

Sweetland

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**Writing
Workshop
by appointment
Fall 2002**

Monday

9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Tuesday

9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Wednesday

9 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

and 2:30-5 p.m.

Thursday

9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Friday

9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Walk-In Hours

Mary Markley Library

Tuesdays 7-10 p.m.

**Peer Tutors
walk-in hours**

Sunday-Thursday

7 p.m. - 11 p.m.

444C Mason Hall

**Online Writing
and Learning
(OWL)**

[http://www.lsa.](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/help/owl.html)

[umich.edu/swc/](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/help/owl.html)

[help/owl.html](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/help/owl.html)

**Multi-Literacy
Center**

by appointment

Monday - Friday

October 2002
Volume 6 Number 1

DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

by Ejner J. Jensen

As someone who was born in January, I have a legacy of looking both ways; that's what Janus, the Roman god of doorways, did naturally, since he was (without the connotation of duplicity) a two-faced being. This seems a good time to employ that gift as I head into my last semester as Director of the Sweetland Writing Center.

When I first arrived, the SWC was suffering a kind of identity crisis; formerly the English Composition Board, it had been renamed and put under the direction of the Department of English Language and Literature. At first, this was an unhappy dependency. Accustomed to autonomy and their own academic practices, the faculty of the ECB chafed under the domination of a colonial power. Gradually, this metaphor lost its currency as Sweetland Writing Center re-organized its existing programs and added new ones. Together, the faculty talked about new ways to achieve familiar goals. New projects brought a revitalized sense of purpose, while cooperation among new and established faculty members on familiar obligations and projects helped to create a welcome sense of community. The shift to directed self-placement and work on the Advanced Writing in the Disciplines Program with assistance from the Whitaker Fund for the Improvement of Undergraduate Education are examples of the former; the latter is best exemplified by our annual contribution to the Martin Luther King, Jr. celebrations. We have added new faculty as Lecturer Is and IIs, many of whom are graduates of the MFA program. Faculty members in the SWC contribute to the full range of our course offerings, and this circumstance brings us together regularly for

extensive and rewarding pedagogical discussions.

In the 2001-2002 academic year, the SWC experienced two major changes, the first in personnel, the second in program. Caroline Eisner came from Georgetown University to take the position of Associate Director. She has brought to her role a ready and seemingly inexhaustible supply of energy joined with a strong capacity for invention. She has enlarged our outreach efforts, re-energized the Peer Tutoring Program, and provided solid leadership to the unit and welcome support to its Director. We also made a significant addition to our program last year, with the creation of the Multi-Literacy Center. The MLC provides guidance for students who are engaged in projects that call for competence in the managing of multi-media communication. These often complex forms of writing call for new skills and offer a wide range of possibilities for deploying the full range of technology available to us. David Sheridan, who writes about the MLC elsewhere in this issue, has provided strong leadership in the formative stages of this enterprise.

I could say much more about the past, but I've discussed many of our achievements in earlier issues of this newsletter. I should, though, mention that the Sweetland Seminar has been a most rewarding and productive innovation. Over the past years we have brought over a dozen nationally-recognized specialists in composition and rhetoric to this campus, many of them several times. Meeting with faculty and graduate students for discussions about the writing classroom and methods of teaching writing across disciplines, they have enriched awareness of the importance of writing, College wide, and aided immeasurably in furthering the work of the SWC.

What's next? First of course, there will be a change in leadership. In January, Martha Vicinus will assume the Directorship of the SWC. A gifted administrator who is committed to the work of the SWC, she chaired the Department of English during the English Composition Board's transition into the Sweetland Writing Center. Martha will lead a unit that will continue to grow over the next years. She will provide direction for some projects that need guidance and nuanced definition. I think especially of the Sweetland Seminar, for which she will have to define a new financial support model, and the Dissertation Laboratory, a project we share with Rackham, which—*deo volente*—will be in operation for the first time next summer.

The major change of the past year, and one that will have great importance for the future, is the granting of independent status to the SWC. Beginning this year, we are no longer affiliated with the Department of English. This shift once again underlines the point that writing instruction is a College-wide concern and not a matter for which a single department is responsible. The SWC has a responsibility to promote writing in the College, to assist our colleagues in their teaching of writing, and to discover ways to improve our students' writing throughout their years of study at Michigan. That is both our past and our future.

Advanced Writing in the Disciplines

by Caroline L. Eisner

Since 1978, the Sweetland Writing Center (SWC) has been responsible for administering the Upper-Level Writing Requirement (ULWR) through the Advanced Writing in the Disciplines Program (AWDP). That administration has taken place through two major channels: the review of Advanced Writing in the Disciplines (AWD) course proposals, and control of GSI funding and training. For SWC to approve a course as meeting the ULWR, the instructor who will be teaching it must file a course proposal with Sweetland. SWC certifies as AWD courses those courses in which (1) the students address the subject matter via written assignments and (2) the instructor attempts to improve the quality of students' performance by giving feedback to writing assignments and requiring revision. Sweetland also asks that the instructor show how he or she will integrate writing instruction into the course, what kinds of assignments he or she will give, and what additional staffing needs the course will incur. Once the proposal is approved, SWC and the department agree on the level of GSI effort required, and the SWC provides all or a portion of funding for the GSIs. Since 1999, SWC regulations have required that faculty file course proposals every five years.

During the academic year 2001-2002, Sweetland received a Stage I grant from the Gilbert Whitaker Fund (GWF) to investigate the teaching of upper-level writing in the College of Literature, Science, and Arts. At the time, we knew relatively little about how faculty were teaching advanced writing at the University of Michigan. With our grant, we began an investigation into the ways four departments—Psychology, English, Biology, and Political Science—teach advanced writing. We also initiated what we hope will be long-term relationships with the four departments, as well as with others, including History of Art, Anthropology, and Philosophy. Our project was at once an investigation and an intervention; we sought to combine inquiry into the teaching of writing with efforts to improve it. From our inquiry we learned about the different ways the departments approached writing and writing instruction, and we were able to participate in the development of undergraduate and graduate curricula.

One outcome of our GWF Stage I project from Fall 2001 was a proposal to the College that a more comprehensive one-track system replace the two-track courses. Writing, we argued, should be integrated into the curriculum, not separated from it, and students should be encouraged to view writing not as something ancillary or secondary to, but as inseparable from, academic work. The College was receptive to the idea, and that change is now under way.

Sweetland has submitted a proposal to the Gilbert Whitaker Fund for the second phase of our project, the goal of which is to create enduring changes in the way faculty teach advanced writing in the College. In particular, we outline an approach aimed at changing the "culture" of writing instruction by changing the relationships, both formal and informal, that characterize it. Faculty workshops have been from the beginning and continue to be the heart of most advanced writing programs. Since writing in the disciplines aims at transformation of pedagogy, advanced writing programs must have faculty development as a starting point.

Our goal is to raise the status of writing pedagogy, to make writing more visible and valued, and to encourage departments to become more engaged in the AWDP. The work is consequential; the AWDP directly affects thousands of students. SWC knows that changing the culture will require a firm, yet diplomatic, effort. Sweetland knows that the success of an AWDP course depends far more on a department's, and more importantly an instructor's, commitment to writing as a tool for learning than it does on an adherence to any particular "advanced writing" formula. Early on, we recognized that the old ECB standards for AWDP courses that articulated guidelines in terms of *length*, rather than of form or process, were not applicable across the disciplines, and that departments needed to specify for themselves their own standards for advanced writing.

As a result, in Stage I Sweetland asked faculty to begin articulating their goals and standards for the Upper-Level Writing Requirement in their department. Through this next grant, SWC would like to formalize how it helps departments to develop these discipline-specific goals for advanced student writing. To assist them we offer consultation, reflection, resources, and advice. Our new approach, as it has been applied to date, has already had important and positive effects, not the least of which has been the reinvigoration of Sweetland's pedagogical and consultative, as opposed to bureaucratic, role in the College.

Director's Postscript

It isn't customary in a newsletter to offer late-breaking news, but I want to violate generic norms to announce with great pleasure the receipt of a letter from Paul Courant, Provost of the University. In it, he informs me that Caroline Eisner, Martha Vicinus, and I have received a \$25,000 grant from the Gilbert Whitaker Fund for the Improvement of Teaching. As you know from having read Caroline's article, these funds will go to support our work with the Advanced Writing in the Disciplines Program. The letter came on October 20, just as we were prepared to sign off on the final draft of this newsletter; it seems appropriate to mention this welcome news in the context of my earlier remarks and as a happy coda to Caroline's report. I want to thank Stefan Senders, who did much of the work on the Stage I grant, and Colleen LaPere and Sandra Haas, who provided steady and indispensable staff assistance.

**Please Join Us in Welcoming Our
Newest Faculty Members**

Jessica Adams

Michele Champagne

Kirk Davis

Margaret Dean

Alex Ralph

Carol Tell

Talking about Writing

by Louis Cicciarelli

MFA students, as graduate student instructors, are often thrust into composition classrooms in their second years with limited teacher training. It's not an ideal circumstance, yet many of these young writer-teachers learn quickly on the job, finding that the tools they most need to teach writing—all kinds of writing—are the same tools they have been studying and practicing all along in their MFA workshops. Writers, as a symptom of the condition, *read* and *write*. They *think* about writing and *talk* about writing. When working with their students, MFAs, as teachers of composition, call upon the same passions, thought-processes, techniques, and attention to language that they bring to their own writing.

Currently, half of the 18 Sweetland faculty hold MFA degrees in either poetry or fiction writing. The inclination to tap creative writers as Sweetland instructors is partly the result of an ample supply of recent MFA graduates; writers finishing the University's MFA program can walk down the hallway from the Hopwood Room, curriculum vitas and recommendations in hand. Yet, as these numbers suggest, MFAs have adapted to teaching composition in some part due to the skills and pedagogies they learned—and still practice—as creative writers.

Last winter a group of MFA writing program graduates teaching in the Sweetland Writing Center began meeting to discuss their work and pedagogies in composition. By reflecting on the methods they've developed from their education as creative writers, these Sweetland faculty have begun to document how MFAs are transforming the composition classroom. Not surprisingly, attention to voice, language, image, audience, and the necessity of revision have emerged as valuable crossovers from the MFA workshop experience. Individual faculty have begun to pursue a range of topics that include a composition pedagogy that makes use of intentional misreading to nurture students' creative choices; a teaching philosophy that virtues originality "without sacrificing correctness"; an examination of how students can better use the first-person voice to engage more critically in their ideas and their writing; and a study of how creative writing's figurative techniques and teachings of creative writing can help students craft strong arguments. Clearly, creative writers' approaches to the teaching of composition go beyond the commonly borrowed "workshopping" strategies of the fiction or poetry workshop. These teachers bring an intuitive *and* learned approach to the writing process and successfully reach students in ways we hope to examine and recognize.

The Sweetland Multi-Literacy Center

by David Sheridan

Literacy theorists have increasingly turned to the concept of “multiple literacies” to describe the complicated meaning-making processes employed by individuals in a media-rich, digital culture. As Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis put it, “the Multiliteracies argument runs like this: our personal, public and working lives are changing in some dramatic ways, and these changes are transforming our cultures and the ways we communicate.” Cope and Kalantzis note that in a digital age,

[W]ritten-linguistic modes of meaning are part and parcel of visual, audio, and spatial patterns of meaning. Take for instance the multimodal ways in which meanings are made on the World Wide Web, or in video captioning, or in interactive multimedia, or in desktop publishing.... To find our way around this emerging world of meaning requires a new, multimodal literacy.

To be fully literate means not only being able to consume but to produce the kinds of texts valued by the culture. Recent developments in digital technologies have made it possible for the non-specialist to exploit the power of multimodal communication. One does not need to be a graphic designer or computer scientist to produce a website that effectively combines words, photographs, and graphic design elements. Indeed, the non-specialist is increasingly asked—in the classroom, in the workplace, and in the public forum—to communicate in precisely this manner.

Institutions, such as writing centers, that foster literacy, need to continually interrogate their roles in response to changes in literate practices. John Trimbur has predicted that “writing centers will more and more define themselves as multiliteracy centers” (30). To more fully support the kinds of literacies important in an electronic age, in Fall 2000 the Sweetland Writing Center applied for an LSA Instructional Technology New Initiatives Grant to fund the establishment of the Sweetland Multi-Literacy Center (MLC): a place where students could receive one-on-one support as they worked on digital projects such as websites, PowerPoint presentations, and other forms of communication that depend on multiple literacies. The LSA-IT committee awarded Sweetland the full amount requested in the proposal, and we immediately began making the necessary preparations to begin multi-literacy consulting.

The MLC opened its doors in January 2002 and is currently located in a single office within the Sweetland Writing Center in a cozy space with three workstations and

a set of bookshelves. Reconfiguring the priorities of traditional computer labs, MLC consultants do not begin with technical issues, but instead start by asking clients to clarify their rhetorical goals (Who is the target audience? What do you hope to communicate? How can the medium of the WWW be used effectively?). Once rhetorical goals are clarified, MLC consultants help clients realize those goals by helping them acquire the appropriate technical knowledge.

From the beginning, we hoped that instructors would build the services of the MLC into their syllabi and that this would allow them greater freedom to integrate multiple literacies into their courses. During our first semester of operation we put this concept to the test by working closely with George Cooper, who taught a special section of English 125 in which students created websites for non-profit organizations. Part of the Michigan Community Scholars Program, this course provided students with opportunities to collaborate in digital environments, to write for real audiences, to practice multimodal communication, and to gain an appreciation for how new technologies can be employed to serve the needs of the community. The MLC worked closely with George to develop an appropriate syllabus for the course and to ensure that his students would receive the support they needed. (For a more detailed description of this course please visit <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/help/mlc/example.html>.)

This Fall, instructors from several departments and schools who are interested in having their students use the MLC have contacted us, and we welcome more. We have also begun a partnership with Art and Design’s Dwayne Overmyer, who is training a small group of design students to become MLC consultants. These students will bring special skills and knowledge to the MLC, particularly in the area of visual communication.

Although it has been operational for only a short time, we believe that the MLC has already made a substantial contribution to the learning of multiple literacies at the University of Michigan. As more and more instructors ask their students to compose in new media, the MLC is positioned to play an increasingly important role in years to come.

Works Cited

- Cope, Bill and Mary Kalantzis. “Putting Multiliteracies to the Test.” Education Australia Archive. Retrieved 17 September 2002. <<http://www.edoz.com.au/educationaustralia/archive/features/mult1.html>>.
- Trimbur, John. “Multiliteracies, Social futures, and Writing Centers.” *The Writing Center Journal* 20.2 (2000): 29-31.