

Citings

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Carol Sweedler-Brown Will "Semi" Retire

Carol Sweedler-Brown, known to most of us as the first chair of the DRWS, will be reducing her workload and going into semi-retirement this fall. Carol has been associated with the developmental writing program through much of her career at San Diego State. In 1967, she taught as a lecturer in what was then called the Study Skills

Department. That department became Academic Skills in 1982, a year after Carol attained a tenure-track position. She spent two years as Academic Coordinator for EOP and was one of three developmental faculty members who joined three others from English to form the new Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies in 1993.

"The formation of the new department changed the way I worked because I suddenly became responsible for more than teaching and having a good time. I loved being chair." Starting in 1998, Carol spent four years as Associate Dean of CAL. Her favorite memories from that time stem from interacting with personnel. "We have a good faculty here." Carol will continue to work in a 50% capacity, overseeing developmental writing and the committee that awards sabbaticals. What does she plan to do with the extra free time? She wants to spend more time with her new granddaughter, Josephine. "And I have a garden that screams at me, 'Why aren't you home more?'"



DRWS Assessment Project in WACS Case Study

This fall, DRWS will be featured in a case study in the "Educational Effectiveness Report" for SDSU's re-accreditation through the Western Association of States and Colleges. The case study, summarized here, focuses on the assessment project concerning student writing about diversity that was conducted by fifteen of our instructors last fall.

In spring 2004, Ann Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* was selected as SDSU's first book for the Summer Reading Program, a project designed to engage first time freshmen in a common learning experience. The DRWS encouraged instructors to use the book in RWS 100 in fall 2004.

The Lower Division Writing Committee, directed by Ellen Quandahl, designed a sequence

of writing assignments that incorporated the Fadiman text. The sequence was to be used by new Teaching Associates, who use a common syllabus in their first semester of teaching, and by any other instructors who so wished. In August 2004, during the department's annual conference on pedagogy, a panel of faculty conducted a workshop on the one assignment that specifically addressed the Fadiman text and rhetorical approaches to teaching Fadiman. The workshop was attended by over 50 instructors.

Twenty-six DRWS 100 instructors taught the Fadiman text in their classes, with approximately 20 using the model assignment or a slight variation. Those instructors were invited to submit student papers in response to that assignment for an

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assessment project examining how well students were meeting the RWS learning outcome concerning diversity. They were also invited to participate in a reading of those papers on December 4, 2004. Instructors submitted clean, ungraded copies of their student papers to the department. Staff randomly selected 5 papers from each class and copied them for the December 4 reading.

Richard Boyd and Ellen Quandahl designed a rubric for scoring the papers, modeled on one described in Dallinger and Mann's "Assessing Student Knowledge of and Attitudes toward the Humanities" (*College Teaching* 48.3, 95ff). It also repeated language from the departmental learning outcome about diversity and from the assignment itself, laying out three scores, Strong, Moderate and Low.

Fifteen instructors attended the scoring session, which began with a norming session. The scoring process for this project was different from other holistic scoring events that instructors may have been familiar with, since

it focused specifically on one learning outcome. The diversity outcome is fairly new to DRWS, having been added to the list of outcomes in 2003.

Each paper was read by two readers and ranked Strong, Moderate or Low. In cases where the scores diverged, the papers were read by a third reader. The group read 80 papers, in addition to the 8 norming papers. Twenty seven papers (31%) were rated Strong; 42 papers (48%) were rated Moderate; and 19 papers (22%) were rated Low.

Following the scoring, but before anyone had seen total scores tabulated, instructors discussed the project and papers. Several themes emerged from that discussion. For example, instructors were impressed with the thoughtfulness of the papers and the depth of students' analyses. They felt that the prompt allowed students to write about how authors use language to engage readers in thinking about difference.

The following quotes exemplify instructors' reactions to students' writing:

"I'm struck...by the quite thoughtful way in which students engaged the topic. I was actually surprised at how well they were able to articulate what was going on in the texts. As RWS 100 students, it was at times perfunctory, their analysis, but showed that they had thoughtfully engaged with these texts. You don't always see that..."

"What struck me with the strong papers, was the fact that the prompt asks students to look at strategies that the author used and that permitted them to connect and express their compassion and maybe grow up a little bit and mature in their own thinking in articulating those strategies..."

"As they were working through the texts, they became aware of their own assumptions. It's hard for them to become aware of that and move into an expression of it. But being able to verbalize how these writers do that, it gave them an opening...to express that we do deal with other cultures with our own assumptions and our own bias, and this was eye opening."

Instructors appreciated seeing papers from across various classes, and were encour-

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A Lecturer's Reading of the DRWS Programmatic Plan

Julie Williams

The goals of the department in which we all work are formulated in The DRWS 2005 Programmatic Plan. It is a formal document that is reviewed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters and, ultimately, by the University Provost. More importantly, for our faculty, it is a preview of what we can expect in terms of future job requirements and opportunities. An awareness of the Programmatic Plan can help us prepare to meet the needs of our emerging programs.

Besides discovering clues about the kinds of professional development that might further the mission of the DRWS, faculty may also find that the Plan answers questions concerning how their specific appointments have helped, and continue to help, realize the department's ambition to become "the best department in the region" for the study of the following four academic foci.

Academic Focus

Our primary academic foci include (1) "Literacy and the Teaching of Writing,"

which covers literacy from the developmental to the graduate level, and interestingly, aligns with SDSU's goal of "furthering social justice on and off campus." As such, we can expect courses and programs that "enhance literacy among the ethnically and linguistically diverse populations of the region." (2) "Rhetorical theory" is seen as the center of our department's research and teaching. (3) "Professional and Public Discourse" is seen as teaching students to make "ethical and strategic use of language" in public and professional communities. (4) "General Math Studies" asks students to use critical thinking and problem-solving in mathematical skills.

Programmatic Goals

These foci generate specific programmatic goals. Currently, the DRWS is creating an "interdisciplinary undergraduate minor." The recommendation for this minor has been approved by the CAL Dean and has been referred to several university-wide

committees for review. In this minor, students will focus on rhetoric and writing in their own disciplines. (Currently, the DRWS offers RWS 305W for sociology and anthropology majors, RWS 100 for pre-science majors through the Integrated Curriculum Program, and RWS 200 sections focused on Islamic and Arabic issues.) If the University approves the interdisciplinary minor, DRWS will consider creating a major program. Also, a joint Doctoral Program (linked with a UC campus) is in the proposal stages.

The DRWS promotes "technological literacy in writing instruction." Use of Blackboard and Writespace is fundamental to instructors moving forward in this area. Faculty may also submit journal articles to LORE, the DRWS on-line journal, edited by Chris Werry. Also, the DRWS is working with The People, Information, Communications, and Technologies Project (PICT) sponsored by the SDSU Qualcomm Institute for Inno-

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Summer Blackboard Workshops

Terry Williams

After Glen's article in the last issue of *Citations*, which focused on how we all need to be ready to teach any of our regular classes on a moment's notice next fall, now might be the time to finally post at least the basics of your class material on Blackboard. That way you (and/or the office staff) won't have to be scrambling at the last moment, creating or finding, revising, organizing, Xeroxing, collating, stapling, and distributing syllabi that you may or may not actually wind up using.

Another advantage is that most (if not all) of the materials associated with the departmentally designed communal first learning units will be posted on Blackboard already. So if, for example, you suddenly find you're teaching 200 instead of the 305W you'd carefully prepped for, it will be a simple matter of your copying the 200 communal assignment materials into your Blackboard web site, and you're up and running with your students, while you still have time to design a personalized reading schedule for the rest of the semester.

Those of you who considered Blackboard before, but rejected it because posting the same documents to multiple sections of the same class is so time consuming, will be pleasantly surprised that the Blackboard support staff can now combine those sections into one "master class" right away, rather than waiting until the add deadline has passed: in other words, no more having to copy a document two, three or even four times.

I will be available over the summer and would be happy to work with faculty, either individually or in small groups. As the folks who have attended previous Blackboard workshops can attest, part of the fun is learning how other instructors are using Blackboard: it's a versatile program that can be used as simply a syllabus warehouse on up to a repository for all class materials: assignments, tests, grades, pretty much you name it.

I will, of course, be offering the normal "Intro to Blackboard" and "Posting

Class Materials" workshops during the week prior to classes, but I generally find folks are so busy with last minute details, they are mostly interested in getting their syllabi posted before classes begin and can't really focus on learning the multiple ways Blackboard can make their lives simpler in the following weeks and semesters.

So, if you're interested in learning more about Blackboard over the summer, e-mail me at williamt@mail.sdsu.edu.

Fall Grad Courses

RWS 600: Reading and Writing Rhetorically *Glen McClish* M 3:30 - 6:15

RWS 601A: History of Rhetoric I *Ellen Quandahl* Tue 3:30-6:15

RWS 609: Teaching of Composition *Suzanne Bordelon* Th 3:30 - 6:15

RWS 605: Writing Project Management *Linn Bekins* M 4-6:40

RWS 750: Rhetorics of Science and Technology *Cezar Ornatowski* W 3:30 - 6:15

Programmatic Plan

vation and Educational Success to study the role of technology in our classrooms.

The DRWS is developing a Certificate in Teaching Writing for the Secondary Schools. This professional development program is geared toward middle and high school writing teachers in our area. The course of study supporting this certificate will be comprised primarily of existing classes in the DRWS, Linguistics and Oriental Languages, and Teacher Education.

The Certificate in Teaching Writing for the Secondary Schools has as its source the various community outreach programs in which our department participates. DRWS mathematics and writing faculty have assisted local community colleges, high schools, and middle schools in helping their students to be "college ready." The current program in this endeavor is Reading Institutes for Academic Preparation (RIAP). This is a CSU-sponsored collaboration with Sweetwater Union and Grossmont Union High School

Districts. Cali Linfor and Micah Jendian are DRWS liaisons for this program.

Learning Outcomes Assessment

One third of the Plan focuses on student learning outcomes assessment. This is an area of academic endeavor that continues to grow, and consequently, this section may offer clues into the direction our various programs will take. For instance, a survey done by the Freshman Success/IC program indicates that linked packages may once again be offered to developmental writers.

The RWS 100 Diversity Outcome Assessment Project conducted in conjunction with last fall's Summer Reading Program suggests that incorporating diversity into the work of DRWS writing instructors is an important goal of the department and the university. Our department is actively looking for ways in which to enhance our teaching concerning writing in diverse communities. In fact, on top of the "Comprehensive Hiring Plan" for tenure/tenure track faculty is a

position of Writing, Rhetoric, and Community Practices. Ethnic rhetorics and "tailoring instruction to the multicultural classroom" would be areas of expertise for this new hire.

The Upper Division Writing Program is working at filling a need for more selection in upper division writing course choices. The new proposal is for RWS 510, Rhetoric and Culture. This course will consider rhetoric and race/ethnicity, gender, and social class.

The Technical and Scientific Writing Certificate Program reviewed core courses and adjusted them to provide students with more "experiential learning activities." The newly formulated courses rely less on lecture than on students developing and testing documents' effectiveness with outside "clients." The courses also focus on group interaction. Experiential and collaborative learning are seen as improvements to an already successful curriculum.

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WACS to Use Assessment Study

aged that these papers seem to represent a program, that there was consistency in various teachers' approaches to rhetoric:

"...One of the other strong things...it seemed like these papers were written by students who could have all been in the same class. I was encouraged by the fact that they all seemed to be on the same page with rhetorical strategies, and yet these came from classes where there are different instructors, and even the material was different."

Instructors also recognized the complexities of teaching about diversity; with some saying they felt under prepared for that task, and wanting discussion of this contested term and ways to approach it. At the same time, instructors agreed that, in this department, diversity is approached through the discipline, which is concerned with language; how people write, speak, and communicate with others about diversity:

"We remain a department interested in lan-

guage, right, so it seems to me that no matter what we come at from diversity, it's going to be a matter of how people write about it, speak about it, communicate about it...what I like about this project is that it allowed (students) to talk about the communication and ways of speaking to one another becomes a way to talk about tolerance; because a lot of the papers came to the conclusion that respecting one another's culture and speaking to one another in a way that shows respect for one another's cultures is the way to prevent things like Lia Lee from happening...."

"if you go toward what you're saying, and picking out very specific ways that an author is asking us to look at another culture and tolerate them...that's a big cognitive step for students...and the success of the papers, the prompt, is that a lot of students are able to do that."

In summary, the instructors and the program director were generally pleased with the level of student learning for this outcome:

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almost 1/3 of the papers were rated Strong while another 48% were rated Moderate. In addition, this project was a launching point for a more program-wide discussion about how student work is read and what kind of intellectual work the department is looking for.

It was clearly very useful to discuss work across sections, and to self-assess the consistency across a multi-section program. This assessment of student learning inaugurated a useful conversation about how the discipline of rhetoric can approach and teach diversity in our classes.

In the future, it will be important for DRWS to initiate discussions about how, specifically, we understand the term diversity and its place in our learning outcomes. We will also need to hold a thorough-going discussion of designing rubrics for assessing student learning.

Programmatic Plan

DRWS has also identified a need for students to be able to critically read visual rhetoric. Assignments that incorporate a visual element are already collected in the Instructor Resource Site on Blackboard. The textbook committee takes instruction in visual rhetoric into account in their recommendations. RWS 200 now offers a "documentary curriculum" that meets that program's student learning objectives.

Tenure/Tenure Track Hiring Plan

Along with a position for Writing, Rhetoric, and Community Practices mentioned earlier, the department hopes to hire people to support already existing programs—the Lower Division Program, the Master's Program (with a position for Modern Rhetorical and Critical Theory), and the Technical Writing Program (with a specialist in technical writing).

Other Programs and Initiatives

SDSU mandates that students take the Writing Proficiency Assessment (WPA) in their junior year. Students who neglect to do so will not be able to register for future terms. The WPA is being revised to assess advanced

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writing skills of juniors and seniors, focusing on reading and analyzing argumentation. Hopefully, the new WPA test will be in place in Fall 2005. Although SDSU is using the WPA in the foreseeable future, it is recommended that the University change its practice to require students to take "rigorous, discipline-specific, upper division writing courses." In the meantime, the department proposes that the University appoint a Campus-Wide Graduate Writing Assessment Requirement (GWAR) Coordinator to "develop, manage, and assess upper division writing across the campus."

An Invitation

I have worked my way through this Plan, reporting on the elements that I have noticed. You may have a different reading of this Plan and notice aspects I have not described.

In order to make your own judgments, you will want to go to Blackboard Instructor Resources, under 'Administration' and look at the DRWS 2005 Programmatic Plan. A letter to the Citings editor might be in order to relay information I have left out.

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San Diego State University

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