

Citings

Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies Newsletter

April
2003
Volume 10
Issue 2

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Published
by and for
the DRWS
Faculty and Staff



SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY

Melody Kilcrease Heads Program

Glen McClish

Between the Fall and Spring semesters, our own Melody Kilcrease was appointed the first full-time Director of the Thomas B. Day Freshman Success Programs. In this capacity, Melody oversees the University Semi-



nars and the Integrated Curriculum Packages. Initially, Melody thought that she would begin by simply observing and assessing the working of the programs, but the current budget crisis has compelled her to don her managerial hard hat and get right to work. She's been busy with an impressive list of initiatives, including redesigning the Programs' marketing materials, building a web page, establishing special science-oriented writing sections to accommodate more students, enhancing student and faculty recruitment, and writing a strategic plan for the Programs. In addition, she's working to reorient the Programs to focus not only on the transition from high school to college, but also on the completion of one's degree.

Melody reports that she enjoys working

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Handout Repository Planned

Terry Williams

Ever waited in line at the copier and thought, "I could really use that handout he/she is xeroxing for my class"? Or promised one of your fellow faculty a copy of a particularly useful handout you created, only to remember two months later that you never got it to him/her? Tired of creating new handouts on basic issues that warrant a quick review but that aren't covered in your chosen text?

Well, all of these problems can be resolved with our new DRWS Blackboard handout repository. The concept is simple: you supply us (Terry Williams or Chris Werry) the Microsoft Word formatted file of handout(s) you've created that you've found effective in the classroom along with a brief explanation of what the handout involves

(Grading Rubric, Comma Lesson, Reading response questionnaire, etc). We post it on a Blackboard web site that's available to all RWS faculty with your name prominently displayed in footer at the bottom. You benefit in a variety of ways: 1. Your best handouts are out there being put to good use helping students to learn. 2. You claim the handouts you posted as part of your service to the department on your next periodic review. 3. You have access to all of your fellow DRWS faculty's best handouts as well.

Since the files will be posted on Blackboard, you can access them from anywhere you can get on the Internet: a great help when you're working on your lesson plans at home. In addition, since the files are in

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Freshman Success Programs Prepares for Fall '03 Class

Melody Kilcrease

The news from the Freshman Success Programs office continues to be “interesting,” especially in light of the new realities we face with the budget. The good news is that our programs are still highly sought after by students; we have received a record number of requests for information about the IC and LLC already this year. We are also very fortunate to have the continued support of the Colleges, as we develop our fall schedule of IC packages. We are especially interested in how the RWS100 Arguments in the Sciences model will develop.

If you have never taught RWS sections in the IC before, or if it has been a long time since you did, I encourage you to inquire about them. Our plans this year include preparatory workshops for the IC faculty to meet and discuss their semester plans. We want to help the IC faculty develop an increased level

of collaboration and cooperation, therefore offering our students an increasingly integrated experience. In order to teach in an IC section, we only require that you be an RWS instructor interested in working closely with first-year students and faculty colleagues. No other experience is required. Please indicate your interest in the program by contacting Elise Miller as soon as you can.

The last bit of news I want to share has to do with the ways in which we imagine our incoming students. The incoming fall '03 class has a higher profile in terms of their GPA and test scores than we have seen here in quite awhile. But that does not mean that they are any better prepared to make the adjustments needed to be successful here. The most selective schools in the country (Harvard, Stanford, et.al.) offer “first year experience” programs like the Freshman Success Programs because they know

that the adjustment and engagement of first year college students takes more than a history of high grades and test scores, and are the key to their timely graduation.

Our students face many of the hardest obstacles to overcome in getting to a degree: most of them work, at least part-time, many live at home and commute to campus, a very high percentage are first-generation college students, a larger percentage receive some sort of financial aid.

Many of our students face all or most of these obstacles—so many that we have to assume most students fit this profile, along with their high grades and test scores. The FSP demonstrate SDSU's commitment to all of our students' success, and attempt to provide the tools to make the adjustment and engagement effective for as many students as we can serve.

We believe that “success” at SDSU is spelled D-E-G-R-E-E.

MA Program Welcomes New Graduate Students

Cezar Ornatowski

The MA program in Rhetoric and Writing Studies welcomes three new graduate students this semester: Alberto Vargas, Page Gaither, and Michael DePalma.

Alberto (or Albert) C. Vargas was born in La Mesa and raised in San Diego. His college career began after 3 years in the Army. He started at Southwestern College and then transferred to SDSU, where he received his BA in English in 2002. He loves spending time with his wife and two boys (ages 1 and 3). He's a big Raiders fan—recently blown off the map by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. In his spare time, Alberto works as a substitute teacher for the San Diego Unified School District.

Page Gaither comes to the MA program with a BA in English from the University of Texas at Austin. She is

pursuing a dual career as a freelance writer and writing instructor. Page's interests include creative writing, business writing, narrative theory, the rhetoric of fiction, women's fiction, and argument rhetoric. Currently, she works as a Marketing Writer and Marketing Writer Intern writing web content, marketing plans, and other promotional and business communications for two emerging companies in San Diego.

Michael DePalma is from Central Bridge, New York. He has a BA in English with a minor in Rhetoric and Public Address from the University of New Hampshire. At SDSU, Michael is specializing in the Teaching of Writing. Eventually, he wants to teach at a four-year college or university. He is a TA and writing tutor in DRWS and a substitute teacher for San Diego City Schools.

Professor Ornatowski Awarded Grant

Cezar Ornatowski is co-recipient and research associate (with Philippe Salazar of the University of Cape Town and Jerzy Axer of Warsaw University) on a grant for a project entitled “Public Deliberation and Strong Democracy in Poland and South Africa: Two Rhetorical Models for Participatory Citizenship in Post-Totalitarian Cultures” funded by the National Research Council of South Africa and the Polish National Committee for Scientific Research.

He has also been named honorary co-director of the Center for Rhetoric Studies at the University of Cape Town, for which he serves as outside reviewer of doctoral theses.

What Are We Teaching?

With each new semester and each new class, I'm faced with the same challenge: How to get my students, the majority of whom tell me they hate writing, to realize writing is not quite so loathsome as they believe. The problem is getting them to forget all the absolutes about writing that have been drilled into them throughout the years—an essay is only five paragraphs, the three part thesis statement must be at the end of your first paragraph, each paragraph must have one quotation, never ever use the first person. The poor students have been Schafer method-ed into writing-phobics.

Now I'm the last person to call for a standardized curriculum. I think it would create a by-the-numbers approach to teaching that would distance teachers from the subject matter, which would further distance the students from writing. I do, think, however, some discussion of and agreement on what an essay is is needed.

What is it we're teaching our students?

When the department shifted modes into argument, while initially resistant (I'm always initially resistant), I did come to accept the change as a welcome de-

parture from "academic" writing, the kind of writing only applicable in educational situations. Argument has applications well beyond the classroom, and its focus on audience and purpose suggests its natural adaptability. The cover letter, the business proposal, the graduate thesis are all very different writing situations but common in that they are all arguments.

But adaptability in writing is not what I always overhear in our 40 person office. Students are still being told in 100 and 200 classes to write five paragraph essays. They're being told never to end or begin a paragraph with a quotation. They're being failed for not strictly following MLA works cited requirements.

Is this writing?

When my students ask why they are taught the five-paragraph form and other prescribed methods of writing if they're

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Papers, Etc.

Bicho Raro, Southwestern College's literary magazine, has published two literary non-fiction stories by Martha Kennedy, "Pesceria" and "Venice."

RWS Course Teaches Non-Profit Writing

This semester, Steve Merriam is teaching RWS 507: Technical Communications in Nonprofit Organizations (NPOs). The course helps students develop specific written and presentation skills needed in the nonprofit sector.

A nonprofit specialist must often adapt writing strategies to address a more diverse audience than typical technical writers. In today's competitive funding environment, they are often involved in fundraising and grant writing.

The scope and depth of the course is impressive. In addition to develop-

ing persuasive writing skills, as part of the course requirements, students must complete a grant-winning proposal, create a marketing plan, and participate in NPO interest groups and associations.

Throughout the semester, Steve invited local NPO professionals to speak to the class. Speakers included Katherine Seeber, a Funding Specialist for Senior Community Centers, and Doug Perkins, Executive Director of South County Economic Development Council.

The course is an excellent example of how SDSU continues to link with the community in important ways.

Crisis Carnival Seeks Volunteers

Laura Kijak

The Crisis Carnival annual graduate student conference, co-sponsored by the DRWS and the Department of English and Comparative Literature, is seeking graduate students for its organizing committee. The theme for this year's conference, to be held in October 2003, is "Humanities, Arts, and Democracy: Arts and Letters as Forms of Civic Engagement."

Participation on the organizing committee is an opportunity for graduate students to get experience in planning and organizing a major academic event, to network with faculty, students, and administration, and to see how the academic world works on the inside.

Get involved! If you would like to serve on the Conference Committee, please submit the following to the Crisis Carnival mailbox in the DRWS office: a brief note that you'd like to serve and a curriculum vitae, resume, or brief description of who you are. If you have questions about the conference, contact Laura Kijak, 2003 Crisis Carnival Co-chair (kijak@rohan.sdsu.edu) or Cezar Ornatowski, Crisis Carnival faculty advisor (ornat@mail.sdsu.edu).

Plan to Attend 200 Curriculum Meeting

On Wednesday, April 30, Amy Allen and Ellen Quandahl will present information on new assignment types and criteria for RWS 200. This is a reprise of their presentation at the January 03 conference, with additional comments from instructors using the new material this semester.

All DRWS instructors are welcome to attend, and those who were unable to attend in January are especially encouraged to do so. The new curriculum will be in place in Fall 03, so this session will help instructors plan for the new semester.

What Are We Teaching?

not the way to write an essay, I tell them there is not only one way to write an essay and then I use one or two analogies to make my point. Writing is like painting, I'll tell them, and the five-paragraph essay is a paint-by-numbers project. Sure, when you're done you've got a recognizable picture, but it's missing the subtle shading and rich textures of an original work of art. Or, if the class is before lunch, I tell them writing is like baking, and not all cake recipes fit in the same pan—you can't squeeze a wedding cake into a brownie tin.

If writing is part of the learning process, then teaching absolutes is anathema to that purpose. The students are so worried about following the rules, about counting their paragraphs and the number of sentences in them, about proper MLA citations, that they can't reach a conclusion beyond the one they already hold. I encourage my students

to write without forgone goals in mind—without a thesis—and allow the material to help them determine their position, instead of only using research that matches theirs. I don't demand an introduction. I don't even discuss topic sentences. And neat and tidy conclusions should be left to romance novels.

What I do tell students is to focus on a single idea and explore it thoroughly. I encourage them to allow the content to determine the form (considering appropriateness for audience). I ask that they leave no questions unanswered unintentionally. And then I tell them to learn.

And finally, I tell them I have very few absolutes when it comes to writing, though they will find other instructors who do. My "method" allows them to adapt to other people's structure.

Isn't that what we should emphasize? Isn't that what writing is about?

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Kilcrease

in the Division of Undergraduate Studies (her current boss is much nicer than the former one) and loves the opportunity of meeting with faculty, staff, and administration from across campus. Her new position has provided wonderful opportunities to participate in University leadership; for example, she currently sits on the Provost's Retention Council. Melody will continue to teach one course each semester in the Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies, keeping her hand in the classroom and monitoring the relationship between the DRWS and the Programs she directs.

At this moment of transition, I thought it would be appropriate to say a few words about Melody's illustrious career in the Department. She has, in fact, helped shape and develop virtually every aspect of the DRWS. She began as a Graduate Teaching Associate ten years ago; and, as a TA, she served

on the task force that established the current lower division curriculum. After becoming a lecturer in 1995, she continued to work with the lower division writing program and eventually became its Associate Director. She has served as Acting Director of the Technical Writing Certificate Program, faculty advisor to the Crisis Carnival, co-coordinator of the departmental self-study with Ann Johns, coordinator of the departmental fall conference, President of the Lecturer Council, and assistant to the Graduate Program. She hosted many of the Department's social events, graciously putting up with my sons' determined efforts to dismantle her property. As an instructor in the department, she has taught 100, 200, 305, and 503. Wow!

We congratulate Melody on her decade of outstanding service to the DRWS and wish her well in her new position.

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Handout Repository

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Word format, it's easy for you to tweak the handout to fit your particular class' needs: no more retyping handouts from scratch or scanning in documents. The only requirement is that you acknowledge the original author in a footer at the bottom of the page.

And for those who have never used Blackboard, don't be intimidated. If you can get into your SIMS grade sheet, you can get into this web site—it's literally only about two keystrokes different.

We plan on having this up and running by July, so, if you're interested and would like to learn more, contact Terry at williamt@mail.sdsu.edu or call at 45915. If you've got a handout you'd like to contribute, either 1. E-mail it to Chris or Terry as an attachment or 2. Drop a copy on a disk into one of our mailboxes—just be sure to attach a stickum, telling us the file's name and what it involves.

SDSU
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Published twice a semester
by and for the
faculty and staff of the

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and Writing Studies
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