

Citings

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DRWS Instructors Join the pICT Project



Professor Anne Wysocki

Anne Wysocki, Associate Professor of Visual & Digital Communication at Michigan Technological University, led a hands-on workshop for DRWS instructors on July 29.

Her topic was how to develop assignments that incorporate technology in order to support the learning outcomes of RWS 100 and RWS 200. She discussed approaches for engaging students in thinking rhetorically about compositions that use visual as well as verbal means of persuasion.

Professor Wysocki was invited by the People, Information and Communication Technologies (pICT) Project. Housed in the Division of Undergraduate Studies and directed by Dr. Cathie Atkins, the goal of pICT is to provide training and support for instructors who are investigating how to incorporate technology to enhance learn-

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Jury Duty Redux

Glen McClish

In the October 2002 issue of *Citings*, I wrote about my experience not getting picked to serve on a jury. As you may recall, I was summarily struck from a panel of prospective jurors by an assistant district attorney. In the article, I lamented that I seem to have been viewed by the prosecutor as an irritating pedant, rather than a promising juror, and I mused about the larger credibility problem experienced by teachers of rhetoric and writing.

So this summer, when I was once again called for jury duty, I figured that my profession's poor reputation would once again keep me from experiencing anything more than a momentary stay in the jury box. I prepared myself for inevitable rejection.

Since Cezar Ornatowski and I were called to report on the same day, we sat side by side in the central jury room and listened to—and of course critiqued—the general instructions presented to all the prospective jurors by the venerable Judge

Gill, who exhorted us to bring our common sense and life experience to bear on the cases to be tried. Turning to me, Cezar concluded that there was absolutely nothing “postmodern” about the judge's perspective on the law and the duty of jurors.

Cezar was absolutely right. In the academy we ponder the impossibility of foundational truth, the socially constructed nature of knowledge, the naiveté of endorsing grand narratives, and the limits of language, but in courthouses throughout this country, everyday folks matter-of-factly determine what the state will hold as true about the guilt or innocence of their fellow citizens. We apply laws to facts to render verdicts, that is, “true sayings.” If our academic talk entertains postmodern flights of fancy, our work in court is firmly planted in the Enlightenment, a period in which societal consensus on matters as diverse as taste and justice was

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Academic Literacies in the New South Africa

Ann M. Johns

This past summer, my husband and I spent a month in South Africa, enjoying the country that we, like many others, had refused to visit under apartheid rule. Though I am tempted to discuss our trips to Soweto and Cape Town—and to Bishop Tutu's church, which provided sanctuary for many anti-apartheid activists—Citings readers may be more interested in our discussions with teachers about the country's academic literacy initiatives.

The current South Africa could be compared to the post-60s and early 70s America. Though there are daunting problems (HIV/AIDS, 40% unemployment, and significant educational disparities), the energy, hope, and resources of the people are there to confront them.

In this country with eleven national languages (English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, and seven other indigenous languages) and educational institutions segregated by ethnicity (Black, Coloured, Indian, and White) for nearly fifty years, universities are now being integrated and literacy plans for indigenous

languages are being developed, often very rapidly.

In addition to devoting resources to campus desegregation, universities have developed alternative assessments to the established baccalaureate examinations so that traditionally underserved students can demonstrate their abilities to work with academic texts and contexts.

These examinations are coded for majors; and when the results are in, the assessment office meets with departments to discuss the specific academic skills that require further development. This work leads to the creation of Writing-across-the-curriculum programs as faculty attempt to integrate skills into their classes.

Innovative work also focuses upon retention of enrolled students, guided by university foundation programs, similar to SDSU's now-defunct Academic Skills Center. Under apartheid, much of the Black population was exiled to "Bantustans," where the government-controlled chiefs often played up the importance of tribe rather than

ethnicity or country. Students still enter universities suspicious of those from other tribes as well as of the coloured and white students with whom they have had little contact. Discussions of tribe and identity are encouraged, and ongoing, related research assists in efforts to unveil and counteract vestiges of the previous regime.

There is much more to do, of course. Some entrenched white faculty are resistant, and curricula can reflect out-dated and inappropriate practices. However, a remarkable number of students and faculty from all racial groups are confident that they can effect change. Is anything impossible for a country that produces a Nelson Mandela and institutes a Truth and Reconciliation Commission?

Ann Johns is a retired DRWS professor, currently teaching under her fall FERP assignment. Her work in South Africa was funded by the U.S. Department of State.

Papers, Etc.

Bekins, L., Huckin, T., & Kijak, L. (2005). "The Personal Statement in Medical School Applications: Rhetorical Structure in a Diverse and Unstable Context." *Issues in Writing*.

Linn Bekins continues to work with the EMC Social Entrepreneur Internship Program in the School of Business, which places advanced MS/MBA students with non-profit organizations to manage significant strategic projects. Each intern is teamed up with a faculty advisor, a QUALCOMM employee mentor and a non-profit agency. Linn serves as a faculty advisor and really enjoys it because it is an excellent opportunity to connect with San Diego's non-profit community, and to provide guidance to entrepreneurial MBA students as they build tangible business skills.

Bekins, L., & William, S. (2005). "Leaders, Managers, and Producers: Repositioning

Technical Communication for the Creative Economy." *International Professional Communications Conference Proceedings*.

Mun, Susan, Monzon, Reynaldo, and Fielden, Carl. (2005). "A Study On The Holistic Scoring of a College Upper-Division Writing Assessment: Investigating the Reliability and Consequential Validity of the Writing Proficiency Assessment." Presentation made at the *2005 Association for Institutional Research Forum*, San Diego, May 31.

Steve Merriam has been selected as a 2006 participant in LEAD San Diego. LEAD focuses on developing community leaders from the public, private and nonprofit sectors who can serve as catalysts for creating a better San Diego.

Robbinet, J., & Bekins, L. (2005). "Medical Narratives in Empirical Frameworks." *Academic Exchange Quarterly*.

pICT Project

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ing in their classrooms.

According to the program's web site, "pICT will help faculty and students develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be an educated person in an age when technology is continually reshaping opportunities for interacting with complex disciplines and diverse communities."

pICT, which is supported by San Diego State University's Qualcomm Institute for Innovation and Educational Success, awarded fellowships to twenty-four faculty from ten different disciplines—DRWS was well represented.

Fellows participated in a weeklong workshop in June and, over the summer, they developed individual and collaborative teaching projects that incorporated innovative uses of information and communication technology. A few sample projects are available on the pICT web site: <http://ctl.sdsu.edu/pict/index.htm>.

RWS MA Program Welcomes New Grad Students

Jane Robinett

The MA program in Rhetoric and Writing Studies added four new students this Fall: La-Verne Benjamin, Alison Butler, April Cunningham, and Jennifer Weaver. La-Verne is entering the MA program after receiving a BA in Speech and Organizational Leadership from Northeastern State University in Oklahoma. Originally from the island of St. Kitts, she completed seven years of service in the armed forces before returning to college for her BA. Her main interest is the teaching of rhetoric and writing at community college level and following her MA, she intends to pursue a doctorate. She is also interested in writing family history and biography.

Alison Butler is a senior information engineer at a San Diego company who has come to us with BA degrees in both music and literature. She completed the Certificate

program in Rhetoric and Technical Writing here and is now working to complete her MA in Technical and Professional Writing. Although she thoroughly enjoys her professional work, she also comes from a teaching background.

April Cunningham received her BA in Literature at UCSD and went on to UCLA, where she earned an MA in Library and Information Science. She served as a librarian at Palomar College for two years before entering the MA program here. She is especially interested in the teaching of writing.

Jennifer Weaver earned her BA in Literature here at SDSU, where she was also a feature writer for the Daily Aztec. Following graduation, she went to work at the University of Pittsburg as academic coordinator and webmaster. She returned to south-

ern California work at UCSD as a computer resource specialist. She comes to the MA program with a special interest in professional and technical writing.

Our new students have a wide range of interests and are a far more lively group than this short introduction can possibly suggest. We know you'll welcome them to your classes and discussion groups where their interests, ideas and collective senses of humor will provide fresh views for all of us.

Congratulations!

To **Linn Bekins**, who was awarded tenure, promoted, and gave birth to a bouncing baby boy, Colin Lawrence Harris, on May 22.

Jury Duty

believed possible. Of course this mutual epiphany about the eighteenth-century character of twentieth-first-century American jurisprudence was no more than pointless daydreaming, since neither of us stood a chance of actually being selected to serve.

But this trip to the courthouse yielded for me a most unexpected result. Although Cezar was eventually dismissed, I soon found myself sworn in as a juror on a murder trial that was predicted to last several weeks. I was dismayed by the thought of losing that much work time, but relieved that at least this prosecutor believed that a teacher of rhetoric and writing was fit to serve the good citizens of San Diego.

For about eight days, I sat quietly listening to testimony from a wide array of witnesses, including the defendant himself. I did my best to process conflicting accounts of the sad details of the homicide, and I carefully weighed the credibility of each speaker. I scrutinized the techniques employed by the prosecutor and the public defender, working hard to determine which case seemed more credible and what could be known beyond a reasonable doubt.

Then, after two weeks of mute atten-

tion, I joined my fellow jurors in deliberation, discussing the evidence as presented to us over the many days of testimony. As presiding juror, I employed all my skills as a rhetor and diplomat to help ten of my fellow jurors convince the twelfth that his insistence on a verdict of "voluntary manslaughter" was misguided.

We spent the better part of a week engaged in this struggle before finally persuading him to join us in a unanimous verdict of "murder in the second degree." It was an immensely taxing, but intensely gratifying experience.

Aside from communicating my pleasure that—indeed—those who earn their bread by teaching rhetoric and writing are qualified to sit in judgment of their fellow citizens, I've written this account of "my summer vacation" for the purpose of raising several issues related to our teaching in this department.

First, I believe that the focus on argument in our writing courses, particularly RWS 100 and 200, is right on target. My experience in court, listening to a multitude of witnesses and a series of arguments presented by the prosecutor and public defender, clearly

demonstrated the vital importance of learning how to evaluate claims, to sift through the evidence marshaled in their support, and to uncover the premises that make possible the movement from evidence to conclusions. I became aware as never before that it is absolutely essential to understand how appeals to ethos and pathos support—or, potentially, undermine—one's argument. Putting the case together in my mind, I developed a new appreciation for the concept of argument in context. Struggling for what seemed to be an eternity in the deliberation room, I was reminded of the critical nature of skill in persuasion, of facility in putting together a strong argument and seeing it through to the end. Simply put, our student learning outcomes are quintessential to the education of citizens and should be emphasized in any account of what it means to be a college graduate.

Second, I would like to push the point about the entirely unpostmodern nature of jury duty back far beyond Enlightenment thinking. The principle that underlay my service to the state, it seems to me, goes back at least to the ancient Greeks. In the *Rhetoric*,

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Ode to a Confused English Student

by Shirley Kline (Karl's Mom)

This English don't make any sense
No matter how I try
There's times that I get so confused
I could just sit and cry

A mouse will join a group of friends
Together they are mice
Are house and grouse, if more than one,
Then known as hicc and grice?

A goose will waddle with a few
That group is known as geese
But several moose together—
Are they also known as meese?

More than one foot are known as feet
A creep and friends are creeps
Are two boots then a pair of beet
And two sheep known as sheeps?

A teacher—he will teach today
And yesterday he taught
Then does a preacher preach today
But yesterday he praught?

You shoot a rabbit, it was shot
And sadder once was sad
Do owls hoot - or did they hot
Were ladders ever lads?

O-U-G-H is used in through
In thorough and in bough
You'll find it too in rough and tough
Did I confuse you now?

You take R-O and add P-E
I think that should spell rope
But S-O added to P-E
Don't spell correctly soap

You say you hang, or else you hung
A calf becomes a cow
A gun will bang, but did it bung?
Do two halves make a how?

If me is followed by my, mine
And he is changed to his
Does he become then he, hy, hine
And me become then mis?

Why must this all confuse me so
Would someone tell me, please
You think it may be easier
To learn to speak—Chinese?

Jury Duty

Aristotle argues that “because the true and the just are by nature stronger than their opposites” (34), those who sit in judgment of others in law courts ought to be able to reach good decisions if legal advocates on both sides of disputes argue competently. In this passage, Aristotle provides a justification for rhetoric that lives today in contemporary judicial rhetoric. With respect to the agonistic, win/lose rhetoric performed in both ancient Greek and contemporary American courtrooms, there is a belief that when cases are tried properly, the best answers tend to emerge. Since our legal system still depends upon this assumption, we ought to continue to strive to identify and teach rhetorical knowledge that can make it true.

Finally, my experience within the deliberation room, in which we employed a wide range of skills to come to agreement about what we concluded was the truth in this case, suggests to me that in addition to teaching analysis and invention of conventional academic and civic argument, we may wish to consider outcomes based on a more dialectical process that emphasizes how we argue together—as a group or a society—to reach the best possible truths. In his recent manifesto, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric: The Quest for Effective Communication*, the late Wayne Booth labels such a practice Listening Rhetoric to emphasize that such discourse pays particularly careful attention to arguments marshaled by those with whom we disagree. For the legal process to function effectively, as Aristotle notes, attorneys must do their best to win cases, but jurors must strive without partiality for the highest truth available. That truth is only possible if jurors approach their task not with an overriding desire to defend initial impressions, but with a willingness to be open to the possibilities of argument, to surrender to the strongest case the group can muster. In this spirit, I conclude with a short list of imaginary outcomes generated “for the sake of the argument” in my RWS 600 class:

- To listen to and restate an argument with which we disagree.
- To construct an argument on a controversial issue that explicitly accounts for

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and respects one's opposition.

- To identify potential common ground among disparate positions.
- To replace “win/lose” or agonistic rhetoric with “Listening Rhetoric” when warranted.
- To debate for the purpose of finding the best available argument.
- To debate for the purpose of establishing a genuine consensus.

These imaginary outcomes are meant to prompt, not to direct, discussion. Learning outcomes must be the result of thorough programmatic discussion and dutifully practiced Listening Rhetoric, not the idle musings of department chairs. For those of you who have an interest in curricular reform within the department, though, I encourage you to ponder the matter. Initiate a discussion. Write a response.

Works Cited

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