

Citings

Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies Newsletter

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*Dr. Paul Minifee (far left) and Dr. Jane Robinett (far right)
with the 2008 DRWS MA Graduates*

RWS MA Program Graduates Thirteen

SDSU's 2008 Commencement saw the graduation of the largest class of graduates from the RWS M.A. program to date. Thirteen new graduates earned their degrees, bringing the total of graduates in the last five years to thirty-three.

A post-commencement reception for new holders of the Master's Degree in Rhetoric was held on May 23 in the Presidential Suite at the Aztec Center following the College of Arts and Letters Commencement held in the Cox Arena.

Among those graduates attending were Andrew Hinds, Melissa Sanchez, Melissa Saffell, Jason Romero, Charles Jackson, Jennifer Weaver, William Schraufnagel and Emily Bass.

A short welcome address was given by Dr. Jane Robinett, the graduate director, and Andrew Hinds responded with a lively address on his experience in the M.A. program on behalf of the students.

The reception, attended by the families and

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CSU Conference on First-Year Proficiency

Glen McClish

On October 30 and 31, Pat Morgan and I—along with Jose Preciado, Cathie Atkins, and Chris Frost from Undergraduate Studies—attended a CSU-wide conference in Los Angeles entitled “Proficiency in the First Year at the University.” The conference, which focused on developmental math and writing, marked a refreshing change in the way developmental course work has been approached in the CSU over the last decade.

In the late 1990s, the CSU established a very rigid approach toward students who required developmental math and writing courses. As detailed in the notorious Executive Order #665, these students were compelled to enroll in and successfully complete all developmental course work during their first year of college. Those students who did not complete these requirements during the prescribed time period were administratively

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RWS Minor Begins Third Year

For the past two years, the department has offered an interdisciplinary writing minor for undergraduates. At this point, there are about thirty students in the program taking courses toward the RWS Writing Minor. In addition, a handful of students have already graduated with a minor. Designed for students across the disciplines, the minor provides students with an enhanced awareness of the central role of language and textual practices in every discipline.

"The recruiting efforts of RWS instructors have played a major role in getting the minor off the ground. We really appreciate those efforts, and we encourage all instructors to let students know about the RWS Writing Minor," said Suzanne Bordelon, RWS Writing Minor Advisor. Both students who want to improve their critical reading, writing, and thinking skills and students interested in pursuing graduate work or entering more writing-intensive professions will benefit from the minor.

The minor consists of fifteen upper division units. This includes core and elective courses, which are divided into three strands: Literacies and the Teaching of Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Writing. The first two strands, Literacies and the Teaching of Writing and Rhetoric, require RWS 500W, 510, and 511 as the core classes and

six units selected from one of those two strands. The Professional Writing strand requires two of the three core classes (RWS 500W, 510, and 511) and nine units selected from that strand.

Core courses include RWS 500W Advanced Writing Strategies, RWS 510 Rhetoric and Culture, and RWS 511 Literacy, Rhetoric, and Technology. Two sections of RWS 500W are being offered this fall, and they are being taught by Paul Minifee and Jane Robinett. RWS 500W is an advanced writing course focusing on how meaning is negotiated in academic and public discourse. Students entering this class are likely to choose graduate or professional programs and/or future employment that necessitate critical analysis skills and an ability to construct sophisticated texts.

This fall the department is also offering RWS 511 Literacy, Rhetoric, and Technology. The course is taught by Chris Werry, whose research and teaching interests include new media, and online commerce and community. RWS 511 examines how digital technologies are used to persuade, produce change, build community, tell stories, coordinate behavior, and intervene in political struggles. The course also addresses how web pages, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and other multimedia texts involve new forms of read-

ing and writing that enlarge and complicate traditional conceptions of literacy.

In spring, RWS 510 Rhetoric and Culture will be offered. The course will explore the interaction of rhetoric and culture in shaping the public identities of three marginalized groups involved in the Abolitionist and/or Women's Rights movements of the nineteenth century: white women, and black women and men. Through examination of sermons, letters, public addresses, and narratives, students will learn how various strategies employed by socially "muted" groups enabled them to win battles for freedom and justice.

The course will be taught by Paul Minifee, whose research and teaching interests include rhetoric of abolitionists, slave narratives, spiritual autobiographies, black church history, black preaching, homiletics, biblical hermeneutics, black women's rhetoric, black manhood, blaxploitation films, and therapeutic writing.

Faculty scheduled to teach courses in the interdisciplinary minor will be drawn from Communication, Linguistics, Education, and Rhetoric and Writing Studies. Information on the minor is available on the RWS website: <http://rhetoric.sdsu.edu/minor/index.htm> and in the 2008-2009 SDSU catalogue.

CSU Conference

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disenrolled from the University. Along with the one-year time limit on developmental classes, the CSU strived to reduce the percentage of entering students requiring developmental course work to about ten percent by 2007. This was an ambitious goal, since for many of the campuses a large percentage of their first-year students require one or more developmental classes.

Although Executive Order #665 was announced with good intentions and high hopes, its goal of dramatically reducing the number of developmental math and writing students in the system was plainly unrealistic. It is important to note that California's expectations for math and writing compe-

tency are—if not the strictest—among the strictest in the nation. Furthermore, the diversity of our population necessitates that a significant number of our students will require extra help with these requirements. We are an immigrant culture, and, inevitably, our students come to the CSU from different backgrounds. Many are exposed to English from birth, while others learn it in school with little help from the domestic environment. With its uncompromising, impractical expectations and goals, Executive Order #665 had the unfortunate effect of politicizing developmental pedagogy and marginalizing developmental students.

As 2007 came and went, and as the

number of students entering the CSU requiring developmental math and writing students remained about the same, a discernable shift in the CSU's attitude toward these students and the courses they required seemed to occur. Those of us involved in system-wide discussions concerning basic skills noticed that the top-down talk about eliminating the need for developmental course work was replaced by more practical, collaborative conversations about how best to teach such courses and help the students succeed. For example, the Chancellor's Office became very interested in innovative methods being used at various CSU campuses to help stu-

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Faculty Focus: Karl Kline

When Karl Kline was growing up in Lancaster, PA, his sometime cleaning girl, Ada, was Amish. She promised to take him for a buggy ride, but never did.

He went to Garden Spot High School and was involved in theater, student council, track, and the school radio. He earned a BA in English from Penn State and an MFA in creative writing here at SDSU

Karl started as a TA in 1994 when, as he said, "We were dropped into classes with little more than a pat on the back." He started as a lecturer in 1997 and has taught a range of classes from 92A to 305W.

What does he enjoy about teaching? "Grading over 130 essays four times a semester? No. But in every class there are those few students who really engage with the class, with the material, and are eager to discuss and apply what we're learning to situations beyond the class. And those moments when something a student says makes me say 'Wow, I hadn't considered that before.'"



Karl and his partner Juergen have been together for 11 years. They have a beagle, Tilda, who "sleeps a lot and begs for attention the rest of the time."

Karl and Juergen love to travel. They've been to Peru, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Hong Kong, and all over Europe. Karl also likes reading novels and spending Friday happy hours with fellow DRWS instructors, "where ranting is not only accepted, but encouraged."

The Matter of Punctuation

Albert Moorin

In a recent film featuring Emma Thomson enduring cancer, she remembers her punctilious university English teacher who chastised her for understating the value of punctuation in John Donne's poetry. Lesson: do not underestimate the meaning and beauty of accurate punctuation.

In my own experience, I recall my freshman English professor, an Icabod Crane type: lanky, slim, unusual looking, and pixilated. In fact, his nose resembled an obscure tool from a hardware store. His passion was the history of punctuation. In fact, that is all we studied during my sixteen weeks of Freshman English composition - no writing except for sentences illustrating his pontificated use of the comma and the stilted uses of the colon and semi colon. When we used impeccable punctuation, he produced a bright broad grin. We worked so hard for that grin. At first I was so bored that I believed that only sleeping surreptitiously in the back of the classroom would give me a reprieve from this prolix, repetitious mono-

logue. After a while I had to admit that even though the subject could not be resuscitated from its kingdom of boredom, the man himself was so passionate and thrilled by his research that I had to admire him. He exuded more enthusiasm for his mundane subject than many of my other professors who merely repeated the same ancient notes from lectures they had used for the last decade or two. Gradually, very gradually, I became one of his appreciative students.

As part of my teaching preparation several years later, I memorized twenty-five rules of comma usage and produced a worksheet, along with an exercise for students. So far I have not used this exercise here at SDSU. After all, I do not want to become a punctuation pedagogue, but when my students ask for help in comma usage, I give this handout to them.

With so many other writing issues to ponder, we may believe punctuation to be a rather marginal matter at best until an essay

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Graduates

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friends of the graduates, was hosted by Dr. Robinett and Dr. Paul Miniffee.

Among the graduates, two are going into Ph.D. programs: Kathy Swift at UC Santa Barbara and William Schraufnagel at Penn State University. Two other new graduates, Andy Hinds and Lauren Lang, are currently teaching for RWS.

This fall we welcome twelve new students from California, Utah and Oregon into the M.A. program. This brings our current enrollment to thirty-two.

Congratulations!

To Jo Serrano, our hard working Administrative Supervisor, who has reached her tenth anniversary with the DRWS.

To Glen McClish and Jackie Bacon, who received the Kneupper Award from the Rhetoric Society of America for publishing the best article in the society's journal, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*.

Papers, etc.

Cezar Ornatowski's article, "Spiritual Leadership and Political Agency: The Rhetoric of Pope John Paul II's Visits to Poland, 1979-2002," appears in *The Rhetoric of Pope John Paul II: Studies in Political Communication*, edited by Joseph R. Blaney and Joseph P. Zompetti, and published by Lexington Books, 2008.

Cezar also published "The Future is Ours, or Is It? The Rise and Fall of Communist Rhetoric in Poland," a paper presented at the 13th biennial conference of the Rhetoric Society of America, in Seattle, May 2008.

Jane Robinett published "The Narrative Shape of Trauma" in *Literature and Medicine*, Volume 26, Number 2 (Fall 2007).

Rita Tomlin's article "Online FDA Regulations: Implications for Medical Writers" appeared in the July Online Health Communication issue of *Technical Communication Quarterly*.

CSU Conference

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dents succeed in developmental writing courses, and its representatives communicated its enthusiasm for such pedagogical innovation at biannual meetings of the English Council. It appeared to many of us that the CSU was finally beginning to accept—even embrace—the reality of its diverse student body and the pedagogy it requires.

When the October Proficiency Conference was announced, however, many CSU faculty expressed concern that it would amount to the culminating step in a sinister plan to destroy developmental math and writing pedagogy through outsourcing, online course work, streamlining, mass lectures, or a combination of these approaches. Nonetheless, many of the writing and math faculty who were invited—including Pat and myself—prepared and subsequently attended the great Halloween celebration.

And, fortunately, there was nothing remotely sinister—or ghoulish, for that matter—about the conference. On the first day, we heard talks from community college faculty and administrators from Bakersfield College, Chaffey College, Pasadena City College, and El Camino College who are experimenting with methods for improving student success in developmental math and writing courses. After dinner, we were treated to a spirited lecture by Dr. Herbert L. Carter, Vice Chair of the CSU Board of

Trustees and Chair of the Educational Policy Committee, who declared that we should stop fretting about the percentage of students who enter the CSU with developmental needs and simply teach them.

The next day, a wide variety of talks were offered, including presentations on redesigning assessment and placement for developmental mathematics, the Twelfth-Grade Expository Reading and Writing Course and the Reading Institutes for Academic Preparation, stretch courses that combine developmental and first-year writing instruction, directed self-placement in writing courses, writing instruction for multilingual writing students, learning communities for writing students, “jump start” summer courses, and assessment of developmental writing programs. This array of presentations was, in effect, a system-wide investigation of “best practices” concerning developmental math and writing pedagogy. In one of the most interesting presentations, Philip Garcia from the Chancellor's Office argued that over the entire system, students who complete developmental math and writing at CSU campuses fare very well when compared to their counterparts who have passed out of these courses. Garcia reiterated Trustee Carter's point that, rather than stigmatizing developmental math and writing students, we should view them, simply, as our students.

As requested, I gave a presentation about the pros and cons of San Diego State's “outsourcing” model for developmental writing and math instruction, in which City College instructors teach all our courses except RWS 94. I encouraged campuses contemplating adopting the outsourcing model to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of such an approach very carefully before altering their current curricula.

Pat, Jose, Cathie, Chris, and I left the conference with a pretty good feeling about the CSU's evolving attitude toward developmental math and writing students. Clearly, this budget crisis will offer severe challenges to all educators across the state, but at least we have the sense that the CSU system is turning from a punitive to a supportive approach to basic math and writing instruction. I expect we'll all struggle to maintain a reasonable quality of instruction in the CSU, but I don't believe our programs in developmental math and writing we be singled out by Long Beach for drastic cuts, elimination, or complete restructuring.

Punctuation

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is loaded with unneeded commas or, heaven forbid, a multitude of comma splices. It is like throwing unneeded dabs of paint on a Mona Lisa. It defaces the original in an almost obnoxious way. Sometimes too the lack of a comma may make a sentence impossible to understand. Consider this example: “To the weak strength seems like a wonderful physical attribute.” One definitely needs the comma after weak, lest the sentence become equally weak in expression.

Sometimes the only way to fix the tangle of verbiage that crosses our desks is the surgical red pen of essay correction, which

takes on a life of its own as it pinpoints those little marks that bring surprising clarity to an essay's message.

So, the world may shake with hurricanes and earthquakes; the oceans may overwhelm the dry land with tsunamis; the dry weather may cause fires to appear from nowhere; the world's financial systems may be in a perpetual meltdown position; terrorists may be waiting to attack the mainland. Whatever happens in the outside world, one thing we know for sure: how to correct punctuation errors in a composition! What a magnificent triviality!

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