

The
North Texas Writing Centers
Association
Newsletter

Spring 2006/Issue 1

March 20, 2006

Alice Newsome, Editor

A Message From the President

A few weeks ago, when I attended the Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference in Provo, Utah, a writing center director from Gillette, Wyoming, said, "Every time I come to a conference of writing center people, I'm struck by their kindness and humility. They're not like anyone else in higher education, are they?"

The answer, as those of us sitting at the same table agreed, is a resounding no. When writing center people get together, you seldom have the sort of competitive self-aggrandizing behavior that can occur in some academic conferences. Most writing center professionals and peer tutors find their way into this line of work because they like to help people. Even the most famous of our scholars, such as Mickey Harris, tend to be friendly, down-to-earth, and generous with their time and expertise. We are helping personalities, cut perhaps from the same cloth as social workers, medical professionals, and other educators, one of the chief differences being that we write well (and have learned to help others improve their writing). Probably the simplest, clearest way to state this notion follows: Good people tend to staff writing centers. And that principle holds true whether they work in Maine or Wyoming, and whether they are getting together for the International Writing

Center Association Conference or the spring meeting for the North Texas Writing Centers Association.

As it happens, our spring meeting in Granbury, which will occur on April 7 at Tarleton State's Langdon Center, will be my last as president of the association. I'll be passing the baton, so to speak, to the next president, elected by the membership attending the meeting. In fact, our members will vote on an entire slate of officers and on proposed changes in membership dues. We will also hear presentations from the winner of the Mary Nell Kivikko Excellence in Scholarship Award and from several very bright peer tutors working in the William L. Adams Center for Writing at TCU.

We will convene in this beautiful setting for lunch, spend some time getting to know new members and getting reacquainted with old friends, and learn what our colleagues and peer tutors in other institutions have to teach us. The meeting is an important one, and we urge all good writing center folk in the North Texas region—members and prospective members alike—to attend. See you there.

Steve Sherwood
President
North Texas Writing Centers
Association

North Texas Writing Centers Association
Spring 2006 Mini-Conference

Reflections from the Center

Hosted by
Tarleton State University at
the Langdon Center in Granbury
April 7, 2006

Program Schedule

11:30-12:00	Arrival and Registration Concert Hall, The Langdon Center
12:00-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:00	Opening Remarks and Business Meeting Steve Sherwood, Director of the William L. Adams Center for Writing, Texas Christian University
1:00-1:20	Report from the Regional Writing Center Association Conferences Steve Sherwood and Cheryl Carithers
1:20-1:30	Break
1:30-2:15	Winner of the Mary Nell Kivikko Excellence in Scholarship Award “Opening the Conversation between Disability Studies and Writing Centers” Dr. Rebecca Day Babcock, University of Texas Permian Basin
2:15-2:25	Break
2:25-3:15	“Writing Center Ethics: The Process” Janna Pate, Texas Christian University “A Peer Tutor’s Take on Online Interactions” Katherine Quinn, Texas Christian University “Three Years in the Writing Center: A Peer Tutor’s Retrospection” Ben Graber, Texas Christian University



Campus Map

<http://www.tarleton.edu/~langdoncenter>

Parking Information

**Parking is free. Please park in the Stockton Street parking lot.
For driving directions, go to <http://www.tarleton.edu/~langdoncenter>
and click Map.**

Lunch

**Lunch will be provided by Tarleton at no cost to attendees.
Please choose your sandwich from the following selections:**

Fillings

**Chicken Salad
Tuna Salad
Egg Salad
Avocado-Cheese
Sliced Turkey
Sliced Ham**

Bread

**Sourdough
Seven-Grain**

The sandwich lunch also includes a pickle, chips, a cookie, and bottled water.

**Please email your lunch selection to Alice Newsome by Friday March 31.
(anewsom@tarleton.edu)**

About Our Presenters

The Mary Nell Kivikko Excellence in Scholarship Award Winner

Rebecca Day Babcock is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Texas Permian Basin. She is a former executive committee member of the Midwest Writing Centers Association and a current executive committee member of the Modern Language Association Discussion Group on General Linguistics. She is an indexer of writing center publications for the MLA International Bibliography and was awarded a Fellowship by the MLA for this important work. She has published articles on writing centers in the Writing Lab Newsletter and her work will appear in the forthcoming *Disability/Teaching/Writing: A Critical Sourcebook*. She has presented at conferences such as The National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, the Midwest Writing Centers Association, and the International Writing Centers Association. She is also a member of the International Writing Centers Committee on Disability. She currently has two books under consideration for publication, a co-edited collection on disability in the writing center and a monograph on tutoring deaf and hearing students in the writing center.

From the William L. Adams Center for Writing at Texas Christian University

Janna Pate is a senior who plans to work in the publishing world. She has recently applied to NYU's program in publishing. In March, Janna's piece titled "Writing Center Ethics: The Process," won TCU's Subversive Thought Award, part of the annual creative writing awards sponsored by the TCU English Department. She has also submitted the piece to the *Writing Lab Newsletter*.

Katie Quinn is a junior English major who also plans to attend NYU's publishing program.

Ben Graber is a senior religion major who plans to do missionary work before attending graduate school.

Praise from director Steve Sherwood: These tutors are "all honors students, excellent writers, and three of the finest peer tutors who have worked for the TCU Center for Writing in a number of years."

Officer Nominations

It is time to install new officers for the North Texas Writing Centers Association. There are five elected officers for the organization; officers serve for a minimum of two years.

The responsibilities of each officer follows:

President: The president chairs all meetings and facilitates the operations of the association.

Vice-President: The vice-president functions as program chair and assumes the duties of the president in the president's absence.

Newsletter Editor: The newsletter editor gathers information, edits articles, publishes the newsletter, and handles mailings.

Secretary: The secretary takes minutes at meetings and handles correspondence.

Treasurer: The treasurer collects dues, records memberships, and reports finances and memberships at meetings.

Any member in good standing may nominate another member in good standing for any of the positions listed. Members may also nominate themselves. Nominees should have paid dues for 2005-2006 (either institutional or individual) and should be able to serve a two-year term.

The following members have expressed interest in these positions:

President: Cheryl Carithers

Vice-President: Shannon Carter

Newsletter Editor: Alice Newsome

Secretary: Peggy Vera

Treasurer: Ben Sword

News from the Region

From **Texas A&M Commerce**, graduate tutors and director **Shannon Carter** have presented at several conferences. The graduate tutors include **Maryann Whitaker** who presented "One Space, Two Space, Green Space, Blue Space: The 'Otherness' of Tutors in the Writing Center" at SCWCA in February. In addition, other graduate tutors were part of a panel presentation at SCWCA entitled "The Writing Center as Marketplace: Creating a Profitable Environment." Individual presentations in the panel include **Jeremy A. Hurley**, "Making the Sale: Developing a Retail Mentality in the Writing Center;" **Andrea Miller**, "Consumer Culture and the Comfy Couch: Aesthetics in the Writing Center;" **Daniel Ragusa**, "Getting By With a Little Help from Your Friends: Building a Team Identity in the Writing Center;" and **Elise Flannigan**, "Giving Away the Goods: Issues of Loss Prevention in the Writing Center."

Dr. Carter has presented in several venues this year, as well. At International Writing Centers Association Conference, she presented "Tutoring Writing Outside of the Center: Crossing Boundaries in Communities and Classrooms," and for SCWCA she presented "Tutoring Writing is Bagging Groceries is Coloring Hair is Fixing a Sink: Writing Center Work as Activity System." At CCCC March 22-25, Dr. Carter will present "The Prison, the Post Office, and the Evangelical Church: What Vernacular Literacies Have to Teach Us About Academic Ones."

Peggy Vera, from the **Collin County Community College District**, wrote a review for *The Writer's Harbrace Handbook*, Third Edition. The handbook is edited by

Cheryl Glenn and Loretta Gray and is available for distribution. Ms. Vera is the Online Writing Lab Director for CCCC.

In addition, from **TCU's William L. Adams Center for Writing**, director **Steve Sherwood** presented the keynote address to the Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. The title of the presentation was "The Art of the Beat Tutor: Learning Lessons No One Can Teach." While at BYU, he also presented a paper to the university's WAC program titled "Rhetorical Proprieties and the Use of Humor in the Writing Emphasis Classroom." In October, along with Pam Childers, he presented a paper titled "Opening the Floodgates: Giving Creative Writers Access to the Writing Center" at the IWCA Conference. Dr. Sherwood will be the keynote speaker at the creative writing luncheon at North Central Texas College on April 14. He will read portions of *Hardwater* and talk about the processes of writing a novel.

Dave Kuhne (TCU) is now president of the Texas Association of Creative Writing Teachers. He urges members of NTWCA who practice or teach creative writing to join the association. Dr. Kuhne also published a review of Steve Sherwood's novel *Hardwater* in the Spring/Summer 2005 issue of *Texas Books in Review*. In addition, Dr. Kuhne published an interview with author and publisher Paul Ruffin in the 2005 issue of *descant*.

Also from TCU, **Cheryl Carithers** participated at both the SCWCA conference and CCE. Her SCWCA presentation is entitled "Tutoring Across the Curriculum: An Intimidating Prospect." For CCE, Ms.

Carithers presented "Chick Lit: Post Feminism or Fad?"

Cynthia Shearer (TCU) won a Pushcart Prize for her essay "The Famous Writers' School: Lessons from Faulkner's House," and her second novel, *The Celestial Jukebox*, was published as a paperback by the University of Georgia Press.

Billie Hara (TCU) presented papers at or attended the Feminism and Rhetoric Conference in October 2005

and the Wakonse South Conference on College Teaching in March 2005. In addition, with **Matthew Levy** (TCU), she has a book review forthcoming in *Reflections: A Journal of Writing Service Learning and Community Literacy*.

Dr. Levy has also published an essay titled "Cynicism, Social Epistemic, and the Institutional Context of College Composition" in the current issue of *JAC*.

Tutors: The Heartbeat of the Writing Center

As we all know, tutors are crucial to the success of our writing centers. Recently, Tarleton State University tutors, former tutors, and instructors responded to the following:

A good tutor

"...must be firm, but patient and compassionate.
...shows students that sometimes you just gotta look it up.
...writes in her head a thousand papers which nobody ever reads."

Lynn Swanbom

"...needs to be interested in helping the students that enter the Writing Center. A good tutor should be willing to muddle through any possible horrors that could come her way."

Paula Denny

"...needs to be completely tuned in. There should be a complete mental shift from whatever the tutor was doing before the student entered to the mindset that accompanies the tutorial session."

Ben Sword

"... needs to not just understand the writing, but the writer. One can learn some about the writer from the writing; however, it is important that the tutor observe the writer for clues as to the writer's approach to the task. A receptive attitude on the part of the writer will generally yield a positive tutoring session. A writer who is anxious or irritated most likely will only receive a quick fix solution. And we all know that a quick fix does not develop good writers."

Michael Dooley

"... needs to have a positive attitude toward learning. He/she needs to be patient and respect the learners. The tutor must be able to strike the right balance between getting the student on the right track and still enabling him/her to become an independent learner. The goal of the tutor is to facilitate learning."

Jennifer Echols

"... should recognize each student's individual strengths and weaknesses and customize the tutoring session to accommodate those strengths and weaknesses."

Karon Moore

"... needs to be respectful, patient, and understand that he or she can only do so much with each student."

Matthew Smith

Musings

The North Texas Writing Centers Association was honored to have Kevin Davis, Writing Center Director at East Central Oklahoma University, as its keynote speaker in Fall 2005. Dr. Davis presented “The Writing Center as Last Best Place: Six Easy Pieces on Montana, Bears, Love, Missions, and Tutoring.” The following is an excerpt from Dr. Davis’s paper. Enjoy!

VI. The Writing Center as Last Best Place

The writing center, like Montana, is certainly not a perfect place; both are populated with the occasionally disturbing grizzly bear (though, of course, some grizzly bears are more metaphorical than others.) A couple of years ago, Annie and I took our friends Josh and Brenda to Montana with us. It was their first trip west, and Brenda, who does a lot of reading before she actually experiences anything, had pretty much driven herself into a bear-fearing frenzy long before we even left Oklahoma. I have a tendency to be like Brenda, to make my bears scarier than they actually need to be, to blow them out of proportion. More importantly, I tend to outrun my bears, rather than redefining the opposition, and that usually gets me in trouble. To make our writing centers the Last Best Place, we need our grizzlies, but we also need to recognize them for what they are: more myth than reality, more avoidable than defeatable, more creatures of our own worst imaginations than beasts of reality.

Both Montana and the writing center represent home to me. Less than people or locale, *home* is a sense of well-being, a connection between ourselves and our surroundings, a place that we love because it brings out the best in us. Building a writing center that brought out the best in me was a little tricky; at the time I was building, I don’t know that I could have told you what the best of me was. But building a writing center that brings out the best in a wide variety of individuals, workers and clients alike, is trickier still, and I’m not sure that I can even suggest where to start. But at

ECU, it’s a feeling we’re after in our writing center, a place of friendliness and caring, of helpfulness, of personal support and mental challenges. For example, a non-traditional student whom none of us recognized brought by a big box of cookies last December to thank us for having encouraged her one dark day in late September when she was ready to throw in the towel and go back to her laundry and cooking. “This is the best place,” she told me; “I just come here when I feel like I need someone to believe in me.” Me too, I thought; me too.

Part of the reason the writing center can provide this belief in the individual, I think, is that we maintain an existence on the edge of the university. We’re different; we should be doing anything we can to emphasize and capitalize on the difference. For example, most university classes seem to revolve around the magical thinking that students (who know little) should absorb what professors (who know a lot) teach. Writing centers, however, do not traditionally emphasize this type of top-down learning; we need to be sure that we continue to focus on the kinds of learning we do best: developmental, experiential, collaborative, individual. Our work should emphasize the learning human more than the learned subject, the integration more than the regurgitation. I have tried to bring that into the training we do, attending to the affective dimension which must precede any intellectual work we do. For example, I’ve noticed that new tutors always want to get right down to work, to begin a session with the paper that’s

in front of them; like the rest of the university, they see the goal of learning as manifest in the artifacts of learning. But as tutors gain experience, they spend more and more time with the writer, less and less time with the text; they move to the edge of the university, the place where people are more important than lessons, where contact is greater than concept. Now, I'm trying to develop this sensibility in the training seminar, trying to facilitate the affective development in the newer consultants.

Through this affection, the consultants become perhaps the only human connection for some writers. When students look at their instructors, they see professors eager to do their own research; they see graduate assistants more worried about the classes they take than the classes they teach; they see adjuncts packing up hurriedly for their next adjunct appointment, 10 or 20 or 50 miles down the road; or, increasingly, they see a television or computer monitor. When students look at our writing center, they should see consultants, unhurried and undistracted, who will learn their names and their fears, who will come to know them as something more than a chair and a paper. When students look at our writing center, they should see a different kind of world view—a Montana view—one which values the individual within the community. They should see a state on the edge of the union, a place that's a little odd, a little unsettled, a little unrefined; they should see the last, best place.

We must remember that this place, this independent center I advocate, can appear a little uncivilized, but that, too, can be a good thing. Our writing center moved a couple of years ago to a main floor, center-of-campus location which is directly beneath the president's office. The muckamuck come and go at all hours of the day, passing in front of our glass-walled center. When we first moved into this

location, I dreaded the intrusions that were bound to come and, at first, the administrators would walk by, peering at us in our fish bowl. But then some interesting changes occurred. First, we started getting more respect as the administrators finally saw the physical manifestation of the numbers we serve, numbers I'd been feeding them for years, numbers which remained shapeless abstractions until they watched us on a daily basis. Second, the administrators stopped watching. Now, two years later, they never look in, strolling past with their faces straight ahead or locked on their own shoes. To be honest, I think we scare them. I think we're a little too uncivilized for them with our food, our table lamps, our rock and roll; with our affective learning, our irreverence for the traditional, our willingness to flop belly down in the mud of learning. I think, in fact, that when they look at us they see...grizzly bears.

We should cultivate this, I think. As administrators, we should work harder to distinguish the literal bears from the imaginary ones so that we know when we really *do* need to run, conserving our energies for those moments. As tutor trainers, we should infuse our workers with an understanding and appreciation of the affective dimension, the one which will make our centers into homes, not just for the workers but for the clients as well. As humans, we should learn to love the selves our places make possible. As revolutionaries, we should make the most of our different world view, the one which supports the traditional institution even as we undermine it. We should keep our centers a little uncivilized, and we should always, always maintain our locations on the fringe, a place where individuality is extolled and nurtured by the community, the Last Best Place in the university.

Reprinted with permission.

CONSTITUTION OF THE NORTH TEXAS WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

(Revised Spring 2004)

- I. The North Texas Writing Centers Association serves writing centers of the region as a clearinghouse for exchanging information, as a forum for discussing important writing center issues, and as a means of promoting the professional status of writing center personnel.**
- II. Membership in the NTWCA includes directors and staff of writing centers and persons interested in writing centers. Membership can be either institutional (\$50) or individual (\$10). Institutional memberships include writing center staff and tutors at the institution.**
- III. NTWCA assesses dues annually at the fall meeting. Memberships run from September through August. Monies collected are used for communication, publication, and conference expenses.**
- IV. The right to vote and to hold office extends to all individual and institutional members.**
- V. The following elected officers serve a two-year term and may be elected for a second two-year term:**
 - A. President: The president chairs all meetings and facilitates the operations of the association.**
 - B. Vice-President: The vice-president functions as program chair and assumes the duties of the president in the president's absence.**
 - C. Newsletter Editor: The newsletter editor gathers information, edits articles, publishes the newsletter, and handles mailings.**
 - D. Secretary: The secretary takes minutes at meetings and handles correspondence.**
 - E. Treasurer: The treasurer collects dues, records memberships, and reports finances and memberships at meetings.**
 - F. Immediate Past President: The immediate past president serves as an advisor and assists other officers in discharging their duties.**
- VI. The president appoints the following officers for two-year terms:**
 - A. Membership Chair: The membership chair promotes involvement by serving as NTWCA's outreach liaison, contacting potential members at colleges, universities, and secondary schools in the area.**
 - B. Web Spinner: The web spinner maintains the NTWCA website page.**
 - C. Archivist: The archivist serves as custodian of the organization's records.**
- VII. The Executive Board, consisting of the six elected officers and three appointees, meets at least twice per calendar year to plan meetings and conferences. When officers and appointees are selected at the spring meeting, they immediately assume their duties and plan the schedule of events for the following year.**

- VIII. If an officer resigns, the Executive Board will appoint an interim officer to serve out the officer's term. If the resigning officer's term has more than one year remaining, the association will elect a new officer at the next regular meeting to serve out the remainder of the term.**
- IX. The NTWCA sponsors at least two meetings per calendar year, including a mini-conference.**
- X. This constitution may be amended or replaced by a majority vote of the executive board and membership at any business meeting.**

