

Sweetland

GAYLE MORRIS SWEETLAND WRITING CENTER

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1139 Angell Hall
764-0429
SWCinfo@
umich.edu
<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc>

**Writing
Workshop**
by appointment
Winter 2004

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.

Evening Hours

Mary Markley Library
Tuesdays 7-10 p.m.

Peer Tutors

Sunday-Thursday
7 p.m. - 11 p.m.
G219 Angell Hall

Call for
daytime hours

**Online Writing
and Learning
(OWL)**

owl@umich.edu

OR

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

DIRECTOR'S LETTER by Martha Vicinus

I find it hard to believe that I have been Director of Sweetland for more than a year now—Ejner Jensen left everything in such good working order that I have made a smooth transition into my new responsibilities. Last winter term, John Sweetland hosted a wonderful dinner, sending Ejner off with a beautiful edition of Milton's works, commemorating both Ejner's service to Sweetland and his field of specialization, Early Modern British literature.

Sometimes it is hard to keep track of all of Sweetland's different activities, and of how well faculty and staff carry them out. The range of articles in this issue will give you a sense of our most recent work.

Sweetland's core responsibilities include teaching 18 sections of *Practicum*, a two-credit, intensive writing course introducing students to academic writing skills; six sections of *SWC 300: Seminar in Peer Tutoring*; two sections of *SWC 301*, the follow-up second-semester course for peer tutors; and *SWC 993: Seminar in Teaching in the Disciplines*, a one-credit course for GSIs who are teaching and grading Upper-Level Writing Requirement courses across LSA. In the past two years, we have seen a 60% increase in the number of students seeking assistance for our Writing Workshop and Peer Tutoring services; we had more than 5,000 appointments last year. This year, in collaboration with the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program, we began teaching all of their sections of First-Year Writing, as well as their other writing courses. In addition to this work, we continue our outreach to local high schools



Martha Vicinus

Eliza M. Mosher Distinguished University Professor

and to other schools in the University. We regularly offer workshops for high school teachers of English; we have worked with Mackenzie High School in Detroit for over 15 years. We have held workshops for faculty in LSA to help them construct writing-intensive courses in their field, as well as workshops for undergraduates seeking admission to the School of Business. In November, our Associate Director, Caroline Eisner, held training sessions for the admissions officers of LSA to help them assess the newly required essays of applicants to the University of Michigan.

Our proudest announcement is the opening of the new *Peer Tutor Center*, located in the basement of Angell Hall. As George Cooper's article outlines, Peer Tutoring began as a small experimental course 15 years ago. For many years, peer tutors used a classroom adjacent to the "Fishbowl" computer center, but now we can provide tutors their own working space and expand our tutoring

hours to include more daytime sessions. Our freshly painted rooms are beautifully decorated with fine art posters of readers and writers, meant to inspire tutors and students alike. Please drop by Angell G219 to see the new space, meet the tutors—and don't forget to recommend that your students come work with us!

Although we remain focused on undergraduate writing, at the request of the Rackham Graduate School, this term, we began teaching a one-credit course, *SWC 630: Advanced Academic Writing for Graduate Students*. In addition, last year we received three years of funding from Rackham and LSA to sponsor an experimental program for dissertation writers, the spring term *Dissertation Writing Institute*. Louis Cicciarelli's article outlines the organization of this Institute, but he fails to mention the Institute's great success, and the role he played in making it successful. In their final evaluations, the students praised his support and guidance. As one student said, "Louis helped immensely.... He has a keen eye for diagnosing where a writer's argumentative doubts appear as hesitant or convoluted prose. And his willingness to highlight the strengths as well as the weaknesses offered an example to everyone." The Institute's writing groups provided a supportive atmosphere; students were surprised and pleased at how easy it was to share work with their fellow students outside their own discipline. In addition, most students found peer expectations to be the single most effective tool in fighting procrastination, another benefit of the writing groups. We look forward to this spring's Institute, which we hope to increase to 15 students.

We continue to have close ties with the English Department's First- and Second-Year Studies Program, working with them to improve LSA's First-Year Writing courses. Each winter term we mentor eight junior fellows from the Sweetland Writing Seminar who will teach First-Year Seminars. The Fall 2003 fellows offered useful feedback—including suggestions that we have more time for workshoping course syllabi and discussing our theoretical readings—but everyone appreciated the opportunity to reflect on their teaching styles and pedagogical assumptions. A 2002-03 fellow, Khristina Haddad, eloquently describes in this issue her experience teaching a political theory-based First-Year Writing course.

As I look forward to the next few years, I hope to see Sweetland continue its outreach efforts, helping more faculty and graduate students teach courses that meet the Upper-Level Writing Requirement and disseminating information about effective and useful writing practices, regardless of field or specialization. Of course, we can always improve what we already do well, but as I happily wrote in my recent long-range report to LSA, we are "a strong, high morale unit, poised to move into national prominence as a writing center."

The Peer Tutoring Center: Celebrating Its History

by George Cooper

In celebrating the opening of Sweetland's new Peer Tutoring Center, I can remember its more humble, though ambitious, beginnings. The earliest record I found regarding our Peer Tutoring Program, dated July 24, 1987, was written by the English Composition Board Director, Deborah Keller-Cohen, to Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education, Jack Meiland. The memo spoke about the trial course containing nine students, taught by Phyllis Lassner, with a curriculum "consisting of studying theories of composition and interaction in tutoring, practicing role-plays, and using students' own papers as well as sample papers from a variety of disciplines." During the latter part of the semester, "each tutor served in an internship in an Upper-Level Writing course, working with a fellow student in a course either in his or her major or in a course similar to the one in which he or she was nominated."

In these early years, Helen Isaacson, Susan Marie Harrington, and Emily Jessup all took turns teaching the 300 and 301 peer tutoring seminars. Within the next few years, Becky Rickly, Barbra Monroe, and Wayne Butler took on these responsibilities, and in their era (the early 1990s), 444C Mason was remodeled, furnished with computers to launch our online instruction and OWL, and to provide the evening home of our peer tutors for writing.

In the Rickly, Monroe, and Butler years, we grew from offering one seminar per year in peer tutoring to offering two seminars in the fall and one in the winter; we now offer



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three seminars in the fall and three in the winter. We grew from working with nine individual tutors (and possibly nine clients!) in one term to sponsoring about 65 tutors and offering 1,900 conferences in the academic year 2002-2003.

But the story here is not only about growth. Meg Woolbright writes that peer tutoring is the development of “an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, and community; shared leadership; a cooperative structure; the integration of cognitive and affective learning; and action.” The mid 90s provided my first entry into the Peer Tutoring Program and, at that time, participating on a writing center listserv, I read about one faculty member’s adventure to a conference with four student tutors. He wrote vividly about the long hours in the car, the cramped seating, the constant conversation and music, the satisfying fatigue that they felt upon return. I realized then that I knew what peer tutoring was about: traveling long distances with young people.

Traveling with young people is not so different from what Meg Woolbright says about making a tutoring atmosphere. Traveling with young people means sharing driving time, each person having a chance at the controls. It means tolerating others and being tolerated. It means telling entertaining stories, as well as being entertained by the stories of others. It means not always getting your own way, and sometimes denying the way of another. It means



Jessica Gorga, OWL Peer Tutor

both social and intellectual. It seems fitting then that our tutors have a place now in Angell Hall that is both social and intellectual, a place to share stories, a place to share the driving. Most important, our peer tutors now have a permanent place to speak with writers about writing.

We all have great appreciation for those people who served as contributors to the home of our new Peer Tutoring Center. Thanks especially to Rob Cook, whose generosity and belief in a tutoring home helped to make this happen. Nor can we forget Helen Fox who was Rob’s teacher for SWC 300. It was she whom Rob contacted, thinking enough of her and her guidance to believe a gift bestowed here would, indeed, be a well-bestowed gift.

Dissertation Writing Institute: A Residency for Promising, Stalled Dissertators

by Louis Cicciarelli

In Spring 2004, Sweetland’s Dissertation Writing Institute will begin the second year of its three-year pilot run. The innovative program, funded jointly by Sweetland, LSA, and the Rackham Graduate School, is specifically designed to aid graduate students stalled in the writing of their dissertations. The seven-week program, housed in the Sweetland Writing Center, where Sweetland faculty surrender their offices for program participants, operates as a micro-writing residency. Participants show up 9am-3pm, Monday through Friday, to devote each day to their projects and the in-house workshops. The program provides participants with a working office space where they can manage their research materials, a computer workstation, and a \$3,000 stipend.

Last May, 10 graduate students in various stages of writing their dissertations gathered to launch this new program. Students, wary on that first day, wondered why their departments had “nominated” them for the Institute. The mere implication of a writing center suggested to them that they needed remedial help for perceived writing deficiencies. The program’s approach, however, was to work with the most promising students who had hit writing blocks and needed encouragement and, perhaps, structure to get them moving again. By assessing and reassessing each writer’s progress over the Institute’s seven weeks, and by giving them time to re-vision and reframe their projects, students were able to write through their individual impasses.

As a Sweetland lecturer, I served as an individual consultant for the 10 students and organized the group workshops. Each week began with an accountability meeting, in which each participant discussed his or her work and goals for the week. At the end of the week, everyone gathered to

share their progress—the obstacles they encountered and, in most cases, overcame. The group found common ground as they communicated their experiences of writing their dissertations. Although the graduate students came from different departments across LSA, they realized that many of the “issues” they wrestled with were not entirely personal, but were also institutional, endemic perhaps to academe itself. Students struggled with distant committee members, lack of funding, and feelings of alienation from departments that seemed to cast them adrift to complete projects many of them felt unable to fully comprehend. As one Institute participant said, “No one can tell me what a dissertation is. And after I complete mine, I’m going to get a job and be expected to help someone like me write one.” From discussions like this, we considered such writing issues as authorial voice, awareness of audience expectations, and discipline and genre specifics.

Louis Ciccirelli, Dissertation Consultant

As the consultant, I divided the large group of 10 students into two groups based on their relative stages in the dissertation process. These groups met each of the last five weeks and used MFA-style workshop format to discuss one another’s current work. In addition to setting effective deadlines that jumpstarted their stalled writing, these groups read each week’s selection beforehand and met to discuss the writer’s argument, prose style, structure, and use of evidence. Strategies for the best use of footnotes, for example, arose in these meetings and allowed students to share and develop better strategies for organizing and presenting information.

As the Institute wrapped up, it became clear that each participant was a burgeoning expert in his or her field, struggling through the difficult process of compiling, sorting, analyzing, synthesizing, arguing, and writing material. Sweetland’s new initiative supports these experts by providing the time and space to process their ideas with the more personal writing guidance they need to map their success.

Teaching Composition: A Political Theorist’s Perspective

by Kristina Haddad

As a Sweetland Junior Fellow during the Fall 2002 term, I had the opportunity to design my own section of First-Year Writing. For some time I had been thinking about the importance of writing to political theorists and about the work of political theorists *as writers*. I was finishing my dissertation in political theory, and was eager to bring together my interests in writing and in theory, so I decided to ask my students in my Winter 2003 English 125 class to create an original piece of visionary political writing. In particular, I wanted them to think about theorizing as a space apart from what exists, a space from which the new could emerge with fewer obstacles than in other forms of discourse. To imagine a best humanly possible society seemed to be the right thing to do in the classroom just about now, what with so many political changes throughout the world. To do this, I decided to focus my section on theories about non-existent spaces: utopias.

In our readings and discussions I wanted us to go to the nowhere spaces of creative political thinkers and to reconsider our own present conditions and potential futures from there. This is an old trick of the political theorist: “Oh, never mind me and what I say, I am just speculating!” Theorizing about non-spaces opens up the possibilities of critique and innovation that seem foreclosed or unlikely elsewhere and increasingly perhaps will be. I also wanted in this course to emphasize an aspect of political thought that I think gets short shrift in traditional political theory classes: the craft of theorizing. What habits of mind does the theorist require? What kind of tool chest? A class focused on student writing provides ideal conditions for introducing students not just to political theory, but to the practice of theorizing and thereby imagining a different political order, a different set of rules, or a different set of guiding values. All theorists are writers, so a composition class appealed to me as an ideal place to consider not just what they say, but what they do and how they do it.

I was lucky. My section of First-Year Writing attracted 18 smart and open-minded students, most of whom carried a motivating inspiration or grudge to envision another world. In the process of building new worlds, using the questions, categories, and concepts we gleaned from readings and discussions, we also thought about how to build sentences and vocabularies. For example, it turns out that the passive voice is hell for utopias because a utopia, in the tradition inspired by Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), is about human agency, about an ordered world given neither by God, nor by history.

Who does what and why is the *sine qua non* of utopian models of social order; the cost of losing the subject is too high to fathom for this genre of thought.

To be honest, it was a challenge for me to teach a writing class in the English language. All my primary education took place in German. When I first started graduate school, my writing exhibited much of what you might expect of someone who thinks in German and writes in English: long sentences, the dreaded passive voice, verbs turned into nouns, and very long neologisms. In addition, spending years reading authors such as Hegel, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Habermas in various translated and untranslated versions did little to improve my academic writing in English. Patient readers commented on my writing and helped me to recognize problematic patterns and inexplicable idiosyncracies. Teaching writing to First-Year students allowed me to harvest all the insights from my own process of learning about writing.

But teaching composition also opened other doors. I taught in what I can only think of as a truly interdisciplinary space, so that I could think outside of the Political Science box. As a result, I taught a more radical (closer to my heart) course than I would have designed if I had been asked to teach in my home department. There are several reasons for this and they all relate back to utopia and its focus on present agency and presently valid meanings.

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- Kristina Haddad

First, disciplines (and perhaps I overgeneralize about my own) represent a history of scholarly work and they require students to pass through that history in order to speak within a tradition. Only the hardy stick around long enough to become certified voices, experts, in any given discipline they study. And maybe that is a good thing from the point of view of thinking and writing. Almost inevitably, this certification process reproduces a certain kind of conservatism of thought. Second, I have my pride (although less than I had before this experience). Like my colleagues, I want to be considered a serious political theorist. I am not sure that I would have taught *Batman - The Dark Knight Returns* in a political theory class, but as an example of multimodal writing (a comic book!) it served its purpose for 125. (*Note for political theorists and legal scholars: Batman presents an excellent example of the tensions between substantive and procedural conceptions of justice.*)

In First-Year Writing, however, I felt freer to put together quite a mixed reading list that was unified by neither period, nor genre. Of course we focused on utopias, but we opened up that definition. For example, we considered not only traditional utopias, but also Theodore Herzl's *The Jewish State* (1895). We could read it as political theory about a non-place at the time it was written. And when would I have ever had the opportunity to teach separatist socialist utopian feminist thought? We were willing to consider all kinds of thought that contained a critical nugget of social logic but that was likely to be dismissed or marginalized from the so-called legitimate political discourse. Focusing on writing meant that our focus was on what we were creating, not on finding unity or discipline in what we were reading.

But there's the dark underbelly in every utopian vision: A young woman came to me one day after class. She was clearly enraged and she intended to pour all her anger at her educational experience into her final project, a dystopia about education. At the end of class, I had her project in my bag. I was scared. Sometimes when you encourage students to develop a voice, the first thing they do is to scream. And you are the one who is standing right there.

Dr. Haddad joined the Political Science Department at Moravian College in Fall 2003; she plans to teach a version of her "Utopias" class there.

2003 Callaway Winner: Crystal Martin

by George Cooper

Mary Lou Callaway was a long-time community activist, reporter, and columnist who died in 1999, at the age of 82. The Callaway Prize of \$1,000 has been established to honor her memory and her life-long commitment to civic activism. The Callaway Prize is funded through the generous gift from the Contempo Communications Foundation for the Arts, whose founders are David and Joan Marshall, University of Michigan graduates and friends of Mary Lou Callaway for nearly 50 years.

In honoring Callaway winners, we have said that this award is not just a writing contest, but a way to value and reward writing composed in service to the community. Such writing grows from people talking to people, and it documents otherwise obscured voices, such as community members, teachers, and students. "Education is a community affair," Crystal Martin writes. Her essay, which describes her efforts to understand achievement gaps and to improve education in low-income communities, is the 2003 Callaway Prize winner.

Martin's idea is really nothing new. But in honoring writers like Crystal Martin, a native of Detroit, with the Callaway Prize, we don't have to seek something new. The likely solutions to inequitable education, solutions to decreasing the achievement gap, are not necessarily new, but they need to be recognized and articulated again and again.

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- George Cooper

The triad: the parents, the teachers, and the students. Even as Martin admits to not knowing exactly what the solution is, she knows where to look for it. She then isolates it, observing in the parent a tendency to blame the schools, observing in the student a tendency to blame the schools and the parents, observing in the teacher a tendency to blame the parents and students. Martin identifies in the triad the human tendency to blame others. This realization is easier to make about others than it is to make about our own selves. It is easier to articulate in words than to put into action. But it is a first step in reaching a reasonable solution to educational inequality. "We must broaden our notion of accountability," Martin writes. "We must accept individual responsibility for the improvement of our schools. We must realize that it is only through the collective practice of good citizenship that we can guarantee an excellent education for all children."

Martin is now a graduate of Michigan's Business School. We can hope and expect that these words are not the last we will hear from this young woman. We can hope and expect that within the world of business—a world so powerful and on the forefront of community as it engages consumers—there will be at least one businesswoman out there talking to her community, and very likely making education a community affair.

**2004 CALLAWAY WRITING PRIZE
deadline for submissions
is April 24th**

Any University of Michigan undergraduate who wishes to compete for the award may do so by submitting an original essay of eight-to-ten pages, double spaced, on a community service experience, highlighting one's own civic engagement and activism.

**Matt Kelley
Sweetland's Newest Lecturer III**

*We welcome Matt Kelley,
who joined us in September, 2003.
Here he describes his route to Sweetland.*

I am a Key West, Florida, native (born just across the street from Hemingway's house), who began my teaching career as a high school teacher with literary aspirations. While working on my M.A. thesis at Purdue University, the discovery of two once-lost family photographs from the 19th century started a five-year inquiry into the intersections of photography and the American novel which became my Ph.D. dissertation (2002). Teaching as a graduate student in Purdue's literature and composition programs I was selected to serve as the Assistant Director of the ESL Writing Program developing and overseeing the ESL and NNS writing curriculum for the English Department, and mentoring and advising 10 teaching assistants who taught some 250 international students per term. The work from my dissertation became immediately applicable and relevant to my ESL and writing experience when I took a post at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Here I was challenged and provoked by the number of resources students could use outside of the traditional boundaries of the classroom. My interest in the writerly applications of still photography allowed me to implement a photo-essay program for the residence halls with academic credits that were applied towards the students' composition sequence. Using Diana George's ideas about young writers' constructions of visual narrative, I was able to get students out of the classroom and into the galleries, museums, parks, and neighborhoods of Chicago itself. My current research is an amalgam of all these interests and engagements. On the American Literature front, I have just

published a piece on Jack Kerouac's cinematic influences and am in the intermediate phases of a longer work on the photography of Gordon Parks and its ongoing correspondence with the work of Ralph Ellison. My current composition research comes out of my recent and teaching Writing Practicum, teaching composition, and working in the Writing Workshop here at Sweetland where I'm looking into the implications of the use of visual materials among international student populations.

Advanced Writing in the Disciplines Progress

by Carol Tell

The Advanced Writing in the Disciplines Program (AWDP), administered through the Sweetland Writing Center, provides students access to writing-centered courses in their chosen disciplines or fields of study. Although the program has evolved since its inception in the mid-1970s, it has kept as its fundamental belief that "writing makes thought visible and enhances learning." During the academic year 2001-2002, Sweetland received a Stage I grant from the Gilbert Whitaker Fund to investigate the teaching of Upper-Level Writing in LSA. From our inquiry, we learned about the different ways departments approach writing and writing instruction. One of the most important things we found was that the social and intellectual climate within which writing instruction takes place—in particular, the low status accorded writing instruction, and the degree of social distance among GSIs, professors, and students—can undermine the University's ability to provide rich and meaningful writing instruction.

Therefore, we knew we had more work to do. Sweetland received funding for the second phase of the project, the goal of which is to create enduring changes in the way faculty teach advanced writing in the college. To make writing more visible and valued, and to encourage departments to become more engaged in the AWDP, we have formalized how Sweetland helps departments develop their discipline-specific goals for advanced student writing. We have expanded our outreach work to departments and students by increasing the frequency and scope of our consultation and training workshops. In addition, we are partnering with other departments to offer seminars on the role of writing in the disciplines.

A Sweetland consultant has visited the following departments, meeting with department chairs and/or faculty members during department faculty meetings: Communications, Sociology, Psychology, Germanic Languages, Anthropology, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, and History. Meetings with Environmental Studies, Philosophy, and Women's Studies are scheduled for this next term. The

Associate Director at Sweetland has also met individually with faculty members from Statistics, Mathematics, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, History, Philosophy, and Women's Studies to work on course syllabi and writing assignments.

Advanced Writing in the Disciplines Guidebook

We are pleased to announce the publication of our
Advanced Writing in the Disciplines'
*Faculty Guide for Teaching Upper-Level
Writing Requirement Courses.*

Funded in part through the Gilbert Whitaker Grant, our *Guide* provides information on writing to learn in a discipline-based course, designing writing assignments, responding to writing, and using the Sweetland Writing Center's services. If you would like to receive a copy of this guidebook, please contact us at 764-0429.

Congratulations 2004-05 Writing Seminar Fellows

Faculty Fellows

Raquel Gonzalez
George Hoffman
Rosemary Kowalski
Laura Olsen

Graduate Student Fellows

Amit Ahuja
Rebecca Brannon
Olivier Delers
Jacqueline George
Brenda Longfellow
Geoffrey Maturen

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