

Citings

Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies Newsletter

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In this Issue

RWS 507	2
New Gen Ed Program	2
Papers, etc.	2
Welcome Karen	3
Faculty Focus	3
Congratulations	3
Graduates	3

Published
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Faculty and Staff



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Department Authors Honored at Book Fair



Suzanne Bordelon and Jackie Bacon

DRWS held its annual book fair on April 30. As usual, publishers were on hand to present the latest offerings of college-level readers and other rhetorical texts. This year's fair featured a presentation by Suzanne Bordelon and Jackie Bacon, who both recently published their own texts.

Suzanne's book, *A Feminist Legacy: The Rhetoric and Pedagogy of Gertrude Buck*, was published by Southern Illinois UP. It examines Buck's contribution to the fields of education and rhetoric during the Progressive Era.

Jackie's book, *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper*, was published by Lexington Books. It examines *Freedom's Journal*, the first African-American newspaper published in New York from 1827 to 1829.

Periodic Evaluations Revisited

Glen McClish

Having recently completed a careful review of scores of Periodic Evaluation files and written an equal number of letters to the lectures who assembled them, I'd like to offer a few reflections about the process of Periodic Evaluation and the state of teaching within the department.

First, I'd like to communicate that I'm very impressed by the high quality of instruction that characterizes Rhetoric and Writing Studies, both at the upper and lower division. Across the board, our instructors deliver challenging, engaging courses. Student satisfaction, as measured by course evaluations, is high; but, more significantly, our courses are expertly designed to improve students' reading, critical thinking, and writing. Syllabi, sample assignments, classroom observations, and instructor reflections provide compelling evidence that our teaching is very strong.

Second, I'm pleased to report that our faculty are doing a very good job of delivering common curriculum across the sections. In most cases,

syllabi include course-specific student learning outcomes and assignment sequences. As you might expect, the department's focus on argumentation pervades the course descriptions, reading assignments, discussion topics, and writing prompts I examined. This is not to say that everyone's courses are exactly the same—nor should they be. Each instructor should put his or her individual stamp on their pedagogy. Beyond this necessary and desirable personalization, however, a clear set of programmatic goals and values emerges—as it should.

A third very positive observation is that most our faculty have perfected the art of syllabus construction. Most syllabi are detailed, easy to read, and comprehensive, covering the goals and procedures of the course, grading, classroom etiquette, accommodations for special needs, and schedules for readings and assignments. The vast majority are pleasingly and professionally con-

Continued on Page 4

RWS 507 Prepares Students to Fund Nonprofits

Steve Merriam

This fall, the Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies will once again offer RWS 507, Writing for Nonprofit Organizations. The course has become popular across the university because it offers graduate and returning students the opportunity to partner with local nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in ways that are meaningful to both students and those organizations.

Typically, 507 students work over the course of the semester with an executive or development director to write mission statements, organization resumes, advertising and marketing collateral, member surveys, or material associated with fundraising campaigns. Though students might create a variety of documents for the nonprofits, the course's main focus, and every student's final project, is writing a winnable grant proposal. Often, the nonprofits they choose to work with focus on a cause about which the students feel passionate, allowing them to focus their writing skills and community activism in a practical, enlivening way.

San Diego has approximately 7,000 active nonprofits, and students can choose to collaborate with organizations in a variety of sectors like health and human services, science and technology, civil society, and of course, the arts. Past students have worked with a widely diverse cross-section of NPOs, from Planned Parenthood, the San Diego Homeless Court, and the Mingei International Museum, to the Sierra Club and Paws'itive Teams. All students choose who to work with on their own.

For example, Emily Lieber, an RWS student last fall, is married to a professional golfer who had recently competed on the Canadian Tour. Through a friend of her husband's, Emily heard about Pro Kids Golf, a highly respected organization in Chollas View that uses golf to teach children about education and responsibility. She teamed up with the development director there and wrote a grant that Pro Kids eventually submitted to the Staples Foundation.

All good grant proposals begin with

thorough research for potential funders, so students start their work at the San Diego Foundation's Funding Resource Center. Using an organization's mission statement as a guide, they identify its core values and attempt to match up funder and nonprofit. Research might include interviewing the NPO's staff members or already established grantwriters. Several class sessions are spent examining sample grant proposals, looking specifically at how these persuasive documents tell their stories and argue their cases. Every semester, 5 or 6 different speakers from local, national and international nonprofit communities address the class. Their invaluable insights help students envision real-world applications of persuasive writing strategies, and understand how development, fundraising and proposal writing fit into the important world of nonprofit management and sustainability. Past speakers include Deb Lein, Funding Development Specialist for National Public Radio; Janet

Continued on Page 4

New Program in General Education

Glen McClish

As many of you know, SDSU's General Education Program has been revised this spring. Beginning in the fall, a new program will be in place. As a member of the committee responsible for the revision, I'm excited about the changes ahead, which I believe will place newfound emphasis on argumentation while adding coherence and clarity to undergraduate education. Since Rhetoric and Writing Studies is a major provider of General Education on campus, we will pay very careful attention to the new approach.

At the heart of the new General Education Program are seven essential skills or capacities basic to higher education: 1) Construct, analyze, and communicate arguments; 2) Apply theoretical models to the real world; 3) Contextualize phenomena; 4) Negotiate differences; 5) Integrate global and local perspectives; 6) Illustrate relevance of concepts across boundaries; and 7) Evaluate consequences of actions. All courses in the

General Education Program will be designed to help students develop several of these fundamental skills.

In addition to addressing these capacities, all courses in the Communication and Critical Thinking category, which includes RWS 100, 101, and 200, are responsible for meeting the following four goals: 1) craft well-reasoned arguments for specific audiences; 2) analyze a variety of texts commonly encountered in the academic setting; 3) situate discourse within social, generic, cultural, and historic contexts; and 4) assess the relative strengths of arguments and supporting evidence.

For the most part, these capacities and goals have much in common with our current student learning outcomes for RWS 100, 101, and 200. For example, our learning outcomes emphasize argumentation, rhetorical context, and the application of theory to real-world text. Nonetheless, the process of aligning our curriculum precisely

with the new General Education will take some time and effort. Chris Werry, Director of the Lower Division Writing Program, and I intend to dedicate a significant portion to our Fall Conference to this important subject, so you can look forward to workshops and discussions on General Education. Keep an eye on Blackboard as well.

Papers, etc.

Jill Holstin's review of *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official* will appear in the June 2008 issue of *Contemporary Women's Writing*. The book is a new scholarly memoir by Miriam Cooke, the American professor of Arabic Literature.

Cezar Ornatowski presented an invited guest lecture, "Reinventing Nationhood: Symbolic Reconstruction in Poland's Transition from Communism," at Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, on April 17.

Welcome Karen Keene



Join us in welcoming Karen Keene to the DRWS staff. Karen, who has taken over the budget/payroll position formerly held by Jennifer Nguyen, used to work for the Philosophy Department. She also spent many years working for a major bottled water company.

Karen grew up in Baltimore, but has lived in this area for 18 years. She likes to read, crochet, craft/stamp, and is the PTSA president at her son's high school. After graduating in June, he plans to major in aerospace engineering at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo. Karen says everyone in DRWS has been nice and welcoming. "I thank them for making me feel a part of the group right from the start."

Congratulations!

DRWS Chair Glen McClish was honored at SDSU President Stephen Weber's "Top 25" awards dinner on April 30. Glen was recognized, along with Geoff Chase, dean of the Division of Undergraduate Studies, for co-leading the General Education Task Force, which, according to President Weber, "established a General Education program that will transform GE for the entire university."

The "Top 25" award is a tradition begun twelve years ago by President Weber and his wife Susan to celebrate the extraordinary contributions of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community members.

Faculty Focus: Cezar Ornatowski

Cezar Ornatowski was born in Gdynia, Poland, a port city 12 miles from Gdansk. He studied linguistics at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan before leaving for the U.S. at the age of 24. In 1980, he completed an MA in English at Boston College.

Cezar moved to San Diego in 1982. He taught as a lecturer for SDSU's English department while pursuing a PhD in Literature, with a specialization in Rhetoric and Composition Studies at UCSD. He was hired as a tenure-track assistant professor in the English department at SDSU in 1992. When the DRWS was created the following year, he became one of the original six tenure/tenure track faculty.

Cezar's current research interests include rhetoric and political transformation, especially in Central/Eastern Europe and South Africa, and rhetorics of terrorism.

Cezar's professional affiliations and accomplishments are numerous. He is involved with Polish and South African bi-national research projects. He is an honorary Fellow of the Center for Rhetoric Studies at the University of Cape Town, a founding member of the Polish Rhetoric Society, an Advisory Board member of *Forum Artis Rhetoricae*, and an Advisory Council member of the



Artes Liberales Foundation. He currently serves as Vice Chair of the SDSU Senate. His new research project is "Terrorist Rhetorics," an interdisciplinary examination of extremist discourses. This fall, he plans to teach a seminar for the Master's Program in Homeland Security entitled "Ideology, Discourse, and Conflict."

When he's not reading or writing, Cezar enjoys travel, wine, cooking, skiing, swimming, and hiking. He has a second-degree black belt in Shito-ryu karate and has done yoga since he was 16. As he says, "My ideal is a Greek one—sound mind and body and alert senses to the fullness of life coupled with good citizenship and rational reflection."

14 Students Complete Grad Program

Join us in congratulating the following students, who have completed the requirements for the MA in Rhetoric and Writing Studies.

Jennifer Weaver's master's project is entitled "Augmenting the Curriculum of Sixth College's (UCSD) Mandatory Undergraduate Writing Program to Target the Writing Needs of Engineering Students."

Kathleen Swift's thesis is "The Sinister Science of the Human Betterment Foundation and a Rhetoric of Motives." Kathy has been admitted to the PhD program at UC Santa Barbara, where she is going to pursue her research with Professor Charles Bazerman.

Jason Romero's thesis is "Join Hands

and Get To It: A Study of Information Films Distributed by the US Office of War Information, 1942-1945." Jason will be taking time off to teach English in Brazil.

Emily Bass's thesis is "The Rhetoric of Apology in the Modern Presidency: The Cases of John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan."

William Schraufnagel has completed his thesis, "The Influence of Kenneth Burke on Harold Bloom."

The following students passed the MA exam: Jaime Fleres, Margaret Eugley, Andy Hinds, Emily Shirk, Melissa Sanchez, Melissa Saffell, Amber Smith, Charles Jackson, and Marissa Gonzalez.

Evaluations Revisited

structured and formatted.

I also was pleased to note how many of our instructors found innovative ways to incorporate the summer reading book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, into their lower division courses. Although building the summer book into your pedagogy is not compulsory, it benefits the department and the University by helping to create a “common experience” for first-year students.

In some cases, however, I noted problems with individual Period Evaluation files. Although some of these issues are unique to particular files, others can be generalized. For example, some instructors neglected to include full lists of course-specific student learning outcomes in their syllabi, opting instead to feature partial lists or none at all. The department practice, which mirrors University policy, is that complete lists of student learning outcomes are to be including in all syllabi. In addition, some syllabi featured sketchy, outdated, or idiosyncratic descriptions of the course and its goals, minimal schedules, or vague descriptions of grading and attendance policies. In all of these areas, clarity, specificity, and currency

are crucial. And, if the basic look of your syllabi hasn't changed in a decade or so, you may wish to consider some remodeling. In addition to being a contract with your students, your syllabus constitutes a print version of your teacherly ethos. Put your most persuasive character forward.

I would also like to encourage all instructors to consciously link assignments to student learning outcomes. Such connections keep students on track and help them to understand the relationship between their writing assignments and the actual goals of the course. If you find it difficult to establish clear connections between student writing and student learning outcomes, then it may be useful to rethink some elements of your pedagogy.

In addition, I urge instructors to include a robust, significant sample assignment in their files. Be sure that the assignment you've chosen demonstrates how you help students achieve major student learning outcomes for the course in question and shows that you can construct challenging, carefully scaffolded writing tasks.

Finally, I discovered that some faculty

Continued from Page 1

who would have greatly benefited from including a personal statement in their files did not. For instructors who had a weak course or set of courses over the last year, an explanation or reflection provides a valuable context for the reviewer. Said another way, it's a lot easier for reviewers to respond meaningfully to problems if they have a sense of how the instructors themselves view the situation. Without a personal statement, we are not sure if the instructor in question knows if issues exist or not—and we have little sense of what they intend to do to correct problems. Thus, we encourage instructors to reflect on their teaching in writing, particularly when challenges arise.

As I mentioned at the outset, however, my concluding assessment of this body of work is highly positive. It is a delight to review the work of this impressive faculty, and it continues to be an honor to work with you.

Nonprofit Class

Continued from Page 2

Hines, Executive Director of Mi Esperanza Honduras; and Paul Thompson, Senior Vice President of the San Diego Foundation. This Fall's course will feature speakers from organizations like the Community Research Foundation's IMPACT program for dual-diagnosed homeless people—those who cope with both mental illness and substance abuse—and from the Red Lotus Society, a group that specializes in teaching meditation to groups like elementary students, homeless shelter residents and prisoners.

As a service-learning course, RWS 507 advantageously mixes academic and vocational needs. It is becoming well known in San Diego's nonprofit community, and it is common for students to continue on at the organizations with which they partner—some, like Kristine Calitri, even become board members: Kristine was asked to join

the Gaslamp Quarter Historical Foundation board after writing a proposal for the organization.

In fact, nonprofits actively recruit students from the course. Last semester, Colleen McKnight from St. Vincent de Paul Villages visited the class. Colleen is the Assistant HR director at Father Joe's, and a former 507 student. Emily Lieber interviewed, left her job working in Development for the SDSU Foundation, and is now writing grant proposals as part of a writing team for Father Joe. NPOs are a vital part of a service community, and training writers to enter and actively participate in their community is vital to any university's mission.

This fall's course will be offered on Thursday night, from 7-9:40 pm. For more information about RWS 507, please contact Steve Merriam at smerriam@mail.sdsu.edu.

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