

Citings

Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies Newsletter

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DRWS Toy Drive a Big Success

This past holiday season, DRWS Staffer Clare Crierie collected 90 toys from DRWS faculty and staff. Clare is shown here with Jo Serrano delivering the toys to AJ from Channel 933.

The contribution helped the radio personality reach his goal of donating over 100,000 toys to the Rady Children's Hospital. Claire hopes to make this an annual event.

We would like to extend a big "Thank You" to Clare for organizing the drive and another one to everyone who donated a toy. You made a lot of children very happy.

"Jump Start" Developmental Writing Summer School

Glen McClish

This summer, San Diego State University will test a new intervention designed to help students who begin higher education with relatively weak writing skills. All students who have an "eligibility index" (derived from high school grade point average and SAT score) below 3400 and who need developmental writing will be required to enroll in a five-week summer school program. This six-unit "jump start" on the fall semester, which will run July 13-August 14, will feature an RWS 92A course, a substantial tutoring component, and Student Affairs programming.

Obviously, the two elements of the "jump start" program most important to Rhetoric and Writing Studies are the RWS 92A course and the tutoring component. Although five weeks is a relatively short period of time, the course will meet one and a half hours per day, five days per week, so it will contain the same number of hours as a typical one-semester three-unit course. As usual,

San Diego City College will be responsible for hiring and evaluating the faculty, with RWS developing the curriculum, training the faculty, and running the assessment.

In order to accomplish this important work, we have been given a new position, a director of the summer program. As you know, applications for this job were due March 16th. I have just selected Janet Tempelton for the position. As usual, tutoring for the "jump start" program will be supervised by our tutor coordinator, who will work closely with Janet to tailor the tutors' activities to meet the needs of this special student population. Since students will spend approximately one and a half hours per day with the tutor, we'll need to plan carefully in order to maximize the value of the time. I expect that the tutoring period will include both whole-class activities such as group editing and extra practice with textual analysis, as

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“WPA? Whassat?”

Perhaps in the name of job security I shouldn't be writing this, but after a brief, informal polling of my 305W class, I've determined that DRWS, and especially those of us teaching 100 and 200 classes, are doing our students a disservice by not emphasizing the WPA—the Writing Proficiency Assessment, not Obama's economic stimulus plan—in our classes.

As you may—or should—know, the WPA is the test all students must take during or immediately after the semester they earn 60 units. The test allows the students two hours to read a text—generally an easier piece like a newspaper opinion piece or editorial—and then write a rhetorical analysis of it. The results of the test determine the students' next writing course requirement: A score of 10, 11 or 12 means they are free to graduate; an 8 places them in a 305W (or equivalent) class; and a 6 or lower requires them to take both RWS 280 and 305W or equivalent.

What surprised me in my informal poll was the students' lack of knowledge about all aspects of the test. They don't know why it's given at all. They don't know what “kind”

of writing is expected. They don't know how it's graded. And, sadly, many of them weren't even aware of the test office's web site and the helpful information to be found about the WPA there.

Creating awareness of all this should be, I feel, the responsibility of DRWS.

Students passing our 200 classes should know what the WPA is. We should show them the web site and familiarize them with the prompt, which asks for an identification of the assigned article's argument, an explanation of two rhetorical techniques the writer uses to craft the argument, a discussion of the structure and its effect on the piece, identification of the warrant or shared belief and assumptions of the author and audience, and an evaluation of the overall success of the argument.

In short, they are asked to do what we are teaching them already.

And yet, my students have some pretty disheartening ideas about what they were to write (which I hope are not indication of what we are teaching in our classes). They think they must write a five-paragraph essay. They think every paragraph must have

Karl Kline

a topic sentence, a sentence leading into a quotation, a quotation and two sentences of interpretation. They think an identifiable thesis statement must—and can only—appear as the last sentence of the introduction. They think neatness counts and that cross-outs, addendums, or notes to a reader (“Please read last paragraph first”) hurt rather than help them. They seem to have been Schaffer-Methoded, Berkeley-Paragraphed, prescribed-structured into timed-writing automatons, writing only what and how they've been programmed instead

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Sixth Annual Landmark Lecture

DRWS' sixth annual Landmark Lecture is scheduled for Monday, April 13, at 4:00 p.m. Professors Jeanne Gunner and Doug Sweet will give a talk entitled “Rhetorical Uses of Critical Frames: Theory/ies in the Writing Class.”

In *Grounds for Writers*, Gunner and Sweet ask student writers to read texts and social situations through the frames of various critical theories, considering each for the heuristics it provides—the implicit suggestions each offers for framing arguments and authorial personae. The authors will discuss the pedagogy of framing, and they welcome critiques and variations.

Jeanne Gunner is Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education and Professor of English & Comparative Literature at Chapman University, where she teaches writing courses and the freshman seminar. Her main publications address writing program theory, and she is co-editor with Donna Strickland of the forthcoming *Interrupting the (Writing) Program: Making Space for Critical Discourse*.

Doug Sweet is Director of the Writing Program at Chapman, where he teaches lower and upper division writing and literature courses. His professional interests include rhetorical theory and creative writing.

Pilot Study Evaluates Handbooks

During the spring semester 2008, a handbook pilot was planned by the Textbook Committee. The pilot's purpose was to determine if *Keys for Writers* should continue to be the adopted handbook or if a different handbook would be a more effective learning resource for students and faculty.

The pilot was conducted in the fall semester 2008 and three handbooks were reviewed: James Towner and Adelaide Isaac piloted *The DK Handbook*; Shannon Toll and Jennifer Sager piloted *The Thomson Handbook*; Seth Taylor and Karl Kline piloted *A Writer's Reference*. Questionnaires for both students and faculty were distributed in December and the results were reviewed by the Textbook Committee in the spring. After completing a review of the questionnaires, the Committee determined that *Keys for Writers* should be retained as the adopted handbook

for a period of one year since there was no compelling reason to switch handbooks. The reviews for the three handbooks were mixed, and no clear advantage was seen in changing handbooks.

The one-year time period was suggested as the publisher of *Keys for Writers*, Cengage, needs to make its electronic adjunct materials more user friendly. The Committee recommended that a workshop on the electronic resources be conducted for interested faculty the week prior to the start of the fall semester and that an SDSU visit from the author, Ann Raimis be suggested to Cengage.

Many thanks to those who piloted the handbooks and those who were members of the Textbook Committee for their hard work and interest in this worthwhile project.

Candace Boeck

Ellen Quandahl

The Ancestor Research Assignment

Albert Moorin

Have you ever looked on the Internet and found your long-lost relatives and ancestors and then critically appraised your personality, talents, and shortcomings in view of the so-called ubiquitous DNA code? It is a revealing, sometimes humorous process. About a year ago in between semesters when I went crazy for a minute, I decided to check my name in the many Internet entries to see if I could uncover something special about my relatives. I could have joined ancestor.com and explored my family tree, which would have been much more methodical and logical, but I was in a drifting mode, what artists call a right brain mind bend or meme search. A meme, by the way, is a relatively new term signifying a mental virus.

I found several relatives who had

achieved prominence as doctors, business executives, and even some stars in local community events. I smiled brightly as I thought to myself, "What a wonderful lineage!" I had a royal pedigree, something like a French Poodle at a dog show! But then, the gavel came down as I found, much to my chagrin, several convicts in the 1900s sent here from Europe probably because their home countries had little use for their perfidious talents. Naturally, my ego plummeted.

Still the subject itself was intriguing, so I assigned my students to expand their research skills, talk to their relatives, and discover their talents, strengths, and weaknesses and, most important, their prospects for the future and compose an essay. Naturally, the assignment would be harder for people with names such as Brown, Gonzalez, Chin, or

Nguyen whose names are as familiar as the weather, but still students were quite willing to do the research. After all, this assignment was about themselves—probably their favorite subject.

As we know, the background of ancestral studies is both academically vertical and horizontal, having existed in the ancient religious cultures, the aborigine natives, and—

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Congratulations!

Suzanne Bordelon recently was awarded a \$2,200 Critical Thinking Grant from the College of Arts and Letters. Bordelon will use the grant to complete research trips this summer to San Jose State University and California State University at Chico. She plans to investigate the rhetorical education that women received at California State Normal School, the first state normal school in California and the oldest public higher education institution on the West Coast.

Faculty Focus: Jane Robinett

Jane Robinett grew up in Goshen, Indiana, a small college town surrounded by farmland in northern Indiana. Born into a Mennonite family, her dad was a doctor. Her first teacher was her mom, an imaginative and creative woman who had an MA in English Lit from the University of Iowa. Their home was full of books and the family spent summers at their lake cottage.

Jane did her undergraduate work at Goshen College, where her grandfather had once been president. She completed her MA and PhD at the University of Notre Dame.

Jane began exploring Latin American literature after returning from six years in Spain. This led to a study of the philosophy of technology and how technology was presented in literature. That led to a Fulbright to Costa Rica and a book.

Another interest in traditional medicine and healing eventually led to investigating representations of psychological trauma in literature, Tibetan Buddhist traditions, and, currently, Buddhist dialectics and rhetoric.

At SDSU, Jane was hired on a split contract with English and RWS. After tenure, she "wisely" chose DRWS—where she was teaching "academic skills," now developmen-



tal writing—as a home department. Her interest in argument led her to teach advanced composition. She has been directing the RWS graduate program for the last three years and continues to teach one course for English and Comp. Lit. each semester.

Jane has two brothers who live in Del Mar and one in south India. She says, "We are a family of storytellers, all engaged in either higher education or medicine or music. Most of sing and/or play something and love sports. I'm the only non-athlete, but the best swimmer. We speak a variety of languages and Africa is the only continent we haven't yet visited."

Papers, etc.

Gareth Davies-Morris has contributed a chapter, "The Alien Eye: Imperialism and Otherness in H.G. Wells's *The First Men In the Moon*," to *Science Fiction and the Two Cultures*, edited by Gary Westfahl and George Slusser of UC Riverside. The book will be available sometime this Spring from McFarland Publishers.

In November, Carl Fielden and two SDSU colleagues, Lynn Jenkins-Feinberg and Martin Doucett, gave a presentation titled "Healthy Helicopter Parenting: Preparing a College-Ready Independent (Rather than Dependent) Young Adult" at the 20th Annual *International Conference on Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder* in Anaheim.

In January, Cezar Ornatowski presented "Rhetoric and Collective Identity: (Re)Constituting the Republic of Poland" at the conference *Rhetoric in Society*, at Leiden University in The Netherlands.

Developmental Summer School

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well as individual writing and one-one-one tutoring, but the details have yet to be entirely worked out.

To date, the Student Affairs component of the “jump start” program is still in the early stages of planning. From what I understand, however, there are plans being developed to incorporate key elements of the traditional University Seminar course, as well as components of Bounce Back, the popular program for students on academic probation. There will most likely be a substantial role for peer mentors. Students' goals and aspirations will be explored, as well as the common obstacles that distract and discourage students as they begin their college careers.

Not surprisingly, students in the targeted population often fail to thrive in college because they overemphasize the agency of others, rather than their own ability to effect positive changes in their lives. In many cases, such students believe that the power held by their teachers, the bureaucracy, and

other forces beyond their control determines their success or failure.

Although they haven't read Foucault's “Panopticism” yet, they feel somewhat oppressed and manipulated by powerful, seemingly impersonal machines such as San Diego State and those who represent the institution in their lives: administrators, teachers, counselors, tutors, and so forth.

One of the primary goals of the Student Affairs programming, as I understand it, is to help students come to realize that—to a great extent—they control their success or failure, that it is up to them. This realization—or perhaps more accurately this

Ancestor Assignment

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more familiar to many of us—the Native American culture and the Mormon teaching. The subject itself is endlessly fascinating!

If one is inclined to start with this assignment, one could organically build on the personal revelation by adding the historical and mythological background and a rhetorical analysis of the accuracy of the DNA message from those ancestors. Students could then update their coverage in light of current research. Would this information be like the previous idea of the apparently set-in-stone IQ test, an erroneous conclusion? According to the book *Biology and Belief*, one's perceptions and choices can transcend such apparently prophetic information, yet the ancestral information cannot be ignored. The subject is sufficiently conjectural enough, I think, to be worth a proficient argument essay.

So, should you find such a subject worth your precious time, please write a follow-up article in a future edition of *Citings*. If you think you might forget about it, remember the famous words of Nietzsche: “The advantage of a bad memory is that one enjoys several times the same good things for the future.”

belief—may be the single most important determinant of success in higher education.

Although some will view this “jump start” program as an intrusion in the lives of entering students, I would like to conceive of it as an opportunity for students to develop key skills and perspectives essential for success in college and life beyond graduation. The proficiencies related to reading, writing, and thinking developed in RWS 92A support virtually all learning that takes place at an institution such as SDSU.

If nurtured, the attitudes and beliefs proposed for the Student Affairs component of the program will help incoming students to take responsibility for their education. If we are able to realize the full potential of the program, it will indeed “jump start” these students' success in college.

WPA

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of considering the actual task of the prompt. And a simple reading of the WPA grading criteria by them—and more importantly us—will show that none of that is what the WPA requires. (Ethos moment: I was one of the WPA readers for years.)

So here's what I suggest: We all, especially those of us teaching 200, familiarize ourselves with the test and its grading rubric. I'd love to see participating in one or two WPA grading sessions made mandatory for all instructors (but I'm sure bureaucracy would get in the way of that).

I think that we all need to devote at least two weeks of our RWS 200 curricula to prepping for the test, including a practice exam. And we need to know that there's not only one way to respond to the WPA prompt, and that purpose, topic, and audience should determine the best approach, not prescribed writing formula.

That is, after all, the basis of all good writing, isn't it?

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