

gayle morris  
**sweetland writing center**  
university of michigan

# Newsletter

WINTER 2008

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## DIRECTOR'S LETTER MARTHA VICINUS

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**A**t the end of this academic year, I will be completing my term as Director of the Sweetland Writing Center. It has been a wonderful five and a half years, during which we have accomplished much—we launched our Dissertation Writing Institute during spring term, and the one-credit Advanced Writing for Graduate Students (SWC 630); we hosted two national conferences, produced a volume of essays drawn from one conference, welcomed our first International Visiting Lecturer, and hired several new faculty. Around the corner is our move to North Quad, with new challenges and opportunities. We are especially proud to present *Originality, Imitation, and Plagiarism: Teaching Writing in the Digital Age*, which will be published in March 2008 by the University of Michigan Press. We celebrate this event with a panel discussion on the future of writing and a book party at Shaman Drum, Friday, March 14. See inside for details!

This issue focuses on integrating writing into classes across the curriculum. . . A fundamental tenet of the Writing Center is that students learn better when they are asked to respond to course material in writing, both in the form of longer essays with revisions and in shorter, more-frequent "low-stakes" assignments. This year's insert features a piece by Paul Courant, Dean of Libraries, and Margie Morris, Special Projects Librarian, about how faculty can integrate library research more fully into their writing projects. Since many of us feel that students do not make sufficient use of the resources of our magnificent library, their suggestions point to how we might better employ the data resources, on-line journals, and books available there. Their article also reminds us that both the library and Sweetland have experts who are eager to visit classes and to help in the crafting of writing assignments.

This past Winter, our four faculty fellows came to Sweetland's Writing Seminar with considerable experience in the teaching of writing—all of them had taught the required LSA writing courses, won teaching awards, and developed innovative courses in their departments. Throughout the semester, they generously shared their experiences with the rest of us, but as their short pieces indicate, our discussions helped them rethink familiar patterns of teaching. Their excitement, about rethinking a course or revising a writing assignment or reconceptualizing a course theme, was contagious. I have asked each of them to write about one thing our Seminar readings and discussions led them to change in a course they had previously taught. We welcome faculty and graduate student applications to this seminar!

It is hard to describe the numerous intangible benefits that the Sweetland faculty derived from Dr. Lisa Emerson's semester as our first International Visiting Lecturer. She was an outstanding visitor who both energized our unit and made invaluable contacts with the science faculty on our behalf. Her presentation on required science writing courses in New Zealand documented the benefits of faculty working together to create appropriate assignments. Her tact, capacity to listen, and enthusiasm for composition studies was infectious and made us all better teachers. In the best possible way we learned that the United States does not have a monopoly on good ideas. We were very sorry to see her leave.

Among the many changes here at Sweetland has been the welcome promotion of Dr. Naomi Silver to the position of Associate Director. Her special strengths are briefly outlined in our feature about her. She has transitioned so smoothly into her new job that I know she will be an invaluable resource to a new Director. Special thanks to Colleen LaPere, who has been an outstanding key administrator; I would have been lost without her these past five years. Teri Ford's warm welcome at our front desk has reassured hundreds of students; Racheal Higley's careful monitoring of LSA's two writing requirements has helped countless faculty and students; Carrie Luke's commitment to peer tutoring has been a model for all of us; Laura Schuyler has served as assistant extraordinaire in the planning for our conferences and visitors, as well as helping me in innumerable ways. Their good will and spirit are a vital part of Sweetland.

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1139 Angell Hall  
734-764-0429  
swcinfo@umich.edu  
[www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/)

### Writing Workshop by Appointment

M,T,Th,F: 9am-5pm  
W: 9am-12:30pm and 2:30-5pm

### Peer Tutoring Centers (Walk-in)

Angell Hall Peer Tutoring Center  
G219 Angell Hall  
Sunday-Thursday: 7-11pm  
Monday-Friday: 12-3pm

Undergraduate Library  
1154 Undergraduate Library  
Sunday-Wednesday: 7-10pm

Lloyd Hall Writing Center  
First floor, Alice Lloyd Hall  
Sunday-Wednesday: 7-11pm

### Online Writing Lab (OWL)

[www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/undergrads/support](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/undergrads/support)

## Sweetland Welcomes A New Associate Director **NAOMI SILVER**

WE ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE the appointment of Dr. Naomi Silver as our new Associate Director. We are very fortunate to have someone with her experience and initiative in this key role. Naomi came to Sweetland in 2004 with considerable experience in teaching writing, at both the high school and university levels, including the year-long Humanities Core Course Program at the University of California, Irvine. She has taught virtually all of the courses Sweetland offers, ranging from *SWC 100: Practicum to SWC 993: GSI Training for Writing in the Disciplines*. She has served on several pedagogically-oriented committees here at Michigan, such as the English Department's Textbook Committee, to select and annotate a selection of expository, argumentative and creative writing textbooks for use in First-Year Writing courses and the Writing Project Committee, which normed more than 400 essays from First-Year Writing courses, to assess writers' abilities and instructional effectiveness. Currently she is working with three other lecturers on our Whitaker grant to investigate the best practices for writing tutorials in Writing Workshop. Most recently, she was elected to the LSA Curriculum Committee for a three-year term.

In her teaching philosophy, Naomi has written, that while we can all agree that "Good writing is clear, well-organized, purposeful, free of error, well supported and thoughtful... I have come to find it more relevant to consider the ways in which student writing develops or is arrested, and the places and languages from which it arises, rather than the outcome it reaches, alone... I have worked with my students to think about writing as a matter of *appropriateness*, rather than *correctness*, so that they may engage with the central rhetorical elements of *audience* and *purpose*. 'What is the purpose of a writing assignment?' and 'For whom is it being written?' are crucial questions in my teaching and tutoring."

In describing her goals for Sweetland, Naomi has pointed out our increasing involvement with learning technologies that include multimodal materials involving the visual, written and aural. She will be working over the next months to upgrade our Web site, adding digital resources for teachers and students. As Associate Director, she is in charge of our outreach to departments and faculty, providing assistance for those who seek help in preparing writing-intensive assignments. In addition, she will help initiate plans for a national conference to coincide with our move to North Quad.

**Welcome, Naomi!**



## A PUBLIC DECLARATION FOR BARBRA MORRIS

**BARBRA MORRIS**, Senior Lecturer in the Residential College and the Sweetland Writing Center, died on April 5, 2007 after a courageous battle with cancer.

Dr. Morris received her BA from the University of Delaware in 1956 and her doctorate from the University of Michigan in 1974. She taught in the Department of English and the Residential College for thirty-two years. She was among the founding faculty of the English Composition Board and helped to build programs in writing across the curriculum as the ECB became the Sweetland Writing Center. She was the longest-serving instructor in the Residential College's First Year Writing Seminar and led the development of a second-semester intensive writing course for students experiencing difficulties with prose in their first year. She also taught courses in her field of specialization, the analysis of television news, in the Department of Communications and the Residential College. She was an exemplary classroom teacher, much beloved of her students. She won the LSA Excellence in Education Award (1994) and the Matthews Underclass Teaching Award (1999), before being appointed a Senior Lecturer in the College in 2003.

Throughout her career, Dr. Morris was an active scholar in her areas of specialty, writing and the analysis of television. Her books include a study of disciplinary perspectives on thinking and writing and a handbook for teaching writing in the disciplines. She published forty articles, mainly on the analysis of television news, and gave over eighty conference papers on the media, television news, and writing on four continents. She was a fellow at the East/West Center of the University of Hawai'i and Director of the University of Michigan's program in Dublin. She was active in the development of writing programs for secondary education, especially in Michigan, working for many years on a Ponting Foundation grant with English and journalism teachers at Mackenzie High School in Detroit.

Her deep commitment to her students, her cheerful good humor, her spirited love of travel, and her determined defense of principle were contagious. Her courage and abiding love of life had a profound effect upon her wide circle of friends and colleagues, who join with her three sons in thanking her for teaching us so much for so many years.

## JAMES SLEVIN (1945-2006)

It is with regret that we note the death of James Slevin, a long-time friend of the SWC. Professor Slevin, who founded and directed the Georgetown University Writing Center, served as a major outside advisor to Sweetland in the 1990s. He was a pioneer in creating student-centered writing assignments; much of his work focused on helping first-generation college students to succeed in an academic environment. His input during our formative years was invaluable.

# ORIGINALITY, IMITATION, AND PLAGIARISM

## About the book

Contributors: Linda Adler-Kassner, Chris M. Anson, Anis Bawarshi, Joel Bloch, Lynn Z. Bloom, Christiane Donahue, Lisa Emerson, Amy England, Erhard Graeff, Michael Grossberg, Rebecca Moore Howard, Gordon Kane, Jessica Litman, Laura J. Murray, Gilbert S. Omenn, Alan Peacock, Christina Pugh, Amit Ray, Martine Courant Rife, Stefan Senders, Jeff Ward, Kim Warden

**T**HIS COLLECTION IS A TIMELY INTERVENTION in national debates about what constitutes original or plagiarized writing in the digital age. Somewhat ironically, the Internet makes it both easier to copy and easier to detect copying. The essays in this volume explore the complex issues of originality, imitation, and plagiarism, particularly as they concern students, scholars, professional writers, and readers, while also addressing a range of related issues, including copyright conventions and the ownership of original work, the appropriate dissemination of innovative ideas, and the authority and role of the writer/author. Throughout these essays, the contributors grapple with their desire to encourage and maintain free access to copyrighted

material for noncommercial purposes while also respecting the reasonable desires of authors to maintain control over their own work.

Both novice and experienced teachers of writing will learn from the contributors' practical suggestions about how to fashion unique assignments, teach about proper attribution, and increase students' involvement in their own writing. This is an anthology for anyone interested in how scholars and students can navigate the sea of intellectual information that characterizes the digital/information age.

## Praise for *Originality, Imitation, and Plagiarism: Teaching Writing in the Digital Age*

"Eisner and Vicinus have put together an impressive cast of contributors who cut through the war on plagiarism to examine key specificities that often get blurred by the rhetoric of slogans. It will be required reading not only for those concerned with plagiarism, but for the many more who think about what it means to be an author, a student, a scientist, or anyone who negotiates and renegotiates the meaning of originality and imitation in collaborative and information-intensive settings."

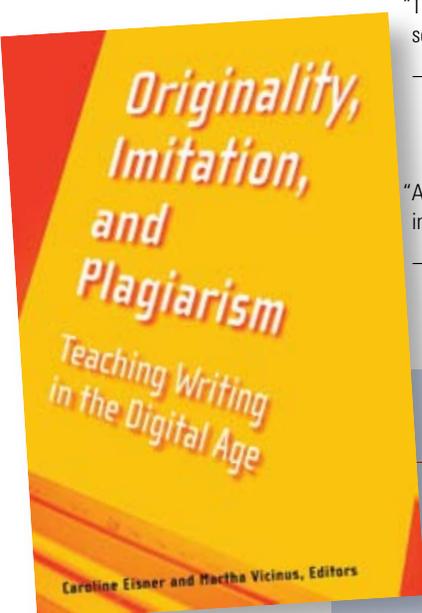
—Mario Biagioli, Professor of the History of Science, Harvard University, and coeditor of *Scientific Authorship: Credit and Intellectual Property in Science*

"This is an important collection that addresses issues of great significance to teachers, to students, and to scholars across several disciplines. . . . These essays tackle their topics head-on in ways that are both accessible and provocative."

—Andrea Lunsford, Louise Hewlett Nixon Professor of English, Claude and Louise Rosenberg Jr. Fellow, and Director of the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stanford University and coauthor of *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing*

"At long last, a discussion of plagiarism that doesn't stop at 'Don't do it or else,' but does full justice to the intellectual interest of the topic!"

—Gerald Graff, author of *Clueless in Academe* and 2008 President, Modern Language Association



### Conference information

#### Friday, March 14th

2:00-4:00 p.m.

"The Future of Writing in the Digital Age"

#### Panelists:

Linda Adler-Kassner, Eastern Michigan University  
Chris M. Anson, North Carolina State University  
Rebecca Moore-Howard, Syracuse University  
*Location:* English conference room, 3222 Angell Hall

#### 4:30-6:00 p.m.

Book signing—*Originality, Imitation, and Plagiarism: Teaching Writing in the Digital Age*, Caroline Eisner and Martha Vicinus, editors.

*Location:* Shaman Drum Bookshop, 313 S. State St.

### Book-ordering information

*Originality, Imitation, and Plagiarism: Teaching Writing in the Digital Age* can be purchased at [www.press.umich.edu](http://www.press.umich.edu) for \$26.95. It will also be published by digitalculturebooks, a new imprint of the University of Michigan Press and Library. All digitalculturebooks projects are available in print, from booksellers everywhere, and for free at [www.digitalculture.org](http://www.digitalculture.org).

# EXCELLENT RESEARCH, EXCELLENT WRITING: HOW THE LIBRARY CAN HELP



**U**BIQUITOUS ACCESS TO INFORMATION POSES a risk that students can complete assignments without engaging in the special character of scholarly work and understanding what those assignments are intended to teach. The typical undergraduate who entered the University of Michigan in Fall 2007 was five years old when Tim Berners-Lee founded the World Wide Web Consortium in 1994: she is so adept at finding answers on the internet that are “good enough” that she may be unaware of the resources that search engines don’t expose.

As an example, we recently searched the Web with Google search, using the term “copyright.” The results were headed by the website of the United States Copyright Office, a reliable but narrowly focused source of information on the topic. It covers copyright basics and how to register a work, and allows one to search copyright records. The second result was a Wikipedia article on the subject; it was flagged as potentially not representing a worldwide view and as needing reliable citations for verification. Still, the article had all the trappings of being genuinely informative, and it was long enough that one could easily forget by its end any warnings that appeared at its beginning. Third up was a brief article entitled “10 Big Myths about Copyright Explained” by Brad Templeton, who is Chairman of the Board of the Electronic Frontier Foundation. As a good overview of issues concerning personal use of materials, this article could convince the reader that she has a grasp of the major issues relating to copyright.

A student who stops her research here might write a paper focused on questions such as: What is copyright? What rights do authors and other creators have over their work under copyright law? What rights do others have to the work and what constitutes Fair Use? She might or might not ask whether the information she has obtained is reliable.

For comparison, we then searched Lexis Nexis Academic, a database licensed by the University Library for the use of the academic community at Michigan. This time we restricted the

information sources searched to legal cases and law review articles published within the last two years, and used the same single word, “copyright,” as our search term. The first article returned concerned the public policy rationale of copyright and the second was a commentary on a symposium about the frontiers of intellectual property. Skimming these two titles alone, with a combined length of fewer than 20,000 words, one can already detect a different flavor in the issues our hypothetical student might address in her paper: What is the public policy behind copyright law? Has it changed over the years? Should it have? Do current copyright statutes achieve their policy goals? Where should the line fall between copyright rights and copyright liberties? As technology increases the ways in which we can make personal use of copyrighted works, how does this balance shift? How should it? Further research has yielded more reliable sources and a richer set of questions for the student to grapple with. But she, like all novice researchers, needs to learn how to navigate unfamiliar search engines such as Lexis Nexis Academic, or the many other on-line sources to which our library subscribes, and to make judgments about the reliability of alternative sources.

Concerned with educating undergraduate students in this “scholarly literacy,” the University Library teaches a first-year level University Course, UC 170, “Digital Research in the Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, or Humanities: Critical concepts and strategies.” As described in the course catalog, “This one-credit, hands-on course will help students lay a solid foundation for success in all current and future academic research. With an emphasis on the wealth of digital resources now available, the material focuses on information discovery and management skills, expands knowledge of scholarly sources, and promotes critical thinking.” But as the above example helps to illustrate, the process of digging through sources, struggling with central concepts, getting confused by ambiguous or conflicting ideas, and then finding a way out, is best done within the context of specific assignments from courses that matter to the student. Accordingly, the library also offers subject-specific instruction directly related to upper-level courses.

Every faculty and staff member at U-M has an associated subject specialist librarian who serves as a liaison between the Library and the relevant academic or administrative unit. These specialists can and do help faculty to design curriculum and research assignments around library use and sources. They can tailor subject-specific instructional sessions to a course and lead those sessions, either in the classroom or as a hands-on session in a library computer lab. These services are relevant for any course that requires research, but are perhaps especially pertinent to courses with a large writing component. Whether or not a course is designed to satisfy a writing requirement, the Sweetland Writing Center and the University library can both provide support for assignments that require and foster analysis, including the ability to master and express knowledge in the form of clear and incisive writing.

The Screen Arts and Culture (SAC) department has a strong commitment to incorporating library instruction into its writing classes. Dealing as it does with content from popular culture, it is easy for students to find sources on course topics without going beyond tools that are immediately, easily, and freely available via the Web. Many faculty in the department have been frustrated by the quality of the papers their students were producing; particularly disappointing were their reference lists. It is often tempting for faculty to think that our post-Google crop of students are lazy, but Scott Dennis, the Graduate Library's subject specialist for SAC, says that faculty who take advantage of library instruction find that their students just need to be pointed in the right direction for finding scholarly sources. Given such guidance, students typically read and critically analyze what they find, and the quality of their papers improves dramatically. An immediate benefit to faculty is that the resulting papers are more fun to read. Another benefit for those emphasizing writing as well as content is that assignments become a better vehicle for teaching students how to analyze information with confidence and to organize their thoughts into complex arguments supported by appropriate sources.

The popular SAC 272, Classical Film Theory, is taught every semester and draws over 70 students per term. Scott teaches a session to each section early in the semester to prepare students for writing an annotated bibliography of source materials. Professor Bambi Haggins, a television studies scholar, teaches SAC 355, Television History. In one assignment each term, students are required to find a review or criticism of a TV show that was published at the time of the show's debut. Students generally have no idea how to approach doing so until Scott shows them how to go about it. He teaches a library instruction session each time Prof. Haggins offers the course. Professor Haggins always remains with the class while he does so, partly so that she can contribute where appropriate, but partly because, as she says, she learns something new each time she hears Scott. She marvels at the rich array of resources the library has to offer her and her students. Professor Haggins encourages her students examine the objects of their research from a minority perspective and compare that to the mainstream viewpoint. The amount and quality of information the library makes available for this type of investigation allows them to do so successfully.

Some materials have value as artifact, as well as for the information they contain. Kathy Beam, a librarian in the Special Collections Library, has worked with instructors to provide students in first-year writing courses access to correspondence and personal materials of such authors as Robert Frost, Marge Piercy, Anne Waldman, and Nancy Willard. By seeing and spending time with the notebooks and journals in which successful writers have jotted down thoughts, phrases, and sketches, students come to view these writers as real people who must work hard to write well. They see examples of how professional writers navigated the process of articulating their ideas and revising their work, or even throwing out a draft and starting over.

Developing critical writing skills in undergraduates takes more than the efforts of the Writing Center, and developing scholarly literacy in undergraduates will take more than the efforts of the Library. Neither mission will succeed without being made part of the educational strategy of the university. Teaching faculty have the authority and the expertise to do so. Teaching the importance of scholarly methods to learning and creating knowledge, and of clear and organized writing to expressing it, is best done in the study of a discipline. Both the Sweetland Writing Center and the University Library can make it easier for faculty to do so: the Writing Center can help faculty construct engaging and clear writing assignments, while the Library can help design them research strategies targeting those assignments. Working together, librarians and teaching faculty can realize their joint ambition to teach students to use the best methods available for learning and communicating what they know and what they do not know.

*Paul N. Courant is a University Librarian and Dean of Libraries. He is also an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, the Harold T. Shapiro Collegiate Professor of Public Policy, and a Professor of Economics and of Information.*

*Margie R. Morris is a Special Projects Librarian in the University Libraries.*

### For more information:

Faculty members interested in conferring with a subject specialist can find a comprehensive list of them by library and field, together with contact information, at <http://lib.umich.edu/collections/specialists.html>.

They can also request a course-related instruction session or more information by submitting the form at <http://lib.umich.edu/instruct/form.html>.

Those interested in other aspects of library instruction, such as workshops, library tours, or tutorials, can find more information at <http://lib.umich.edu/instruct/>.

Netta Berlin



## Self-Assessment as an Integral Part of Writing

Students who achieve critical self-awareness about how they write stand in good chance of making the kinds of connections that reveal to themselves and others the subtle and complex ways in which literature works.

FROM THE THICKET OF POST-IT NOTES framing my computer screen one stands apart. Bearing E. M. Forster's familiar injunction "only connect," the note distills the nature of my intellectual life as both grounded in literature and facilitated by technology. A century after *Howards End* yielded up a heroine striving to "connect the prose in us with the passion," Forster's self-reflexive metaphor seems particularly apt for my work as a writing instructor in a time when many students, like myself, compose and revise on the computer. For every benefit that the ease of cutting and pasting in a Word document brings to the writing process, there is the danger, for inexperienced writers, of its obscuring the meaningful part of the endeavor, as if the production of text on the physical, or virtual, page were an end unto itself. When responding to students' prose, I am often tempted to observe, "only disconnect from the outlet."

I feel this impulse keenly with any revision in which the writer has not grappled with the greater whole of his or her literary analysis but has instead worked, in a piecemeal way, only on those junctures in the draft where problems have been noted. The Sweetland Writing Center Seminar, in which I participated last year, crystallized the importance, for me as a critic, of placing larger issues clearly in the foreground and articulating these issues in more productive terms. It also generated a new component to my pedagogy, which entails challenging students to think concretely about their own writing process through self-assessment.

I ask students to reflect in writing on their own drafts before they receive feedback from others. Their task is to highlight unresolved issues, identify their rhetorical strategies, and brainstorm about possibilities for further development of their ideas. Interesting things emerge in this exercise—recognition of muddled logic or a reference to evidence that was jettisoned from

the draft because it created complications in ways that seemed too difficult for the writer to address. With this information, I can steer the writer toward a clearer and more nuanced treatment of the literary material without privileging my own set of priorities.

Once students have their readers' comments, I ask them to write a synthesis of the issues that have been raised and to start making sense of how these issues relate to each other. I also encourage them to respond to anything with which they do not agree in the feedback and to make an argument for their position. Through this exercise the writer moves away from addressing issues in isolation toward a more thorough and balanced reworking of the entire draft. In turn I can assess how well each writer understands the feedback before the revision is completed and remediate where appropriate.

Students who achieve critical self-awareness about how they write stand a good chance of making the kinds of connections that reveal to themselves and others the subtle and complex ways in which literature works. These are the connections that matter in the final analysis, the ones that may activate a current of passion for expressing one's own ideas in forceful prose. The electrical cord at the back of the computer is only a means to this end.

*Netta Berlin is a Lecturer in the Classical Studies Department.*

Louis Cicciarelli



# The Possibility of Revision

**H**OW DO WE CONVEY to our students exactly what revision is? As writers ourselves, we know and even enjoy the hard work of revision. We know it takes time and that the process is not only about writing but also thinking, discovering, and reshaping, and that all this is essential, transformative even, and quite individual and idiosyncratic to how we work. Joyce Carol Oates tells us, “for the serious writer, writing is revising.” Yet, our challenge each term is to convince students to conceive of revision beyond rules and proofreading, to embrace a more complex view of this work in their own writing process.

After reading Nancy Sommers’ “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers” as part of the Sweetland Seminar, I decided to talk more directly with my students about a conceptual gap developing writers have in regard to the revision process. In class, as students worked on revisions of their third papers, I again stressed the critical work between first and final drafts. In workshops, we talked about what needed the writer’s attention, but had we talked about revising itself? What is expected of students in this work, and what strategies and methods do they use? What do writers do when they revise?

Dr. Sommers’ study frames key distinctions between how students and experienced writers approach revision that I thought might be useful for my students. I made a handout using the sample quotes from both groups of writers who had revised a series of essays for her study. First, I had students free write about their own revising practices: what did they do, when and how did they do it, how long did they spend, and what were their goals. Before reading the handout, we shared our strategies and revising practices. After reading her study, students quickly recognized how the student writers in the study had limited their revising, as she says, to “rewording” and “reviewing,” lexical level changes, that suggest “the meaning to be communicated is already there” and that it only needed to be more “rightly worded.” Several identified these as strategies they once or still used.

In contrast, the experienced writers revealed their struggles to find “frameworks,” “patterns,” “shapes,” “forms” and “lines of argument” in

succeeding drafts, and spoke of the crucial factor “time” played in this process. By baring the processes experienced writers use to work through their own texts, we exposed the cognitive leap most students need to make as developing writers. What they found did not really surprise them: writing is not magic, but messy business, and good revision requires, along with more of their time and attention, their willingness to critically question as they delve into this uncertain process.

I have since given this handout to graduate students besieged by longer writing projects. After reading about how experienced writers struggle to find their argument, one graduate student told me, that Sommers’ study “helps validate the difficulty I’m experiencing. Writing is hard and difficult, something that’s learned.” The experienced writers’ use of terms like “agenda,” “making decisions,” and “constant process” made this student realize that she needed to be more active to “find that voice and be an active participant in this discovery.” Graduate student writers can unravel many of the theoretical and conceptual problems they face by being reminded of the critical value of the revising process. As each new writing project creates new challenges to solve, the methods and strategies we use in our approach to the revising process can provide the solution. Graduate student writers clearly benefit by assessing their own writing and revising practices, and by appreciating that writing, as Flannery O’Connor said, “is the continuous process of learning how to write.”

Hearing experienced writers discuss their own revising process gives students insight into how all writers struggle but discover through revising; drafting thus becomes a tool to deepen their own thinking and see the complex possibilities before them. Taking time to discuss revising practices allows students to examine how they work, to see themselves as working writers and to embrace the methods and strategies that help them best realize and communicate their meaning.

*Louis Cicciarelli is a Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature and the Sweetland Writing Center where he runs the spring Dissertation Writing Institute.*

<sup>1</sup> *College Composition and Communication*, 31 (December 1980): 378-388.

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Patricia Simons



## Peer Review in a Large Class

**FOCUS ON WRITING** in the classroom is often associated with small classes or sections, groups in which intensive discussion and workshoping can take place. I certainly assumed this, but since I had also heard positive reports about the peer review process, I wondered whether I might be able to incorporate it into a large 200-level class. HA/WS 211, "Gender and Popular Culture," is currently the largest course in History of Art, employing three GSIs who each have to handle 75 students. It was therefore also crucial that I not add to the already considerable burden and grading load of the GSIs.

A fellowship at the Sweetland Writing Center in Winter 2007 enabled me to learn more about the peer review process and to experiment successfully with the practice in the Fall 2007 offering of 211. Excellent suggestions and support from the fellows was complemented by the energetic, helpful assistance of a lecturer at Sweetland, Jen Michaels. The power point of a 25 minute presentation she made to the class was placed on CTools and this complemented a set of instructions I gave all students at the beginning of the semester. In early October, each student's draft of the midterm essay had to be handed in by email to two peers as well as the GSI, who monitored the process and recorded compliance but did not otherwise closely read the drafts. Shortly thereafter, each student had to send out their two peer reviews and sections held that week then focused entirely on discussion of those reviews. Within the sections, students broke up into groups of three and talked about the papers, which each of them had already reviewed or written. At the end of the following week,

the revised papers were submitted, along with copies of the reviews and the first draft. GSIs did not closely attend to anything except the final paper, but they gained a sense of how well, on the whole, the reviews did a respectful, useful job. They were certainly impressed by the overall improvement in students' writing.

According to the evaluations filled in at the end of the course, most students also found the process valuable and worthwhile. In the words of one, "it was helpful to get a chance to discuss my ideas and get feedback on them." Another noted that "because our classmates are also doing the assignment, they know what to look for while reading our papers." Even the pragmatic arrangements suited students because, as one said, "it forces you to do your paper early and you are able to fix things within it" before submission. A few, however, disliked the process, chiefly because in some cases their fellow students

did not put much effort into the review or wrote hurried drafts. It was frustrating for several because reviews were occasionally perceived to be contradictory. Next time, I would schedule more time for the turnaround between draft and review.

By breaking the peer review process down into sections, and then small groups of three or four within the sections, one can keep the advantage of intensive, face-to-face review even in large lecture courses. It was so successful that we also mounted a less formal, quick review during the last section so that students could workshop their final papers. I will happily integrate the process into future courses and recommend experimentation with the idea, no matter what the class size.

*Patricia Simons is an Associate Professor of History of Art and Women's Studies.*

By breaking the peer review process down into sections... one can keep the advantage of intensive, face-to-face review even in large lecture courses.

### FALL 2007 SWEETLAND FELLOWS

#### SENIOR FELLOWS

Lisa Emerson  
*Massey University, New Zealand*

Jeffrey Evans  
*Residential College*

Christi Merrill  
*Asian Languages and Cultures*

Ruth Tsoffar  
*Comparative Literature/Women's Studies*

Martha Vicinus  
*Sweetland/English Language and Literature*

Keith Taylor



## Beginning with the Bioblitz:

# Constructing a First Writing Assignment for Young Field Biologists

### WHEN I WAS ASKED TO TEACH

"Environmental Writing and Great Lakes Literature" during the 2006 summer session at the University of Michigan Biological Station, I assumed that, as young scientists, the students would understand the importance of specificity; I could focus on building their writing skills beyond the lab report. Unfortunately, my first assignment—a 1000-word personal narrative about their relation to the natural world around them—yielded poorly written, extremely vague essays on things like the necessity of friendship and the existence of God. Either they fell back on some odd notion of the "humanities essay," or, just maybe, I had done a very poor job defining the assignment.

Over the next year, and with the help of a Sweetland Seminar, I began to find a way to reshape that first assignment, to set parameters and clear goals that could be easily explained. I decided to begin with the research work they were doing at the Biological Station, with an eye to building longer, argumentative essay assignments.

Early in the summer term of 2007, as a preparation for the centennial celebrations of the Station in 2008, we all participated in a BioBlitz. This is a quick—in our case, three day—survey of every living species, from algae to black bears, that could be found on the 10,000 acre property. While this kind of survey is not particularly scientific if done for a long enough period it can reveal valuable statistical trends. Besides, it gets everyone (including the English teacher) outside looking at things.

I tied the first writing assignment to the Bioblitz, asking the students to write about one species they had observed during the three days. I set as a model the first-person journalistic presentation, using short examples from *Traverse* magazine and from the "Upfront" section of the *Ann Arbor Observer*, which both my GSI (Dr. Alan Hogg) and I had written. All of these short pieces (250 words) included looking at things in the world and describing a specific thing itself.

To my pleasure the writing was much stronger, as any theorist of composition studies could have told me. Not only was it focused, but even the grammatical problems seemed to melt away. Students found vivid language, recreating their search for a particular species. For example, Eryn Duffield, a junior in Biology and CAAS, wrote:

*Dusk hangs overhead as we diligently suspend mist nets over the Maple River. "Make sure you don't tangle them," Tanya, an assistant researcher from the University of Michigan, directs. "The bats will eat through my nets if they get too stuck." Carefully unfolding the black webbing from the plastic Kroger bags, we sling them over giant metal poles positioned along the river's edge.*

These short essays became a touchstone that we could return to over the course of the next four assignments. They provided examples of clear, specific and confident writing that was a reference as we explored more complicated narrative, argumentative and advocacy essays.

*Keith Taylor is a Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature where he directs the Undergraduate Creative Writing Program and the Bear River Writers' Conference.*

Bioblitz gave me the perfect writing assignment: students were asked to write about one species they observed during the three days.

### JUNIOR FELLOWS

Michael Bunn  
*English and Education*

Joy Collman  
*Romance Languages and Literatures*

Lisa Del Torto  
*Linguistics*

Eva-Marie Dubuisson  
*Anthropology*

Janice Habarth  
*Psychology*

Shanna Kirschner  
*Political Science*

Robert Maclean  
*History*

Jinny Prais  
*Women's Studies/History*

# ASSESSMENT OF TUTORING BEST PRACTICES IN THE SWEETLAND WRITING CENTER

**I**N THE FALL OF 2007, a group of four faculty members embarked on a research project designed to answer the question "What makes one-to-one writing instruction effective?" With funding through the Provost's Office from the Gilbert Whitaker Fund for the Improvement of Teaching, Sweetland lecturers George Cooper, Christine Modey, and (now) Associate Director Naomi Silver and Judy Dyer, a lecturer in the English Language Institute, conducted the research, with help from sophomore Brigitte DeGraaf, whose participation was made possible by the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP).

The idea for the research project came during a faculty meeting last winter, when a Sweetland faculty member wondered aloud how she could improve her performance in Writing Workshop, Sweetland's faculty-staffed, one-to-one writing instructional service. A search of the literature on one-to-one writing instruction revealed that little empirical research has been conducted in this area; writing centers' and instructors' approaches to individual writing instruction have been shaped, rather, by anecdotal accounts of success and failure and by manifestos that run the gamut from very directive approaches, in which instructors make clear recommendations to students and provide a lot of practical guidance, to very non-directive approaches, in which instructors ask Socratic questions and students do all the work. While many writing instructors have firmly held beliefs about which approach (or combination of approaches) is preferable, no one has collected data to find out what approaches actually work to improve student essays or to enhance students' critical thinking and writing skills. Thus, the need for an "Assessment of Tutoring Best Practices in the Sweetland Writing Center" seemed clear.

We recruited seven Sweetland faculty members with varying levels of experience in Writing Workshop. Each faculty member was interviewed by one member of the research team about his or her approach to various

aspects of Writing Workshop. During the fall semester, the Sweetland research team collected data from more than seventy undergraduate clients of the writing center. In addition to the intake and evaluation forms that are part of Sweetland's routine self-evaluation, students completed pre- and post-session questionnaires and participated in a brief, open-ended interview with one of the researchers after the writing workshop session. Each participant's session with the instructor was digitally voice recorded, and we collected both the rough draft the student brought to the session and the revised version submitted for a grade. In addition, the participating faculty members answered a brief set of questions about each recorded session. Students received a Shaman Drum gift card for their participation in the study.

In Winter 2008, we are beginning transcription of the recorded writing workshop sessions and analysis of the quantitative data. To help with these tasks, we have recruited an additional UROP student, David Faulkner. We will analyze the transcripts using discourse analysis methods, an area in which Judy Dyer is expert. The team will present its preliminary results at the 2008 convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in New Orleans in April. By examining the early transcripts, we are beginning to define the typical structure of a writing workshop session and to make observations about how the session agenda is negotiated between student and instructor. This has been an exciting project so far, and we look forward to mining the rich data we have collected for further insights into how students and faculty talk about writing and the impact of those writing conversations on students' writing and thinking.

*Christine Modey is a Lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature and the Sweetland Writing Center.*



*From left: Judy Dyer, Naomi Silver, Christine Modey, and George Cooper.*

Lisa Emerson

## Writing Science

**D**URING THE FALL SEMESTER 2007, I was privileged to be employed as Sweetland Writing Center's first International Visiting Lecturer. It was a tremendous experience, both personally and professionally; and a particular highlight was teaching SWC 400: A Seminar in the Challenges of Writing Science.



Science students sometimes come into a science writing class looking for a recipe: "just show me how to write a scientific paper and I'll do it" can be their approach. And of course there is no recipe. Writing in or about the sciences shifts on a number of axes. It shifts across disciplines: the writing style required by a theoretical physics journal may differ dramatically from a journal in social ecology. It shifts across time: try the interesting exercise of picking up a scientific paper on the same topic written in, say, 1807, 1907 and 2007, and see how the writing style, as well as the science, has changed. And it shifts across genres. Scientists write in a huge range of genres for diverse audiences.

My main focus in designing this course, then, was to teach students how to read rhetorical strategies in different genres, so that they could identify and employ those strategies in their own writing. Each student "shadowed" and interviewed a professor in their major to gain an understanding of the role and range of communication within their discipline. Students wrote in a range of styles and forms about topics within their discipline, from literature reviews and introductions to scientific papers, to essays for *Time* and *Scientific American*. As a class, we debated the role of persuasion in scientific writing, and argued a case for the passive voice. We considered the structure of narrative technique in popular science texts. We found – and analysed the role of - metaphor in seminal scientific texts.

Students evaluated the course highly. A typical comment was "The literature review and popular science article were very helpful in improving my writing in the field. Overall the course was a pleasant surprise, since I wasn't sure what to expect".

And that is the point about writing in science – with its myriad of styles, forms and audiences, one can never be too sure what to expect. What I hope my students have taken away from SWC 400 is an ease with that "unexpectedness" in writing science – and the skills to read and write science in any genre they encounter.

*Dr. Lisa Emerson is an Associate Professor in the School of English and Media Studies, Massey University, New Zealand, and was a visiting lecturer at Sweetland, Fall 2007. She has published on integrating the teaching of writing into the sciences at university level, and teaching appropriate written and oral communication skills for science students.*

## Horticulture Project

**A**T MASSEY UNIVERSITY, faculty in the Horticulture School wrote a statement explaining why keeping a journal was a vital task for their students. Using their co-authored statement, given below, Dr. Emerson prepared the assignments for the final term paper. By working closely with the faculty, she was able to craft writing assignments that met their specific expectations and needs.

### What is a journal?

A journal is a professional diary into which are entered ideas, observations and reflections on issues related to your work. Fruit and vegetable growers keep spray journals in which they note the type, timing and rate of the chemicals they apply to their crops. Later, they will note (reflect upon) the level of control achieved by the spray application and what future changes are necessary to achieve better control. The next time you are visiting garden open days, look for other visitors taking notes. These people are likely to be landscape designers making notes in their field journals. They may be writing about aesthetically pleasing combinations of plants of value to them in their future designs, or noting characteristics and growing conditions of plants they have not seen before. Plant scientists maintain detailed experiment journals. In these they keep records of the treatments they applied to their test plants and the plants' subsequent responses. Writing reflectively in their journal about these responses is often the trigger for the flashes of inspiration that lead onto the next set of experiments. The professors teaching this paper are all writing teaching journals. We regularly write about how our teaching is going, what topics the students are having difficulty understanding and which ones they are finding too easy, what 'worked' in the last practical and what didn't and needs improvement. Recording our thoughts and experiences in this way makes it much easier for us when we come to review the paper and plan its on-going development.

You will find that the immediate value of journal writing is a better understanding of the subject material of the paper. Writing is an excellent way of helping you crystallize your ideas and coherently express your understanding of a subject.

### Final Assignment

- Write a report to a client on whether sunflowers can be grown as a cash crop over winter.
- Write a grower blueprint on how to grow winter sunflowers.
- Write a chapter of a textbook for teachers of senior high school students on how growing sunflowers over winter is an effective way of teaching the principles of horticulture to students.

Science students sometimes come into science writing classes looking for a recipe: "just show me how to write a scientific paper and I'll do it" can be their approach.

# FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS

**Charlotte Boulay** has poems forthcoming in *Field* and *Slate* magazines in 2008.

**George Cooper**, along with three peer tutors, Davietta Butty, Clare McGuire, and Joe Varkle, conducted a presentation, "Directive and Non-Directive Tutoring: Rhythmic Variation in the Rhetorical Stance of Peership," for the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing at Penn State University, October 19-21, 2007.

**Margaret Lazarus Dean's** novel, *The Time It Takes to Fall*, was released in paperback in February. She was also awarded a creative writing fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for 2008. In January 2008, Margaret was a featured reader in the Zell Visiting Writers Series, hosted by UM's MFA Program in Creative Writing.

**Helen Fox** presented a paper called "Teaching Nonviolence" at the "Fourth Global Conference on War, Virtual War, and Human Security" in Budapest in May 2007. Her paper was subsequently expanded and included in a collection of papers from the conference edited by Graeme Goldsworthy and Robert Brecher (2008, Interdisciplinary Press, Oxford, UK).

Several of **Lizzie Hutton's** poems are forthcoming in the Spring/Summer editions of the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, the *Harvard Review*, and the *Cimarron Review*. She has also written several poetry reviews for *Interim* and *Review Revue*.

**Matt Kelley** presented a paper, "'Early Morning in the Universe': Photography and Panoramic Consciousness in Robert Frank's *Pull My Daisy*" at The Midwest Modern Language Association's 49th Annual Convention, Film Studies Division. A revised version of this paper has been accepted by the M/MLA Journal's special issue on realism and will appear in late 2008.

In 2007, **Danielle LaVaque-Manty's** short story "Servings" appeared in *Northwest Review*. Danielle also presented "Interactive Theater: Raising Issues about the Climate with Science Faculty" with Jeffrey Steiger and Abigail Stewart at the American Education Research Association (AERA) conference. She co-edited, with Abigail Stewart and Janet Malley, *Transforming Science and Engineering: Advancing Academic Women* (2007) and coauthored, with Abigail Stewart, "Advancing Women Faculty in Science and Engineering: An Effort in Institutional Transformation," in *Gender and Occupational Outcomes: Longitudinal Assessments of Individual, Social, and Cultural Influences* (2008)."

**Danielle Lazarin's** story, "The Holographic Soul," is currently appearing in the Winter 2008 issue of the *Michigan Quarterly Review*.

In 2007, **Ray McDaniel** conducted writing workshops and gave public readings of his work at both Central Michigan University and St. Clair Community College. His long essay "Affect and Autism" appeared in *American Poets in the 21st Century: The New Poetics*, published by Wesleyan University Press. His second book of poetry, *Saltwater Empire*, will be published by Coffee House Press in April 2008.

**Jennifer Michaels'** poem *Ode to the Pa'u Rider* was accepted in May 2007 for the forthcoming anthology *Cadence of Hooves: A Celebration of Horses* from Yarroway Mountain Press. The anthology is scheduled for release in early 2008.

**Christine Modey's** chapter, "Newspapers and Magazines," appeared in *The Oxford Handbook of Early American Literature*, ed. Kevin J. Hayes, published by Oxford University Press in January 2008.

**Patrick O'Keeffe's** short story "Accidents" was published in the Winter 2007 edition of the *Michigan Quarterly Review*. For his story, Patrick won the Lawrence Foundation Prize, which is awarded to the author of the best short story published in the *MQR* each year. His collection of novellas, *The Hill Road*, was also released in paperback in 2007.

In September 2007, **Alex Ralph** gave a talk for the Admissions Office to 75 high school seniors on writing tips for their application essays, and throughout the Fall term, he represented Sweetland during four Q&A sessions with the parents of prospective students. Alex also participated in the English Department's Teaching Colloquium on grading papers in November 2007.

**Naomi Silver** participated in the "Siting Heritage and Memory" seminar at the Modernist Studies Association Conference in Long Beach, CA in November 2007. In April 2008, she will present two papers: "Where Quantitative and Qualitative Collide: Or Do They?" at the College Composition and Communication Conference in New Orleans, and "Transdisciplinary Labors" at the American Comparative Literature Association Conference, Long Beach, CA.

## THE FUTURE OF VICTORIAN STUDIES

*A Conference in Honor of Martha Vicinus*

**18 & 19 April 2008**

East Conference Room, Fourth Floor  
Rackham School of Graduate Studies  
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

The Nineteenth-Century Forum at the University of Michigan is pleased to host a two-day conference, featuring colleagues and former students of Martha Vicinus, Eliza M. Mosher Distinguished University Professor of English, Women's Studies, and History. Papers will be presented in three plenary panels, each followed by an hour of moderated discussion. The conference will conclude with a Roundtable to reflect further on the past, present and future of Victorian studies. All invited. For more details, visit <http://www.umich.edu/~ncf/>.

