

# Verbal Equinox

Weber State University Writing Center Journal

Spring 1999

## Writing Center Goes Online

### Students Can Submit Papers, Receive Feedback from Tutors

by Suzanne Workman, staff writer

The WSU Writing Center has expanded to the Internet. Students now have access to information that can help them with their papers and submit their papers for review online.

On-line tutoring is helpful to students whose busy schedules do not allow them to get into the Writing Center in person. It is also a good resource for those who are taking on-line classes because they can get help without having to come to the campus.

"Expanding to the Internet definitely helps us make our services available to a larger number of people," said Carl Porter, director of the Learning Support Center.

So what do people think about this new method of tutoring? The students who submitted papers online found their on-line sessions very beneficial and said they would definitely use our services again. One tutee, Amanda Stewart, said, "It was nice to get input on my paper. I really like the on-line opportunity because, with my busy schedule, I probably would not have had the chance to get it looked at."

Most Writing Center tutors think that online submissions will be a helpful aid for students who are not able to come in to the center for conventional tutoring.

Tutor Krista Beus Keogh noted that "Online tutoring could be a very useful tool, but we need to work out a few quirks."

See *Online* page 2

### Sylvia Speaks

by Sylvia Newman Pack, Writing Center Coordinator

*Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.*

- "Closing Time" by Semisonic

Once again it falls to me to write a few words. I don't like writing for this issue of the *Verbal Equinox* because it signals the end of the year and saying good-bye to many of our tutors who are graduating. Of course, graduation is the first step to many new and exciting (we hope) things: jobs, graduate school, and other unique opportunities (like teaching English in Russia).

Without taking *too* much credit, I think that working in the Writing Center has helped develop, or at least given practice to, many of the skills needed to succeed in a job, graduate from school or teach English in Russia. All our tutors are talented writers, but some are shy and introverted. Overcoming their shyness to encourage students, tutors build their own confidence. Other tutors who are outgoing and gregarious have learned to tone down their energy to become empathetic listeners. Some tutors had the chance to read their original works at readings on and off campus; many have published and won awards for their

See *Sylvia* page 4

**Online** from page 1

What are some of these "quirks" that make Krista and other tutors so wary about accepting online submissions? One of the main difficulties about working online is that it is very impersonal. There is no opportunity to build a relationship with students. Also, there's no way to get feedback to be sure the tutee understands. Another disadvantage to online tutoring is that it may reinforce the false idea that the writing center is a fix-it shop or editing service. Students can send their papers to their the Writing Center leaving them completely in the tutor's hands. Students, however, need to realize that students must take full responsibility for their work.

Tutor Misty Palmer said she likes this method because she doesn't feel rushed. Misty said sometimes she feels she must hurry through a session because the student only has a few minutes to spend with the tutor. With online submissions, tutors can answer the questions at their leisure and take more time to respond.

"It gives me the ability to examine the paper several times before I make comments. Sometimes I feel that I can help the student better when I can read sections of the paper several times."

There are a few things students can do, however, to make the process a little easier for everyone. First, ask general questions rather than focusing on specifics. When tutors are reading online submissions it's easier to focus on concerns like the thesis and sentence structure rather than comma errors.

Second, ask the tutor no more than three questions per submission. This allows the tutor to respond in a reasonable amount of time. If you have further questions about the paper you can always submit the paper again.

Third, a brief description of the assignment requirements helps the tutor make sure you are staying within the guidelines of the paper.

It is also a good idea for the students to come in to the Writing Center if they need further help or clarification. Face-to-face tutoring remains our main focus.

Dr. LeTourneau, who requires his English students to use the Writing Center at least once during the semester, said, "I'm pleased that you're offering this service. Making it possible for students to get feedback on their writing without having to go to the Center may be a boon to busy students. At the same time, students who benefit from face-to-face interaction about

how to revise and edit their work will probably continue to go to the Center in person. It's good to have more options."

Students can submit papers to **writingcenter@weber.edu**.

The Writing Center encourages students to submit papers via email for review. Here are some guidelines for online submissions that will allow tutors to respond in a reasonable amount of time.

- Ask three questions per submission
- Make sure the questions are clear and concise
- Focus on general, rather than specific, issues with your paper.
- Place the paper in the body of the email or as a WordPerfect attachment.
- Include the writing guidelines for the assignment. This helps the tutor know what the purpose of the paper is and if the writer is staying in the right parameters.

*Verbal Equinox* Staff  
 Editor . . . . . Abel Keogh  
 Staff . . . . . Misty Palmer  
                     Suzanne Workman  
                     Christine O'Dowd  
 Consultant . . . . Ryan Decaria

# Writing, Grammar Aides Now Online

## Writing Resource Hub Provides Links to Writing, Grammar Sites

by Chris O'Dowd, staff writer

When students need help with writing and have access to the Internet, there are numerous links to services that may help them with writing. At the Writing Resource Hub, [www.catis.weber.edu/WRH](http://www.catis.weber.edu/WRH), there are tips and rules on punctuation, sentence structure, and revising your paper. There are also links to sites that can help you with MLA, APA, and other style sites.

"This site has the potential to be a great resource for all writers," said Sylvia Newman Pack, coordinator of the Writing Center.

There's more than just grammar tips at the Writing Resource Hub. There are ideas that can make your sentence structure stronger or show you how to avoid clichés. The site can be used beyond the English 1010 or 2010 assignments. Students who are writing fiction, scientific papers or even looking for an idea or a way to get started can find information that can help them with their writing.

Tutor Brandon Paul likes

the idea of having all of these resources in one place.

"There's lots of good writing tips on the web. This gives students and teachers a single place where they can stop and get information."

The Writing Resource Hub also provides guidelines to students who wish to submit their paper via email for review by Writing Center tutors.

Students are still encouraged to come in to the Writing Center for help. But the Writing Resource Hub makes it easier for students who would like help with their writing but are unable to come in for assistance. \*\*\*

Here is a partial list of resources available on the Writing Resource Hub:

- Knowing your audience
- Grammar rules
- Elements of argument
- Adding flair and depth to your writing
- Essay Types
- Punctuation sheets
- Improving and strengthening sentence structure
- Tips for fiction and non-fiction writing.

### WASTE

Surreal eviscerations upon  
white pages,  
nervous energy flux-jumping  
like intestinal butterflies--  
fluttering in the stomach,  
as a gerbil trapped within  
hands.

Uncut poetry--pure gut  
thoughts  
formed from deep within an  
inner chest--  
rescued emotions from a nest  
of extinction.

Raw material, like clay for  
molding,  
or paint, or wood; words from  
imagination. Street-painted  
words--  
words carved in sand paper.

Untouched, they wither;  
without help,  
they never become, never live;  
without work, ideas stay  
words:  
paint becoming used as  
wallpaper.

-Ryan Decaria

*Sylvia* from page 1

Of course, two talented tutors forayed into the world of publishing by editing and putting together the *Verbal Equinox*. With the addition of computers to our center and online submissions to our methods of tutoring, we have had to become computer savvy.

We have had to learn to work together on many

important projects. Even more important, I rely on the tutors to do most things on their own, and I have been impressed by their self-motivation on many projects including developing the web page, organizing our files, soliciting sample papers from professors, and doing presentations for staff meetings. One tutor presented a paper at the Northern California Writing Center

Association, and another tutor was able to attend as well.

These are all things that have helped prepare our tutors for their new beginnings. I wish them well. The Writing Center, in addition to its purpose of serving students, will continue, I hope, to provide opportunities for growth to its tutors.

\*\*\*

We are proud at the Writing Center proud to have many talented writers on staff. This year many tutors were published won prizes for their writings, and attended the 14th annual National Undergraduate Literature Conference.

#### **Published in *Metaphor***

Ryan Decaria  
Aimee Larson  
Krista Beus Keogh  
Emily Whitby  
Scott Woodham  
Robin Young

#### **Participated in the National Undergraduate Literature Conference**

Andrew Christensen  
Ryan Decaria  
Abel Keogh  
Kirsta Beus Keogh  
Aimee Larson  
Brandon Paul  
Kelly Syphus  
Emily Peterson Whitby  
Scott Woodham  
Robyn Young

#### **Woman's Writing Contest**

Emily Peterson Whitby—1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place  
poetry

#### **Metaphor Staff**

Emily Peterson Whitby  
Andrew Christensen  
Aimee Larson

#### **English Department Winners**

Ryan Decaria —1<sup>st</sup> place poetry  
Robyn Young —1<sup>st</sup> place fiction  
Emily Peterson  
Whitby —1<sup>st</sup> place non-fiction,  
Honorable Mention poetry  
Aimee Carson —2<sup>nd</sup> place fiction, non-fiction  
Abel Keogh —Honorable Mention poetry  
Andrew  
Christensen —Honorable Mention  
non-fiction

#### **Upcoming *Metaphor* Editor 1999-2000**

Ryan Decaria

#### **Published in *Rough Draft***

Abel Keogh  
Scott Woodham

## Fiction

**The Casual Dissatisfieds**

by Emily Peterson Whitby

It was snowing hard the night the old Ford broke down. Matthew damned and helled beneath the hood for a while, then let it slam with the declaration that it wouldn't be worth the cost of parts to try to fix the damn thing. Livy, huddled inside the car, laughed at his gruff skepticism, and her breath briefly collected on the windshield beneath the gathering layers of thick snow. She called through the open window.

"I'll run inside and see if they'll let us use a phone. Maren and Will should be home. They might pick us up."

But the front of the little cafe which they had left only minutes earlier was already dark. Livy could see through the bent aluminum blinds in the front window a fat man in a greasy yellow apron vacuuming the floor near the back of the place, which was still lit dimly. She rattled the doorknob and called out against the low hum of the vacuum, but the man continued to move methodically back and forth until he was hidden by a stack of chairs. Livy tucked her hands into the sleeves of her coat and turned back to Matthew with a shrug of her shoulders. He had stopped fussing with the car and was now leaning on the rear bumper, his bag slung over his shoulder, dense clumps of snow clinging to his shoulders and the creases in his jacket. The damp had already pressed his dark hair into loose curls against his forehead and Livy smiled beneath her scarf at the boyish quality it lent to his appearance.

"Well," he said, shifting the bag as he straightened up, "it never hurt anyone to walk a couple of blocks."

"Six," Livy said. "In a blinding snowstorm."

"Come on. I'll have Will run me back up here in the morning. I'll let him take a look at the beast, see if he can do anything with it."

There was hardly any wind, but the snow was falling heavily. Livy's footprints away from the door of the cafe had already begun to fill as they locked up the car and began to walk. It seemed strange to leave the car, which was rapidly becoming a shapeless mass in the darkened parking lot, soon to be indistinguishable from the low shrubbery crouched near it; it was, of course, an inseparable part of the routine rush from their one-bedroom apartment to the university where they both studied, to work, to the university and back home again, and to leave it in the darkened parking lot was to somehow be thrust out of comfortable habit. Though Matthew went on momentarily about checking the

battery cables and the alternator and how little they could afford the needed repairs, he soon subsided, matching his silence to the muffled hush of the evening. Livy suddenly sensed that, in slipping out of habit, they had also somehow lost their everyday script of wheres and whens and what-times, and they had grown out of practice with what to say in its absence. The silence was comfortable, though, as silence often was now, after a year of marriage, and they walked close without touching, as two familiar with each other's shape, space and movement.

Matthew stopped to heft his backpack to the other shoulder, and Livy glanced up from the sidewalk where she had been watching her shoes rhythmically displacing the smooth white layer which extended in front of each step. It was late. The line of store fronts where they now paused looked abandoned, set dark and empty beneath the occasional pool of fluorescent overhead lights. Once again Livy had a strange sense of displacement, and as they began to walk again, she had the feeling that they were entering into a sort of isolated and intimate world of their own. The store fronts were blinded by the thick screen of snow, and it seemed as if a curtain of it hung, suspended, around them, catching their breath and pressing it back to their mouths. She fancied that Matthew felt it, too, and let herself feel a brief but delicious satisfaction when he slid his hand into hers. Glancing sideways at him beneath the hood of her coat, she caught a glimpse of the comfortably calm expression on his features which she guessed mirrored her own. For a quick moment, she wondered at his thoughts and if they, like hers, dwelt on the strange, intense pleasure of their seeming aloneness, and she felt a thrill not unlike the one she had felt on their first night together. There was a joining, a coming together inherent in their slow walking through the deep white silence that resembled the strange nakedness of a new intimacy. Once again she felt a tentative satisfaction as he bent his glance toward her; once again she was convinced that he had sensed her thoughts.

"You cold, Liv?" He pressed her hand, and she shook her head, reluctant to break the silence. "Forty-second," he read, peering ahead to the street sign, "Only four to go."

Still Livy only nodded in agreement, noting a growing resistance within her to reaching home. She knew they

See *Casual* page 6

*Casual from page 5*

would slip as easily back into their tedious routines as they had slipped out of them into the strange night, and soon Matthew would be cursing the car again, complaining about too-small paychecks, and moving restlessly within the little world of home, school, and work. A sudden wildness rose inside her at the thought of it, a rebellion against the mundane, against the gray mornings that pushed them day after day into the same paths, and she immediately determined that something, *anything* would change irreversibly during tonight's passage through the dark-light, and would alter them, would somehow preserve the newness that had coursed like an electric current through her in the minutes past.

"Matthew." She felt almost breathless. He turned toward her, seeming startled by the tone in her voice.

"What is it?"

"Nothing, I guess." She felt slightly subdued by his surprise. "I just...Matthew, let's go someplace."

He laughed. "Where?"

"I don't know. Somewhere *else*."

Another laugh. "Where on earth did this come from?"

How could she explain to him that in the cold solitude of the last twenty minutes she had felt closer to him, more secure in her decision to marry him, more secure in his love for her, than she had felt since she had woken, spent and broken, by his side for the first time? She couldn't. He would laugh--she would feel ridiculous, beguiled by the raw energy of this night. Unexpectedly, a heaviness began to spread in her belly.

"I don't know...I guess I just want to get away from things."

"Listen, I really wish we could. I mean, I know what you're saying, but I don't see much happening now that we've got car problems on top of everything else." An apologetic smile, then a frustrated sigh. "Look, I'm sorry. You knew what you were getting into when you married me."

"No, Matthew, that's not what I meant...I was trying to tell you--" She broke off, confused, and felt the sudden heaviness threaten to take hold of her completely. Livy quickly changed the subject, a desperate tactic to draw her mind away, draw it back from the thick gray of her thoughts. What had changed her so completely? Without knowing why, she began telling him about an old friend from high school whom she had run into recently. The words simply poured over the silence, distracting it, pushing it away from her because now it hurt. Now it fed the inescapable gray.

"Well, she slept with him, Matthew--he promised her he would marry her and so she slept with him and not even a week later...maybe like three days...I can't remember..."

"What? What happened?" He seemed irritated by her sudden change in mood; his voice was impatient.

"Well, he left her. Just completely took off without a note or anything. She was devastated. That was something like two years ago..."

"Thirty-ninth. Block to go. Good thing, the wind's picking

up again."

She stopped, distracted, and nodded when she understood. "But Matthew, she's dating another guy pretty serious, and she wanted to tell him about the first guy. That they slept together, I mean. I told her she should. You can't trust--"

"We've got to cross here. Watch out, it's slick there--"

"You can't trust each other if--"

"Here. Grab my arm."

"Matthew, don't you agree? You can't trust each other if you have a secret like that to keep. Sometime he's going to find out."

He stopped as they reached the sidewalk at the other side of the road and turned to her, looking at her for a moment as if waiting for her words to catch up with him. Then he gave a short laugh and turned away.

"Livy, you're so idealistic. Nobody does it that way anymore."

"But we did, Matthew."

A split second pause, barely perceptible. Matthew looked at her and, she thought, she feared, a light flashed in his eyes, barely perceptible. It was enough. The cold gray spread to her breast.

A quick recovery: "Yeah, Liv. We did, didn't we?"

And then he turned away again. A little too quickly.

Livy stood for a moment, wide-eyed. The wind had, indeed, picked up, and it swept an icy handful of snow past her and she felt briefly detached, disoriented, as if the cement had been swept from beneath her feet. She looked up. They were only yards from the parking lot outside their apartment. A fear of remaining motionless propelled her forward to clutch Matthew's arm. He seemed relieved, and began talking about the car again.

"You know, I don't think it will really be too bad, if Will and I can do the labor. If he can run me up there tomorrow, we can take a look at it..."

They had reached the edge of the parking lot, but something held them, caught them just outside the pale green circle of the fluorescer.t light. Livy sensed that something *had* changed, and it was reluctance to discover what that *something* would change about the circle of pale light, about their small apartment, about the dark enclosure of their bedroom. It was this reluctance that held them. Matthew turned to her. *Sensing her thoughts?* she wondered bitterly and held her chin in his hand.

"Liv...I'm sorry I was short with you. I'm just tense about everything, you know? I'm really sorry. I mean it."

It was this, finally, that snapped the thread and drove them forward into the light, back into a world where, Liv decided, nothing had changed. Nothing *had* changed. Only the thick snow no longer fell, and instead the wind blew chill.

\*\*\*



# The Lighter Writer

by ElsiaLynn Gardner

"For the last time...you are a good Santa."



## Co-Dependant Claus

*When, In Disgrace With Fortune and Men's Eyes*

When, in disgrace with spelling and passive voice.  
 I all alone bewep my first-draft state,  
 And troubled deaf heaven with my tired sighs,  
 And look upon my essay and curse the date,  
 Wishing me like to one more rich description,  
 featured like him, like him with grade possessed  
 Desiring this man's are, and that man's quote,  
 With what I most rewrite contented least,  
 Yet in these thoughts my teacher almost despising,  
 Haply I think on thee, and then my state,  
 Like to the writing center of light arriving  
 From sullen repose, of computer lab or home sedate  
 For thy sweet edit remeb'red such wealth brings  
 That I scorn to not they verbal prowess sing.

What do a physics major, an engineering major, and an English major say at work each day after graduation?

A physics major says, "What does it work?"  
 The engineering major says, "How does it work?"  
 The English major says, "*Do* you want fries with that?"

"I'm having trouble keeping my passive voices under control. Incompetence, confusion is felt by me."



Why writing center tutors are so often misdiagnosed

# The Challenge of Tutoring ESL Students

by Brandon Paul, Writing Center tutor

The writing center tutor is faced with challenges daily. It is not a light responsibility influencing another student's paper. Often, we give suggestions on how we feel a paper may be more effective or interesting. We point out certain errors and attempt to explain why that error is a problem, or how to fix it. It seems a simple method—with a typical student.

The most difficult challenge I've faced this semester is dealing with English as a Second Language (ESL) students. It doesn't suffice the need to simply explain a problem the same way we may to a traditional student. ESL students come to the writing center with language problems as well as normal writing difficulties. The concept that we, as writing center tutors, are able to help ESL students sufficiently is a dangerous one; our ability to help them is scanty at best.

The majority of ESL students I've worked with this semester have come in with severe writing problems, no doubt a result of their lack of skills with the English language. The problems range from the misuse of articles—some are left out others are added inappropriately—to a lack of continuous thought or word flow. More serious problems are poor organizational skills and a complete misapplication of thoughts, which obviously differ from language to language. Explaining problems such as these seldom works for international students when they have very little proficiency with the language.

One particular ESL student comes to the writing center on a regular basis. I've worked with him at least four times, and each time he comes in there seems to be little or no improvement from his previous visit. This lack of progression has to be disheartening to him as it surely is to me. I've attempted to explain his particular problems most often the misuse of articles, adverbs, progressive

thinking, and organization. We've gone over explanations for why "the" or "a" belongs here or there, and how his paper can improve developmentally. On more than one occasion we referenced handbooks in an attempt to give him some hard evidence to correctly work these glitches out in the future. I've gone over the explanations with him, and he usually nods in compliance, signaling to me that he may be grasping the technicalities of his writing. To my knowledge, he's even purchased a handbook of his own.

None of these explanations, including the book, seemed to help him. These problems, and the inability for him to get over the hump, has caused me to wonder exactly how he can be assisted more adequately. It's not that we as tutors are completely inept in aiding ESL students, but there has to be more qualified help out there. To my understanding, specialized ESL help does exist on our campus, and I would strongly urge that international students seek this avenue before they come to us. We are able to help them make a piece of writing more intelligible, but working them through problems with the actual language can be a dangerous engagement on our part. We often don't have the tools or background to teach these rather severe problems at this stage of our tutoring.

One possible solution—or at least something that could better prepare us for helping ESL students—would be to bring in someone with ESL experience into the classroom for a few lectures. A professional tutor, or perhaps someone who has prior experience in aiding ESL students with language to language transfer, would be invaluable to those of us (all of us) who feel we need extra help in this area.

While tutoring ESL students is difficult at times, it is also very rewarding. By increasing our ability as tutors, we can try to help these students learn better English skills. \*\*\*