

Sweetland

GAYLE MORRIS SWEETLAND WRITING CENTER

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**English
Composition
Board /
Sweetland
Writing Center
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Writing Workshop

Spring 1998

Tues. - Thurs.
9-12 & 1-3 p.m.

Mon. & Fri.
No Appointments

Summer 1998

Tues. - Thurs.
9:30-12 &
12:30-3 p.m.

Mon. & Fri.
No Appointments

*Please call
for a Writing
Workshop
appointment*

Michigan Online Writing Lab (OWL)

[http://
www.lsa.umich.edu/
ecb/OWL/
mailform.html](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/ecb/OWL/mailform.html)

The English Composition Board and The Sweetland Writing Center

Associate Professor Terri Tinkle, Director

Rumors of the English Composition Board's demise are greatly exaggerated. This newsletter is to fill you in on recent exciting developments and continuing programs.

Professor Dan Fader of the English Department founded the English Composition Board in the mid 1970's. Its mission was to invent, administer, and support writing across the curriculum. At the time, writing across the curriculum was a revolutionary concept but it quickly became the model for writing programs across the country.

After an initial flurry of excitement, such academic revolutions have a way of losing their intellectual vigor. The administrative systems established to manage the revolution become bureaucratic habits. The English Composition Board illustrates this process even as it exemplifies the virtue of continued diligent effort. For instance, the English Composition Board continues to assess incoming students' writing, to administer the upper-level writing requirement, and to develop outreach programs, even though it's been some years since the College faculty thought of those activities as vital aspects of a vigorous undergraduate initiative – or thought of themselves as being personally engaged in those tasks. English Composition Board faculty continue to assist College faculty to incorporate writing into their disciplinary courses. Finally, student-centered initiatives continue to flourish – the Peer Tutoring and Outreach programs, the Writing Workshop - and quietly enrich the culture of writing on campus.

Last year the English Composition Board returned (like a migrating bird) to its birthplace in the Department of English. This is a change in administrative structure rather than in function, and the English Composition Board remains responsible for administering writing across the curriculum in the College.

While the English Composition Board was migrating into English, an extremely generous gift from John Sweetland, a University of Michigan alumnus, founded the Gayle Morris Sweetland Writing Center. On November 19, 1997, we dedicated the writing center to John's beloved wife Gayle, who was the owner and publisher of *U, the National College Magazine*, which features the work of hundreds of student journalists, photographers, and artists.

The Sweetland Writing Center has the mission of invigorating writing in the disciplines – from the first year through the dissertation. Our first initiative is the Sweetland Writing Center Fellows Seminar, which releases faculty from a course and supports graduate student instructors so that they can work with visiting scholars to enhance their writing pedagogy. I'm currently planning the Winter 1999 Seminar on Writing in Math and the Sciences. In addition, I'm planning May and August faculty workshops on such topics as Writing Instruction for First-Year Seminars and What to Do With the Upper-Level Writing Requirement, as well as Summer Institutes for high school teachers and administrators. The Sweetland Writing Center resources offer us splendid new opportunities to extend the English Composition Board's mission of supporting writing in the disciplines. As the Director of the English Composition Board and the Sweetland Writing Center, I'm enthusiastic about the possibilities as well as thoughtful about what I develop in this crucial formative period.

I would be delighted to hear from you about College needs. Please e-mail me at tinkle@umich.edu or phone me at 764-3144.

Sweetland Seminars

Professor Ejner Jensen

When I returned to the Department of English after three years in the Fleming Building, I wasn't sure what to expect, especially since I was given no teaching assignments and one of

my administrative roles was the Interim Directorship of the Gayle Morris Sweetland Writing Center. This position was a major source of uncertainty, for the Sweetland Writing Center had just come into being.

In order to invent the Center we launched the Sweetland Fellows Seminar. The inaugural Seminar in the Fall Term, 1997, brought together faculty, graduate student instructors, and lecturers from Biology, English, History, Psychology, Mathematics, and the English Composition Board. Each of the Faculty and Graduate Student Fellows contracted to teach a writing course in the following academic term in exchange for their term in the Sweetland Writing Center Seminar. Over the course of the Fall Term, we met weekly, most often with visiting experts in composition studies, focusing on two major questions. Since we were the first class of Sweetland Fellows, and since the Sweetland Writing Center had been founded to address fundamental questions about writing instruction in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts these questions were appropriately foundational: What should be the function of a Writing Center in our College, and What is the appropriate writing curriculum for the College? While the end of the term brought no definitive answers to these questions, it did bring a design that seems capable of moving us toward some very helpful responses to them. Over the next while, I believe that the Gayle Morris Sweetland Writing Center will spearhead some far-reaching innovations in the way writing is taught at Michigan and the way writing is viewed as a component of our teaching and learning mission.

The second term of the Seminars is building on the work of the initial Seminar offering, this time with an approach more focused on issues in the writing classroom. The Fellows in this class come once again from a variety of disciplines and programs: American Studies, Anthropology, Chemistry, the Comprehensive Studies Program, English, Linguistics, and Psychology. Following the pattern of the Fall Term, we have invited a number of outside speakers to lead the weekly sessions of the Seminar. James Slevin of Georgetown University has been a regular visitor and key figure in our planning. No account of the first year of this undertaking would be complete without some recognition of his work on behalf of this growing enterprise. Nor would any such account be adequate without mention of the support and guidance we have received from the John S. Knight Writing Program at Cornell University.

I see the Seminar as a central ongoing activity of the Gayle Morris Sweetland Writing Center. In the years ahead it ought to be the intellectual home of writing studies in the College and the University, and my hope is that it will continue to support faculty and graduate students interested in the advanced study of writing.

Future Newsletters will profile Seminar Fellows and their courses.

Advanced Writing in the Majors Program

Dr. Todd Gernes

Since its inception in the mid-1970s as a groundbreaking writing-intensive curricular component, the Upperclass Writing Requirement at the University of Michigan has grown and changed. The foundation of the Jr./Sr. Writing Requirement remains the same. With the founding of the Gayle Morris Sweetland Writing Center we have the opportunity to turn a requirement into a program. Advanced Writing in the Majors, a new Sweetland program that reflects our emphasis on professional service and training to faculty, graduate student instructors, and undergraduates and our common goal of fully integrating writing into courses across the curriculum.

Our mission is clear: Writing makes thought visible and enhances learning. The purpose is to provide writing-centered courses in students' fields of interest that incorporate writing as a catalyst for research, dialogue, analysis, and expression. In Advanced Writing in the Majors courses, juniors and seniors build on the rhetorical foundation of the First-Year Writing Program: competence in mechanical, grammatical, and stylistic aspects of writing, mastery of expository and argumentative techniques, control of effective revision strategies, and an awareness of reader expectations. Our goal is to enhance learning and invigorate the rhetoric of inquiry by teaching the generic conventions of academic writing and the ways of constructing knowledge within specific fields.

The Sweetland Writing Center / English Composition Board establishes course guidelines and develops models for writing instruction, approves Advanced Writing in the Majors-designated courses, funds and trains graduate student instructors to assist in writing instruction, offers workshops and consultation for faculty, and monitors and reports students' completion of the Jr./Sr. Writing Requirement. Advanced Writing in the Majors courses use a number of formats. Most focus on a content area within the discipline. Advanced Writing in the Majors courses require a substantial amount of writing (a minimum of 30 pages, often divided into sequential tasks). Most departments incorporate the requirement into established courses. This approach emphasizes to students the idea that writing and revision are integral to learning content. Faculty respond to student writing primarily through written comments on papers and through conferences. In addition, some instructors use class time to combine feedback to students with coverage of new content.

Faculty teaching larger courses may be assisted by graduate students from their departments. Graduate student instructors act as writing consultants in courses across the disciplines and perform multiple tasks, which may include the following: identifying students requiring

various stages of the writing process, presenting workshops and discussions, clarifying assignments or common problems, and supervising peer review sessions. These are challenging tasks requiring active collaboration and ongoing dialogue between faculty members and graduate students.

The Advanced Writing in the Majors Program trains graduate student instructors, providing an intensive, seven-week seminar focusing on the multiple genres of academic writing, the rhetoric of inquiry, reading and writing into content-area courses. This seminar, offered by the Sweetland Writing Center / English Composition Board, is designed to prepare participants to teach content-based, writing-intensive courses and to support faculty in their initial writing-intensive teaching experience. Topics include: creating sequenced writing assignments, the drafting process, establishing and communicating grading criteria, evaluating student writing, portfolio-based assessment, responding to student writing (face to face and in writing), the relationship between reading and writing, on-line resources for writers and teachers of writing, teaching portfolios, and philosophies of teaching.

Writing Workshop

George Cooper

To some degree this conception of it is valid: writing is a solitary activity. Writing involves some period of solitude, a person alone with their thoughts, negotiating possibilities of language, scratching out words to match their ideas. Most professional writers complement this solitude by interacting with others - editors, colleagues, friends - from whom they seek out some response to their work in progress.

The Sweetland Writing Center / English Composition Board is able to provide students such professional and personal feedback. Our Writing Workshop provides an important supplement to formal writing instruction in LSA courses. It offers thirty-minute individual tutoring sessions for all students enrolled in LSA courses and for some graduate students. These services are available through pre-arranged appointments or on a walk-in basis, time permitting.

The Workshop provides support for those students who have not developed the skills to do well in their written work as well as those who wish to expand their writing proficiency. In addition, the Workshop provides support for those foreign students and speakers of nonstandard English whose control of linguistic conventions takes longer to develop. Individualized instruction in the workshop is based upon the same assumption that shapes tutorial courses: writers - whether

experienced or inexperienced - best improve their writing skills by working one-on-one with experienced writing teachers.

Our interaction works most effectively when students initiate the discussion of their writing, directing our attention to the areas in writing where they need help. Tutors will attend primarily to the features which the student has asked for help with, but they will also comment on or ask questions about other aspects of the writing as the need arises. We are happy to work with College instructors to shape tutorial support for courses.

Writing can be a solitary activity, but it doesn't have to be done alone. We are here to help with writing when help is needed.

Second-Language Students at Michigan

Dr. Helen Fox

Those of us who have struggled to learn a second language can easily understand the challenges second-language students are facing. Take for example a common and deceptively simple problem, the use of the articles "a," "an," and "the." Imagine growing up speaking a language that does not employ articles at all. (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Arabic, Russian, Hindi, Polish, Hebrew and others fit into this category). How do you decide whether to say "groups of students were touring the university" or "the groups of students were touring the university"? Even if you learn that "the" is used when you've already mentioned groups of students earlier (or should it be the groups of students?), or when you are talking about particular groups of students rather than groups of students in general, how does that help you understand the difference between "The Huron River" and "Huron River Drive"? Conceptual habits that are learned effortlessly in childhood can become extremely confusing and taxing to the non-native organization or style, not to mention their ideas!

Speakers of English as a second (or third, fourth or fifth) language can enrich the Michigan experience for both students and faculty with their unique cross-cultural perspectives and first-hand knowledge of other regions of the world. Perhaps surprisingly, some of these students are among the most skillful writers that Michigan admits, surpassing most native speakers in their fluidity of expression and mastery of vocabulary and grammar. Instructors often spot mature thinking and creative ideas in these students' writing, but feel frustrated when they have neither the time nor the expertise to give these students the individual attention they deserve. Fortunately, Michigan provides an extensive array of high

quality services for international students at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

Even before applying to Michigan, most international students take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), an internationally recognized assessment of their overall English skills. Applicants must achieve a score of at least 560 to be considered for admission here, though most of our undergraduates have scores of around 600. Upon arrival, they are assessed again, this time with the Academic English Evaluation, a battery of tests developed by Michigan's English Language Institute; they may be required or recommended to take one or more courses in speaking, listening, pronunciation, and/or writing. A course in thesis and dissertation writing is also available at the English Language Institute for advanced graduate students. After completing whatever English Language Institute courses they may have been required to take, undergraduates then proceed to the English Composition Board for a portfolio assessment of their writing. On the basis of this assessment, international students, like all other entering undergraduates, are placed in appropriate writing courses or, in rare cases, are declared exempt from introductory composition.

At every point in this process, help is available for both undergraduate and graduate English as a Second Language students at the English Composition Board's Writing Workshop, as well as through the English Composition Board Peer Tutors, who can be found in 444C Mason, just outside the Angell Hall Computing Center. Students can also get editorial advice by sending their papers to the peer tutors via Michigan's On-Line Writing Lab (OWL). Non-native speakers who take maximum advantage of Michigan's resources will see much improvement in their writing, even if they never completely master the "a," "an," and "the" problem. Some students set up a standing appointment at the English Composition Board's Writing Workshop and work with the same instructor, week after week, for an entire semester. Undergraduates are usually allowed a half hour conference per week, and graduate students may come for weekly, one hour conferences. The English Language Institute also provides a writing workshop for graduate students who have taken an English Language Institute course. Students need to sign up about a week in advance in Room 3003A, NUBS.

High School Outreach

Dr. Barbra Morris

The Sweetland Writing Center hopes to develop two models of collaboration with pre-college institutions across the state. One model is Institutes that will bring together College faculty, high school teachers and

administrators. A second model can be illustrated by the Mackenzie High School/University of Michigan Collaboration.

Since the 1984 creation of the Detroit Public Schools/U-M Collaboration Committee, the English Composition Board has sustained a productive working relationship with the administration, faculty, and students of Mackenzie High School. Ten years ago we established a writing curriculum with a set of English Department composition courses for students, grades nine through twelve. Since then, there have been exchanges between faculty and students at both institutions: these have included creative writing seminars, computer workshops, and drama productions.

In recent years, with support from the Ponting Foundation, the Collaboration has built upon this successful partnership and continued to address current needs identified by a team of Mackenzie High School teachers and university consultants. This process of regeneration recognizes that collaborations evolve and that the success of one phase of an alliance provides a foundation for meeting new challenges in the next. Today it is not enough just to write. Students must combine traditional literacy skills with computer literacy. There are over 174,000 students in the Detroit Public School system. Where will they learn these writing and computer skills to make it? How will the attitude of instructors not in the area of language arts be altered to aspire to the philosophy that every educator is responsible to teach writing? The Mackenzie High School partnership with the University of Michigan in our "Writing to Learn" venture, seeks to achieve these goals:

- * To involve students in the writing process across all disciplines and capitalize on new educational techniques associated with computers
- * To assist teachers in writing and publishing of educational material
- * To train teachers in all disciplines to use writing in the learning process
- * To continue to develop teacher computer literacy skills in study
- * To set aside a monthly schoolwide writing period
- * To establish a process by which students create portfolios of their accumulated works

As noted in the *University Record* (January 1998) we also seek to introduce students to post secondary education by providing day long campus visits, which allow students to experience University life in its academic, creative, and social dimensions. Collaborations such as the one that has connected Mackenzie High School to the University of Michigan become working models for productive, cooperative investigations into questions related to students' preparation for and transition into post-secondary education.