 conference theme is “Reaching Out: The Campus, the Community, and Beyond.”

Ann Russell, Writing Program and Writing Center Director at Madonna, said she intended the theme

to be “something you can run with, be creative with.”

“There are various ways in which a writing center might extend its services, concerns, and commitments outside the center itself,” said Russell. “Satellite sites, collaboration with other units or programs, community service, service learning—these are just a few ideas.”

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New experience, *continued from page 1*



Niketa Woodley

English journalism; and Qolette Jackson, a graduate student in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program at Madonna.

The Writing Center-tied workshop addressed the history, mechanics, strengths and challenges of Madonna’s English 1000 and English 1150 composition courses. Attendees asked the following questions:

- * Do these courses get credit? (Yes)
- * Are they graded? (Yes)
- * How does the variable-credit system work? (For one- or two-credit courses, students

do not attend a class, but work solely in the Writing Center with tutors three to four hours a week.)

Allasio, Davis, FitzGerald, Jackson, Keyser, Kramer, and Woodley also attended other sessions throughout the day.

* Kramer attended “Meeting the ter.” Presenters Andrea Riehl and Brandi engage kinesthetic learners. These in-constructing a “solar system”: the sun as porting points.

“That may be good for younger with college kids and not make them feel

* FitzGerald went to “Creating and Cross-Disciplinary Outreach.” Presenters Sarah Matney, Julie Morris, and Adam Ev-that can affect a tutoring session. For example, collaboration is a foreign idea to many Asian students, who often prefer to be told what to do.

“Several sessions touched on using questions as opposed to statements to guide students in working on their papers,” said Allasio. “We have obviously talked about this a lot ourselves, but it was very helpful to know that others were having the same problems and to see how they handled them.”

Allasio added, “One thing that I really liked about the conference was that I got to meet other writing tutors.”

“Participating in the Ohio State conference was intriguing. Getting to learn new things was an accomplishment,” stated Davis.



Kara Davis

Needs of Kinesthetic Learners in the Writing Cen-Hoffman demonstrated “hands-on” techniques to cluded using colored paper clips or Play-Doh, or the thesis statement and the orbiting planets as sup-

kids,” Kramer commented, “but how do you do it like 12-year-olds?”

Using Tutor Guides as Special Demographic and Julie Moore, Erin SanGregory, ans discussed cultural differences



Qolette Jackson

Call for Papers: Michigan Tutorial Association’s 26th Connections Conference

Deadline: June 13

Editor’s note: Below is a direct quote from an e-mail sent tp MCWCA members by Elizabeth Dewey, director of the Delta College Teaching and Learning Center:

“Our theme is “Building on Our Legacy.” What have you been doing for training tutors, promoting your centers, evolving your mission and services, surviving a move or reassignment, or providing services in Michigan’s tough economic climate? Come share the good and the not-so-good with your colleagues from around the state. We especially love proposals from student tutors. You’ll be sure to pick up some ideas you can use, and your contribution could mean the world to someone else!

“Go to http://www.michigan-tutors.org/mta_conferences.htm for information about the 2008 conference in Lansing. Access the proposal form from there or directly at http://www.michigan-tutors.org/MTA_PROPOSAL_FORM.htm .”

Confessions of a Word Snob

Internet lingo doesn't cut it for this tutor

By Melanie Keyser

Madonna University Writing Center Tutor



Ok. There's this commercial out, I think it's for AT&T, and in it, a mother is talking to her child about her "texting" habits. The little girl responds with a series of words that are supposed to be her reply to her mother, but that are actually a jumble of words and numbers that *represent* words. For example, the ever-catchy "IDK, my BFF Jill?" which, translated means 'I don't know, my best friend forever, Jill?' The commercial is supposed to show that the little girl needs an unlimited texting plan because she texts so much that the lingo has carried over into her conversation.

I get what the commercial means, but to me, it simply highlights a serious problem. **IT IS NOT OK TO USE AWKWARD INTERNET-ESQUE SHORTHAND WHEN YOU ARE SPEAKING.** Ever. Period. As in it is not acceptable. As your resident word snob conscience, I simply will not allow it. I really don't see the appeal in that kind of language. Or the reason, for that matter.

Really, why is it necessary to shorten saying "oh, that's funny!" to "LOL" (laugh out loud)? I don't get it. Is it that there isn't enough time to say what you really need to say? Because I know for a fact that saying the full thing does not take that long. I think the underlying problem is that people have gotten lazy.

That's right, I said it. Lazy with a capital L. As in people have stopped caring about the words that come out of their mouths. This is one of the saddest predicaments I have ever heard of. Word snob that I am, the thought of shortening lovely, lovely words horrifies me. If anything, find a longer word to say! Don't hide the words because it's "cool" to speak like an instant messenger conversation. Let them out! They want to be heard, trust me.

I'll admit to the occasional mocking "JK" in lieu of "just kidding", but like I said, this is only mockery of this obnoxious phenomenon. If I wanted to seriously convey that I am, in fact, kidding, I would straight up say it. It really is that simple.

Consider this: language has been around since the beginning of man in one form or another. The internet is an invention of the past couple decades. Hmmmm. Which is longer: forever or 20-odd years? Yes, this is a rhetorical question that I assume you know the answer to (forever is longer, in case that one went over your head).

So what can we do? What needs to happen in order to save our language? Pretty much all we can do is band together as a determined group of language lovers and proclaim our mission. Proper English is good! Any form of slang or strange computer-inspired lingo is bad! That is all you know, that that is all you need to know.

Fall conference, *cont. from page 1*

"I hope next fall's presentations will generate some thought and discussion on a wide variety of topics related to reaching out."

Proposal deadlines, lodging arrange-

ments, and other information will be sent at a later date to all MWCA members.

Livonia is located in the northwest part of Wayne County. It is the eighth largest city in the state, situated about 22 miles northwest of downtown Detroit.



Nose ring or tuxedo?



Guiding student writers across the disciplines

By Frances E. FitzGerald
Writing Center Coordinator
Madonna University

“He asked for a book review and I gave him a book review. I don’t know why he gave me this grade,” says the student writer in a tight voice, running his fingers through his rumpled hair.

“This reads more like a book report,” the peer tutor comments. “You’ve summarized it well, but I suspect your instructor wants to see more analysis and critique.”

“Why does he care what *I* think? In nursing, we just write summaries of journal articles. They don’t want our opinion.”

At Madonna’s Writing Center, we see many frustrated students. Perhaps they imagine that teachers conspire in a smoke-filled room:

“I know: I’ll tell them they need a thesis statement at the end of the first paragraph, and you tell them they don’t need a thesis statement at all,” says Professor Equivocation.

“Great idea! And I’ll tell them to include their opinion, and Professor Inconsistency, you tell them their opinion has no place in their assignments,” says Professor Contradiction.

“Perfect!” says Professor Inconsistency. “Professor Ambiguity, you tell them to avoid passive construction, and Professor Incertitude, you tell them that passive construction is the norm in their discipline.”

And then they all laugh uproariously, slapping their knees and wiping the tears of mirth from their eyes.

The Evolution of WID/WAC

Although no such smoke-filled room exists—as far as I know—many of our student writers still feel pulled in contradictory directions.



“What do they expect?” is a common question from nursing students taking English classes, from religious studies students taking a general science course, or from business students taking a philosophy class.

This is some of the fallout from Writing in the Disciplines (WID), which is a natural by-product of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement that started picking up momentum in the 1980s, according to the Online Writing Lab (OWL) from Purdue University. Of course, some fallout is inevitable with every innovation in education, and WID and WAC are no exceptions.

WAC developed as a result of many college educators’ concern over students’ writing competency. Instructors recognized potent benefits in pushing their students to write and research more in classes ranging from math and computers to criminal justice and addiction studies.

Not only would student writing improve, educators speculated, but so would their ability to analyze, critique, synthesize and cite outside information, and create new meaning.

WID takes it a step further: Not only must students write more, they must tailor their style, approach, and documentation style to fit each area of study. Unfortunately, some of our students expend more time obsessing over whether the period in their APA citation is in the right place than over the content of their essays. Eventually, as students become more comfortable switching their writing “hats,” I believe we’ll see more balance.

Reaching Out

For many of our students, writing is *not* second nature. They struggle through their English 1010 and 1020 courses. They may assume their assignments in these classes can serve as models for later, discipline-specific essays. Although most of the basics of strong writing/research do translate, later classes often come with a whole new set of demands. These expectations can seem as overwhelming to our students as the Pythagorean Theorem is to some of us number-challenged writing instructors.



WAC, continued from page 4

Madonna's Writing Center offers one option for "interpretation" of assignments from the various disciplines. Naturally, we're constantly struggling to keep up. However, as we get continued exposure to assignments from nursing, addiction studies, etc., we do get a feel for different instructors' expectations.

Detailed instructions from professors are also extremely useful. Most of the instructors whose students come to the Writing Center provide clear, comprehensive rubrics for their students' assignments. Some of them give sample essays to illustrate their expectations. The students we see are usually very grateful for this direction.

In addition, analogies may help illustrate the complicated process of writing. They may sound simplistic, but concrete images can give "teeth" to abstract ideas. I suggest to students that writing is like the grooming and clothing choices we make. For an important job interview, we wear something tailored, we get a haircut, and we make sure our shoes are shined. When we meet our girlfriend's/boyfriend's parents, we're probably going to cover up our tattoos and take out the nose ring. When we go to an informal party, we're likely to pull on our most comfortable jeans. To some degree, we're all chameleons, adjusting to the varying expectations of our audience. In writing, as in life, we make choices about metaphorical haircuts, nose rings, and jeans.



Academic Community

Although some of our students may react to the plethora and apparent contradictions of their writing assignments with dismay and even hostility, the intention behind the WAC/WID movements is to invite them into our learning communities. It's true: Writing is a messy, recursive, multi-layered challenge. Different professors have different expectations. Writing *is* hard. It's also the best introduction we can offer to academic discourse.

Writer's Heaven

A writer died and was given the option of going to heaven or hell.

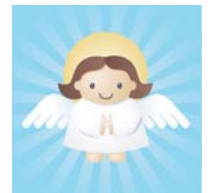
She decided to check out each place first. As the writer descended into the fiery pits, she saw row upon row of writers chained to their desks in a steaming sweatshop. As they worked, they were repeatedly whipped with thorny lashes.

"Oh my," said the writer. "Let me see heaven now."

A few moments later, as she ascended into heaven, she saw rows of writers, chained to their desks in a steaming sweatshop. As they worked, they, too, were whipped with thorny lashes.

"Wait a minute," said the writer. "This is just as bad as hell!"

"Oh no, it's not," replied an unseen voice. "Here, your work gets published."





Tutors' corner

Tutor traces evolution of Madonna University Writing Center

By Stefanie Mastic
Madonna University Writing Center Tutor

When Madonna's writing center first opened in January 2007, we had two basic goals in mind: to increase students' confidence as writers and to help students become better writers overall. A year and a half later, our goals remain the same.

And yet, a number of other things about our writing center have changed.

One of most significant changes we have undergone is the addition of lab-based writing courses that are directly tied to our writing center. These basic composition courses require students to spend a certain number of hours each week (ideally at least 6 hours) working with tutors to help develop college-level writing skills. Although many of the students are often intimidated by writing (and by the writing center itself) when they first come in, it is amazing to watch as these same students develop into self-assured and capable writers.

In addition to the lab-based courses, our writing center has also become more actively involved on our school's campus. This semester we introduced the Madonna Pen, a creative writing club that is open to all students, faculty, and staff who share an interest in writing. Even more exciting, this fall we are tentatively planning a 24-hour "Write-a-Thon" which should be a lot of fun.

Lastly, we have also become more actively involved in the writing center community. This April, a very talented group of our tutors traveled down to Columbus, Ohio to present at the East Central Writing Centers Association Conference. This opportunity allowed our tutors to share their experiences with the lab-based courses and also gave them a chance to hear from others in the field.

Overall, these changes have strengthened and enriched our writing center and it is exciting to think about the changes that are in store for the future.



Stefanie Mastic

'Those Madonna University people—They think they're all that!'

Have you noticed that most of this newsletter is by and/or about Madonna University Writing Center staff? Isn't that a bit booooooring? Wouldn't you prefer to see your own writing center represented prominently on these pages?

Here's the remedy: Turn to the last page and pencil the deadline dates for our newsletter into your planner. Write some copy for us, snap some photos, and send it all in! We guarantee you'll be featured prominently in one of our upcoming issues.





Book review

***From the Foothills of the Himalayas* : Western educator attempts to westernize pedagogy in southern Nepal**

Michael Steinberg, editor of *Fourth Genre*, has made compelling arguments for a creative non-fiction. This is part of a trend in non-fiction narrative that resituates the memoir as part of the creative pantheon of genres, no longer slaved to the mere history or facts, but elevated to take its place alongside genres that feature artistic writing over written record. As exciting as this re-situation is, it also tends to redefine the work of those that chronicle their experiences as a matter of personal and professional practice and not for the sake of art. A case in point is Nancy W. Axinn's *From the Foothills of the Himalayas: a Memoir* (edited by her daughter, Martha Jerrim; Bloomington: iUniverse, 2008. 212 pages; \$18.95 US). Axinn's memoir is composed from her daily journaling and letters to her family, and provides us with the personal observations of a veteran academic and international development consultant as well as a wife and mother. Axinn, until her retirement, was a member of the faculty at Michigan State University, "...a specialist in international rural development, with an emphasis on women in development programs and projects..." Axinn was a pioneer in the study of women and environment in the global community.

From the Foothills of the Himalayas is a completely unself-conscious collection of entries created during Axinn's teaching sojourn in the Chitwan valley in southern Nepal, 1976 – 1978. As such, it is a candid look into the experience of an American consultant attempting to assist with modernizing changes in a foreign country during the time when the United States was experiencing the first rumbles of the current world (in the form of the first gasoline shortage and just prior to the capture of the US embassy in Tehran). However, it is also the observations of an American educator attempting to westernize pedagogy to improve the quality of life in a culture where rote memorization of higher education is the hallmark of presidency of Gerald Ford and administration, it is also an artifact from the last years of the Cold War, in which international assistance played a critical tactical role. In this respect, it represents the focus and devotion of those that fulfilled such missions, while paying little overt attention to political objectives. It is somewhat comforting to note that the road to our current proximity to perdition was paved with honest intentions. I have it from an informal interview with the editor, Martha Jerrim (a recent graduate from the masters program in social sciences at the University of Michigan-Flint, and a veteran tutor in the Marian Wright Writing Center) that her mother and father (Dr. George Axinn) picked the Nepal mission because it was not on the political radar in those years.



Under the auspices of Midwest University Consortium for International Activities (MUCIA), the Axinns, along with other team members undertook to relocate and redesign the Institute of Agriculture and Animal Sciences (IAAS), located in Kathmandu. The project was to move it to the southern agricultural region, away from the city and its outdated English Language textbooks. Taking the assignment, however, also involved making family arrangements, such as convincing the youngest child, Bill, that this trip would be better than staying in Michigan with older sisters. Indeed, the tone of many chapters of Axinn's account read like letters from the frontline of humanitarian engagement, full of personal news. One can imagine having opened the envelope to haul out eagerly awaited pages.

See Foothills, page 8



Foothills *book review*, continued from page 7

One has the sense of isolation from ordinary technology like telephones, roads, television and reliable water sources as well. In the late 1970s, Nepal is a faraway kingdom, a kind of Shangri-la with hashish in hippy mythology by then. Its contact with the world is sporadic and yet the landscape is already showing signs of creeping globalization. By chapter 17, "Collecting Orchid Plants," Axinn notes on a particular tour, ...the electric wire towers of steel that are marching across the valley and the hills to Hetauda. They will eventually bring electricity to the towns and villages along the road across Chitwan.

This time of year, the thatch grass has magnificent silver feathers on the top and they gleam in the sunlight and fill the dry river beds.

Between these flashes of image, there are descriptions of administrative duty mixed with diplomatic receptions, even of Nepalese royalty. Through it all, there is a desire to keep the reader updated, to replace physical presence with enough detailed information, or to keep for the self some words that will later trigger the memory.

"The Beauty of the Countryside" clinches this impression. After witnessing the fields of mustard plants extending to the distant Himalayas one afternoon, Axinn begins her letter home by explaining that she does not feel up to describing the scene in words. There is a charm in this apology: it calls into question what words can do, wonders if one can move what one has seen into another person's imagination. Confronted with the human need to do so, Axinn rises effectively to an occasion for which she feels unprepared. Perhaps, from an artistic point of view, unintentionally, Axinn's homage to the natural power of what she sees is cast against not just her inadequacy, but ours. One wonders at writers that believe in their skill with language. Against the self-fulfilling call of creative non-fiction, there is a kind of human contact that can only be accomplished by that which has only that pure intention. *From the Foothills of the Himalayas*, something authentic has just arrived.

Scott Russell
Marian Wright Writing Center
University of Michigan-Flint
May 22, 2008

***If you enjoy reading our
newsletter, please be a
contributor!***

**Send articles, news in brief, creative
writing, book or conference reviews as
Word documents to
arussell@madonna.edu.**

**Please send photos as separate files.
If you would like to discuss a story idea,
send an e-mail to the editor or call
(734) 432-5438.**

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