

Sweetland

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Spring 2003 Sweetland Symposium: From Writing to Writing

by Lizzie Hutton

*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)

<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/help/owl.html>

Eight of the 14 Lecturer IIs currently employed at Sweetland were graduated from the University of Michigan's prestigious MFA Program in Creative Writing, and consider themselves not only hard working teachers of writing, but also hard working writers. As of last April's SWC organized symposium "From Writing to Writing," this group also can consider itself an important part of the University's thriving community of hard working teachers of teaching. This all-day conference, open to the public and subtitled "The Creative Imagination in the Writing Classroom," aimed to articulate how the training acquired in an MFA workshop has supported, developed, and complicated these teachers' various pedagogical approaches.

The symposium was divided into three panels of three speakers each. The first (Jennifer Lutman, Lizzie Hutton, and Nick Harp) explored those aspects of First-Year Writing that benefit from a student-centered approach to concepts of audience, style, and "error"; the second panel (Ray McDaniel, Alex Ralph, and Louis Cicciarelli) investigated how a writerly emphasis on craft affects a writing teacher's perspective on both process and content; and the third panel (Kirk Davis, Patrick O'Keefe, and Margaret Dean) looked more practically at the different strategies—that writing teachers use to develop their students' critical thinking, even outside of the formal classroom setting. The respondents

(the English Department's Anne Curzan and Keith Taylor, and Sweetland's own George Cooper) and the enthusiastic audience extended each panel into a continuing conversation about how all teachers of writing, whatever their focus or training, can apply these many ideas.

As the conference also illustrated, that Sweetland employs teachers who are well trained and practicing poets, novelists, and essayists is a sign not only of pedagogical rigor, but also of a healthy diversity. The papers delivered ranged from the conceptual to the practical, and argued for techniques as divergent as old-fashioned round-table workshopping to a greater use of the University's extensive technological opportunities. Margaret Dean, for example, explored "the relationship between natural spoken language and the generation of ideas worthy of formal writing," except that in the context of her talk, this "generative" language occurred in the form of weekly online discussion groups. Highlighting some of her students' online postings, Dean showed how the use of such technology gives students opportunities to engage in inventive, critical thinking, as well as creates "a writing community that thinks together more fairly."

All in all, Louis Cicciarelli, organizer and fountainhead of the symposium, said it best: "Our close, critical, and analytical study of writing, as practicing writers, situates us as few other teacher preparations can.... We are uniquely positioned to teach college writing because we bring real insight to the actual writing process."