

Verbal Equinox

The Journal of the Writing Center at Weber State University

Spring 2002

The Collaborative Brilliance of the Writing

Julie Boam

Sometimes I have to duck when I walk into the Writing Center. There are constantly words rocketing through the air and ricocheting off the walls. After sitting at one of our pleasing purple tables for any duration, I can't help but be struck with various words, a few phrases, and even a punctuation mark. One of these phrases that has struck, stuck and keeps echoing through my thoughts in one of those meaningful, ethereal voices is: *collaborative brilliance*.

The definition of the Writing Center is collaborative brilliance. Every day, more than a dozen tutors clock in, bringing not only

our to work but our beautiful minds. Some of our skills are common: we are passionate about writing, we enjoy tutoring, we know how to use a grammar handbook, we can whip punctuation rules out of our pockets like cowboys in a Wild West duel. However, most of our brilliance



Row 1: Melissa Paul, Elisalyn Gardner, Andrea Carter
Row 2: Dan Sayers, Colleen Coleman, Angie Satterthwaite, Sylvia Newman, Elsie Hill
Row 3: Jeorgette Perry, Scott Woodham, Jonathan Yates

stems from our various experiences and backgrounds.

The tutors here are an unexpected conglomeration of individuals who, when simmered in the academic broth of the Writing Center, make up a surprisingly tasty stew. The flavor of each tutor depends on our originality, talent, and texture. We hail from assorted majors and minors. We have various perspectives on spirituality. We have different tastes in music and literature. Some of us are creative writers, while some of us are much more scholarly and analytical. We are not just tutors, but poets and lovers, writers and musicians, students and mothers, employees and friends.

(see Brilliance on page 2)

The Coordinator's Corner

by Sylvia Newman

It is important that I take this opportunity to write in this issue of the *Verbal Equinox* since April 2002 marks five years since I became coordinator of the Writing Center. Much has changed since those days when we were located in the cramped, windowless basement room of the Social Science Bldg. After taking over from Dr. John Schwiebert, Dr. Denise Weeks hired me. In the first few months of her "reign", she wrote a grant and obtained the four computers which got us started in the online tutoring business.

In 1998, the Center moved into the highly "windowed" second-floor room of the new student

service building—complete with matching furniture, a large oak desk and coat rack. With this move, we also left the auspices of the English Department and joined Academic Support Services and Programs and its director Carl Porter. The federal grant that made up our budget expired, and we are now funded primarily by developmental fees.

Also in 1998, we successfully hosted the Rocky Mt. Peer Tutoring Conference (in spite of blizzards and cancelled dances) and are on tap to host it again in the spring of 2003. Denise moved to Washington and Dr. Ramirez took over the teaching of the 3840 class for 1999 and 2000. She will be remembered for the tutor

training video she and the tutors made. During this time, we instituted biweekly staff meetings where tutors are trained and where tutors train each other. In fall 2001, Dr. David Sumner, new faculty member and head of the English Department Writing Program, joined our happy triumvirate.

We have expanded opportunities for our tutors in many ways. With Carl's leadership, our tutors regularly present at the Northern California Writing Center Association annual conference and get the bonus of a day in San Francisco. Tutors also attend and present at the annual Rocky Mt. Peer Tutoring conference, which

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Corner (continued from page 1)

we fund with ARO money. We have been able to raise our tutors' starting pay from \$5.50 to \$6.25 with a cap of \$7.00, and this will be the second year we have been able to offer tuition waivers to our most outstanding tutors (I know, I know-how can I tell?).

In keeping with the Student Affairs division's commitment to technology, this semester we installed a Wildcard "swipe" machine that we hope will expedite our data processing. We have also implemented an online satisfaction/assessment survey.

On the lighter side, our annual talent and awards night (a.k.a. T&A night) has become a treasured tradition complete with interpretive dances, cowboy lawyer raps, improv and great



Sylvia Newman

food. We continue our Quote of Unspecified Duration board and have put our

caption-writing skills to use and created the most humorous scrapbook around.

On a personal note, I plan to finish my masters degree in December. I hope this will enhance and expand my capabilities to lead the Writing Center.

I am proud of what we have accomplished in these five years, and I hope to continue and build on these changes in the next five years!



Julie Boam

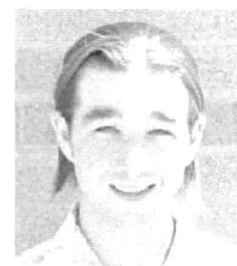
Brilliance

(continued from page 1)

It is all of the things that we are when we are not in the Writing Center that make us such

excellent tutors when we do walk through the door and sit down with a student. Of course, we have had the writing experience and the classes. But more than that, we have lived. That is why each tutoring session is completely unique. The specific combination of a student, a paper-in-progress, a tutor, and the tutor's singular approach to the session can never be reproduced. According to our own experience and expertise, we try to tailor a tutoring session to best fit the needs of the student we are working with at the time. Sometimes that means I share stories about my two-year-old. Sometimes that means Scott talks about his late nights composing poetry. It could mean that Jeorgette relates a similar struggle with a persuasive essay, or that Jen remembers when she had to practice a certain dance step over and over again.

This edition of the *Verbal Equinox* is a brief showcase of our tutors and the things they do when they are not ensconced in our cozy enclave.



Scott Woodham

No Sun Working Yet

Crucial morning is here, you woke breathing,
Without a notion of your nighttime dreams.
Art begins with single, precise motions:
Brushstroke, knifestroke, penstroke, keystroke, breath.
Forget the stars: comfort, dark skies, practice
And absence allow what could never be
To do what it never should. Celebrate
Wonder today and you will almost live.
Please this day, distinguish between your sweets:
Boil the honey to thin the sugar;
Be gentle with milk alone in a pan.
Now sleep until exhaustion leaves your mind;
Forget that you had ever been awake
To build your crafted day with blocks of ice.

--Scott Woodham

NWCWA Conference: ESL Presentations

by Elisalyn Gardner



The Tenth Annual Northern California

Writing Center Association Conference began with a bang. Keynote speaker Francisco X. Alarcon welcomed us and the spirits of creativity, with his speech titled "The Power of Poetry as Writing and Invocation of the Universe." With the verve and soul befitting a poet, Alarcon set the tone for the conference. The sessions I attended, as well as the session Melissa Paul and I presented, resonated with Alarcon's message of fostering tolerance, diversity, and creativity in the Writing Center.

The most memorable presentation I attended was related closely to the session Melissa and I presented. Kate Mills, who hailed from Canada College and Stanford University, presented a session titled "The Influence of

the First Language and Culture on Second Language Acquisition."

Ms. Mills focused on the importance of not just tutoring language when tutoring ESL students, but tutoring on the cultural rhetoric of English within the American University as well. She submitted that English is a "writer responsible rhetoric" where "the burden is on the writer, not the reader."

Ms. Mills encouraged tutors to have some awareness of the different cultural rhetoric ESL students may bring with them to the Writing Center in order to recognize patterns of error. One of her handouts gave examples of writing from Chinese, Japanese, Middle Eastern, and Spanish students who were writing in their second language, English. These writing samples helpfully demonstrated the patterns of discussion that were different from the often linear, individual opinion focused English essay.

I enjoyed Ms. Mills' presentation very much and was familiar with many of the issues she

addressed because of the research

Melissa and I did for our presentation, "Accommodating ESL Students." It was extremely validating to know that the same issues that came up with Melissa and me were what other Writing Centers wanted to address concerning tutoring ESL students. Kate was good enough to chat with us after her presentation, and later she enthusiastically attended our presentation on ESL tutoring.

The presentation that we did in the next session went well, and the evaluations we received from Chabot College were very positive. In "Accommodating ESL Students" Melissa and I took a somewhat broad approach to ESL tutoring and simply offered what we, as tutors at the Weber State University Writing Center, found to be helpful when tutoring ESL students.

Melissa gave out an ESL tutoring rubric handout which she had developed. It was very well received and referred to on our evaluations as "a great help." Melissa's rubric was intended for

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Learning from a Conference Presentation

by Andrea Carter



One of the most interesting aspects of the Northern

California Writing Center Association Conference at Chabot College in Hayward, California, was the keynote speaker, Francisco X. Alarcon. He is a poet who has written several children's

books with the poems appearing in both English and Spanish. He began his presentation by letting us all use Aztec words to "call" the five cardinal directions of the Aztec calendar. It helped us understand his view of his heritage.

His books in both English and Spanish are a sign of the increasing multicultural view of the world and its people. He uses his American and Mexican heritage to make his books relevant and witty

for children of both cultures.

As a writing tutor, it is important to remember that many of our students come from different countries and cultures. His books and discussion reminded me that there are often rich differences that should be celebrated not shunned. As a future teacher in secondary education, I also want to remember this principle, and I hope to share his poems and the cultures of other civilizations with my students.



Discovering "Differentness"

by Jen Brady

As an English major and Writing Center tutor, I often get asked, "So what else do you do besides sit around reading and writing stuff?"

My reply is always the same, "I'm a performer. I perform at Lagoon during the summers." This is always followed by raised eyebrows, pursed lips, and held breath as the inquirer, caught by surprise, tries to think of what to say to my answer. I realize that my two career choices-editing and performing-don't exactly go together the way most people think careers should. Editing is so boring, and who could possibly want to do such a thing? Performing is so exciting but completely unstable as a career, and no one takes performers seriously. But in my life, they have actually complemented each other in wonderful ways.

I have performed my entire life. I spent my early years tapping and twirling away at a local dance

studio. Back then I loved to dance because I got to wear pretty costumes. Now as I continue on my path, I love performing because I find joy in entertaining other people. I also love meeting and working with people from all over the world. It is this experience that has helped me in my career and, more specifically, in the Writing Center.

Since I grew up in Layton most of my life, I wasn't been exposed to very many people of different races, cultures, or even religions. My tunnel vision of the world was bred from this upbringing. I didn't believe that people who were different than me were bad or wrong, I just thought that my way of life was the "normal" way. The second I began performing for companies like Lagoon, I saw what I should have seen years before and what every kid should see sometime in her childhood. I saw people who didn't believe in God, I saw people who were raised in the crime of L.A., I saw men who loved other men, I saw people from far away countries, like Russia, where I didn't

(see "Differentness" on page 5)

Olympic Experience: Fodder for the Fiery Pen

by Jonathan Yates



One of the purposes of this article is to show that we tutors actually have lives outside of the Writing Center. This seems to be a necessary prerequisite because, of course, a writer has to have something to write about-and it usually requires a certain amount of creativity. Just being an English major, though requires a certain amount of creativity in order to survive in the world. What I mean is that since I'm not planning on attending law school or necessarily becoming a school

teacher, I have to be creative in terms of finding a way to relate English to whatever I decide to do for a living. This isn't extremely difficult, however, considering that English relates to "everything" (in a gennnnnneral sort of way!) Yes, that's the difficult part: being specific-and that's what I've been trying to do for the last couple of years.

I've thought about a number of directions I could go. For example, I've thought about pursuing studies in psychology or the humanities. I've thought about pursuing nursing or something in the health sciences field. I've thought about-yes indeed-education. I've also thought about ... television!

A couple of years ago, I was considering a career in broadcast

journalism (actually, radio news to be specific). At about this time, International Sports Broadcasting, the host broadcaster for the Salt Lake 2002 Winter Olympic Games, was in the area recruiting broadcast trainees to help cover the Olympics. I jumped at the chance. I was required to take some course work, attend a workshop, and apply for one of the available positions. I did all of these things and was hired onto ISB's Olympic broadcast crew last summer.

At the time, I really didn't know what I was getting into-and during the process of training, I decided that, no, I wasn't really interested in pursuing broadcasting for a profession. (Too technical for me, too punctual, too high pressure; I think I'll stick with books.) But when it came

(see Fodder on page 7)

Introducing David Sumner

by Julie Boam

Last autumn while the leaves were turning colors as they impatiently waited to fall from the trees and students lined up in the bookstore impatiently waiting to drop their dollars on textbooks, Dr. David Sumner joined the staff at the Writing Center.

Dr. Sumner is currently the Director of Composition in the English Department. Here at the Writing Center, we are ultimately concerned with composition and improving the way students write. However, the Writing Center is no longer formally associated with the English Department. We are part of our university's Academic Support Services and Programs. Dr. Sumner serves as a liaison between the Writing Center and the English Department. He is the

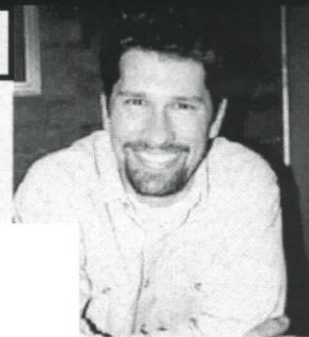
intermediary that preserves the association between the two and makes sure that the practice taking place in the Writing Center meets the goals of the University Writing Program.

Dr. Sumner also teaches the Methods of Tutoring class, which each of our tutors must take. This is a job that he takes quite seriously—"the quality of a writing center depends almost completely on the quality of the tutors who work there."

When asked about *his* philosophy of teaching for the methods class, Dr. Sumner says, "I try to teach the tutors theoretically sound ideas and hope they draw on their own talent to incorporate those ideas into their tutoring sessions." Our tutors are already excellent writers. For many of us, writing flows from our fingertips

as naturally as water flows from a spring.

However, we must



David Sumner

learn the rules and reasons behind the intuition that guides our writing.

Last semester, Dr. Sumner launched his first methods class. We studied the structure of logic and the process of reasoning through ideas in writing. We read articles full of practical tutoring ideas written by other tutors. We had professors from varying disciplines come in and discuss with us their expectations for writing assignments. Then, every Friday, we spent time working on the quality of our own writing. Beyond his obligations to the Writing Center, Dr. Sumner keeps busy teaching various classes in the English Department. As for life outside of the university, Dr. Sumner has a beautiful wife and two children who keep him hopping. He volunteers with the ski patrol at Nordic Valley during the winter months, and in the summer, he enjoys fly fishing. He is a valuable asset to our Writing Center and will work hard to prove what a wonderful asset the Writing Center is to the university.

"Differentness" (continued from page 4)

even think they had dancing. I thought *Wow! I love all of this differentness.* (Yes, differentness). I always read in magazines about people who lived different lifestyles, but I never imagined that they were actually flesh and blood or that I would meet someone like that. I was so excited to meet people who weren't exactly like me and to discover that there really was other life outside of the Wasatch Mountains.

I quickly became friends with all of these "different" people, and we're still friends today. I love talking with them about their beliefs and their thoughts on life. Even more, I love sharing my thoughts with them. I have discovered that it is possible to keep an open mind about things while still clinging to my own values. I often disagree with my friends on ideas, but I also respect their opinions and enjoy hearing about their often crazy notions.

So... how does all of this relate to the Writing Center? Wonderfully. I love tutoring students who bring in controversial papers. I love reading papers that show me how to look at something in a completely different light, and I welcome the fact that Utah maybe isn't as sheltered from the outside world as I once thought it was. My career as a performer opened the doors for me to discover "differentness" while my job as a tutor allows me to explore it even further.

I love tutoring students who bring in controversial papers...

Trapping

By Melissa Paul

1

It is a small cabin. Two weeks, that is what the therapist told her. Time to trunk about her life-time to make a decision.

2

June has never stayed in a cabin before. She has never even been camping. She has to yank on the Masterlock three times before it will open. With wide eyes, June peers into the dim room.

3

A plastic-wrapped mattress crouches against the far wall. In the center of the room are a dusty card table and an old office chair. The walls are painted the brown of park benches. The only colors are the somehow misplaced golds and greens of packaged foods that line the shelves surrounding the single window.

4

June cringes as she hears something scurry behind her feet. She glances down at the gray linoleum with genuine fear. Despite her best efforts to be brave, June feels warmth slide over her cheeks and nose and chin.

5

As June huddles on the factory-scented mattress, she hears him for the first time. Her quivering imagination conjures up an image of a massive hulking bear shrouded in murk and foul menace. When she sees him the next day, she almost laughs.

6

The fox regards her for a few calm seconds before slipping beneath the porch. June flees behind the window and watches shivering. He doesn't come out again.

7

The fox comes at night to pick delicately through her garbage. June watches him from the safety of her headlights. His eyes flash at her occasionally, but he never looks for long. June starts leaving scraps for him. Once, she stands from her crouch and gasps when his wet nose touches her ankle.



animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu



Melissa Paul

8

She makes a trap. Not the killing kind, just to hold him for a moment. Once she has overcome her fear, her fingers itch to touch-to bury themselves in the russet fur.

9

He is wary, but she finally catches him. She approaches with a trembling hotdog in her sweaty fingers. He regards her disdainfully before tearing her thumb with small white teeth. June drops the hotdog and stares at the trail of warm blood that rolls down her wrist.

10

Out of spite, she doesn't let him go for two days. At night, he howls. During the day, he curls beneath the plastic crate and the cinder block, but every time she looks, his eyes are open.

11

When she lifts the crate with a broom, he crouches for a moment before darting between the pines. For some reason, she weeps.

12

The next night, she timidly sips a wine cooler. She is sitting on the hood of her car, and for the first time, she looks up at the sky. She sees her first shooting star, but she doesn't know what to wish for.

13

He comes back. She hears him many times. She sees the white flash of his tail disappear around the corner. She finds his pointed tracks around the garbage can. She keeps leaving him food. He keeps taking it.

14

When she leaves, she still hasn't made a decision. The fox made her forget to think about it. She waits for two hours, but he does not come to say goodbye. She might see him in the rearview mirror as she drives away, but it could be a trick. For some reason, she feels more alone than ever.

Hardening

I pass a man repairing a wall,
coating its outside with layer of wet cement.
The cracks seem to whisper of future degeneration.
But all that matters is that no one can see the gouges or
careless scrapes and scratches.
Just cover up enough so that we can forget and go back
to business as usual.

It's been only a short while since people wailed in the street.
Distant people ran from the falling titans, covered in grey
cement.

I didn't know anyone there,
but I wept with them.

It's been only a little while,
and I can feel that man scraping over me
--Shuck Shuck--

until I look like those people
and I feel like that wall.

--Jeorgette Ferry



attendance.

As one might expect, the opportunity to help in this way during the Olympics was the chance of a lifetime and well worth the effort I put in. It provided me with insight into what I probably *don't* want to do for a living, but temporarily speaking (considering the event), it was beyond my wildest expectations. Plus, I got paid to do what I did! Above all, the experience provided me with plenty of memories and good fodder for the fiery pen (not that my pen is on fire), and yes, we tutors actually do have lives outside of the Writing Center.

Our Award-Winning Tutors!

Here are some of the accomplishments of our tutors this year.

Melissa Paul

First place non-fiction
Lindquist scholarship
Co-editor of Metaphor 2003

Colleen Coleman

Second place fiction
Lindquist scholarship

Elisalyn Gardner

Honorable Mention Poetry
Co-editor of Metaphor 2003
Lindquist Scholarship

Ryan Decaria

Outstanding Graduate Award for
Notable Contribution

Scott Woodham

Outstanding Graduate Award for
Superior Academic Achievement

Julie Boam

Outstanding Graduate Award for
Superior Academic Achievement

Dan Sayers

Arts a Humanities Academic Award
Elsie Hill
Phoenix Achievement Scholarship

Jeorgette Perry

Outstanding Graduate Award for
Notable Contribution

Jennifer Brady

Academic Scholarship

Suzi Decaria

Awards from the Child a Family
Studies Department and the
Education Department

Fodder (continued from page 4)

Olympic time, I had a blast!

I ended up working as a camera assistant at the Opening Ceremonies and here in Ogden at the Ice Sheet (curling). Both of these venues provided unique and exciting experiences, and I met some unique and exciting people. For example, during the Opening Ceremonies, I helped with the high definition TV signal and was assigned to assist with one of the hand-held cameras down on the field of play. I'd have to say that it was the best seat in the house, even though I never actually sat. But I did stand directly behind-within about eight or so feet of-President Bush during the National Anthem. What a moment! I got a similarly close view of the athletes as they

paraded around the stadium, and after the ceremonies were over, I met Picabo Street as I coiled up camera cables. At the Ice Sheet, my experience was similar. We weren't allowed to talk to the athletes, but I was able to get lots of good snapshots of the action. I sat through 48 hours of curling before becoming physically ill and missing three more days of about 11 more games of three hours per game. (By that time, believe me, I was grateful for illness.) But again I probably had the best view in the house, walking up and down directly beside the sheet on which I was assigned, (and sitting, this time, when I so desired). Princess Ann of England and HM King Harold of Norway were only a couple of the dignitaries in

The Writing Center

Weber State *University*

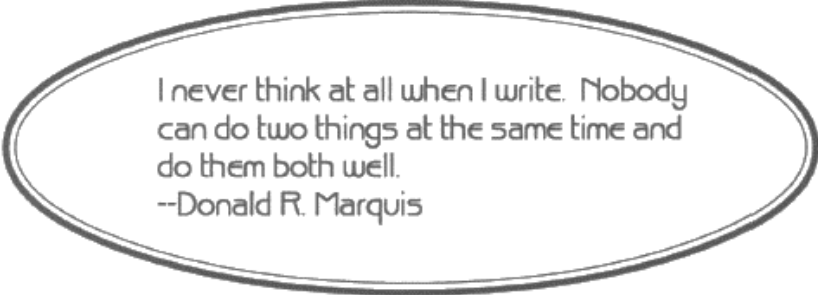
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Conference (continued from page 3)

the tutor and ESL student to fill out together during a tutoring session so that the tutee would have something concrete to take home with them as reference to the session.

My handout consisted mainly of what to do and what not to do in ESL tutoring sessions. Much of what I had to say could cross over into helpful tutoring strategies in general. For example, I discussed the importance of prioritizing issues in a tutoring session, rather than trying to work on every issue that may need attention.

I always learn from doing presentations; sometimes I think I learn even more when presenting than when attending. I would like to thank Sylvia Newman, Carl Porter, and Dave Sumner for supporting our tutor presentations and Chabot College for hosting this particular conference.



I never think at all when I write. Nobody
can do two things at the same time and
do them both well.

--Donald R. Marquis

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