

Writers Elevated

Issue #2/Fall 2011

From the Editor: Highlights of Our Second Issue

Welcome to another edition of the newsletter!

Our inaugural issue received a lot of positive feedback, and it's been great to know that so many readers have enjoyed the content and the format! The new Fall 2011 edition includes familiar section titles and internal links (repeating across issues for consistent organization and navigation) and a lot of new content to help keep you informed about our Larimer Campus Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Program.

Here are some examples of what's new this semester:

- *A biographical spotlight added to the "Consultants" section*
- *News of the Larimer Campus Writing Center remodel-in-progress*
- *Reminders for accessing Writing Center information and online services, and for D2L "Writing Center Resources"*
- *A welcome to our new Larimer Campus WAC Co-Directors*
- *Fresh suggestions for "Writing Landscapes" to explore*
- *New summaries of consultant discussions and some reflection on a Spring 2011 "Teaching the Academic Paper" workshop*
- *More results from our Larimer Campus Writing Center surveys*
- *A history of the Larimer Campus Writing Center*

Additional feedback, suggestions for features, and submissions for the "Writing Landscapes" section are also welcome at any time—and can be forwarded to the contact information for "Editor" on the next page.

Ongoing thanks to our Writing Center and WAC colleagues and to all who have devoted time (including reading and feedback time!) and resources to the newsletter....Hope you continue to enjoy the evolving vistas and views.

--Susan Marshall (Newsletter Editor, Writing Center Consultant, and Asynchronous/Synchronous Hiker)

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*"One of the most
searched words on
Merriam-Webster.com
[is] 'ubiquitous.'"
(Merriam-Webster.com)*

Fall 2011 Writing Center Consultants

- **Marie Flynn** – Arts and Letters, English
- **Deborah Gengler** – Arts and Letters
- **Ann Healy** – Cherished Community Volunteer
- **Jim Heaton** – Arts and Letters
- **Elizabeth (Crystal) Kerr** – Arts and Letters, Music, WAC
- **Therese Loeffler-Clemens** – Arts and Letters
- **Susan Marshall** – Arts and Letters
- **Vickie McLane** – Allied Health, WAC
- **Elaine Milligan** – Larimer Campus Student Services, Fitness/Wellness Coordinator, WAC
- **Heidi Peterson** – Arts and Letters, Philosophy
- **David Redus** – Arts and Letters, English
- **Sonja Scullion** – Arts and Letters, English, Online Consultant
- **Sara Tredennick** – Arts and Letters
- **Jim Weis** – Arts and Letters, English

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Got feedback? Please feel free to contact any of us!

When asked, "What is one of your favorite words?" Ann replied with "dismantle." She likes its "integrity"—how one can dismantle something but not necessarily "remantle" it.

Consultant Spotlight: Ann Healy—For 20+ years, Ann taught English Composition at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. (She also taught some Modern European History and once lived in Yugoslavia for The Experiment in International Living.) After reluctantly trying "retirement" when she moved to Colorado with her husband, her passion was to become re-involved. In the words of one of our former Writing Center directors, Ann has "helped hundreds of students...attended training, and stayed late" while volunteering her time and expertise for many years here at our Writing Center. Ann believes that the act of sharing is the best way to help a person learn what he or she has to say, and the Writing Center experience offers this uniquely from other realms of life/learning. Ann loves working with her colleagues at FRCC, and is profoundly admired in return.

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Retracing Steps: Writing Center Information

Reminders for online access to Larimer Campus Writing Center information and online submissions:

Follow FRCC Web links to the “Academic Support Labs” page for FRCC Larimer Campus (steps outlined in our previous issue), or type www.frontrange.edu/writingcenter to help you link instead.

Consultants can also access the following types of “Faculty Writing Center Resources” via D2L:

discussion prompts, training and “best practice” materials, information on screencasting, WAC activities, style sheets and exercises, presentations, tutorials, Web links, and *Writers Elevated* archived.

Our Larimer Campus Writing Center is physically located at the Learning Opportunity Center, BP 102.

Drop-In Hours: M—F from 9 a.m to 3 p.m. and also M from 5 to 7 p.m.—In addition to online reminders for hours and basic services, also look for Writing Center ads via fliers, monitors, *The Stall Street Journal*, tables at the LPSC, and posters at campus events. Contact **Kathy Mendt** if interested in class visits.

Update on Remodel-in-Progress

Renovations at the Learning Opportunity Center are gradually taking place this semester and into the next, with plans for increased Larimer Campus Writing Center space (as computer stations and partitions are relocated), new furniture, possibly some writing-related artwork, and a new display system for consultant biographies. Special thanks to Bitsy Cohn for all of her work and updates on this!

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Planning Waypoints: Writing Center and WAC Projects in Development

Welcoming New WAC Co-Directors: Eric Salahub and Alyson Huff

This semester marks a transition in leadership for the Larimer Campus WAC Program as we welcome new WAC Co-Directors, Eric Salahub and Alyson Huff (Arts and Letters, Philosophy), who will also serve as new contacts for WAC membership information at Larimer Campus. Congratulations and thanks to Eric and Alyson (and you can also read news about former WAC Program Director, Kathy Mendt, in [Reflecting Outward](#)).

While the “Fall 2011 WAC Syllabus” contains information about broader WAC program goals and objectives, Eric and Alyson were also asked to describe some of their own unique leadership goals and vision. Here are some highlights paraphrased and quoted from a larger reply to the Editor. (Please feel free to also contact Alyson Huff, at Alyson.Huff@frontrange.edu or by calling her at 970-204-8512, with any related questions.)

__To continue to help “non-English discipline and program faculty” feel less “self-conscious about discussing their writing assignments and abilities...” with a range of other faculty members

__To continue to help program participants broaden their horizons by hearing from those “familiar with ...writing needs and concerns...” from different courses and fields of study

__To help further “dispel some stereotypes” about writing instruction, including the misconception that “writing instructors provide every kind of writing instruction”

__To help “lower the burden” for English instructors (by reinforcing the idea that all instructors have “responsibilities” with writing instruction)

__To help further “describe without prescribing” (by adding unique awareness of the “individualized” potential for “techniques and theories about writing”)

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Writing Landscapes: Some Recommended Resources (Discovered, Uncovered, or Recovered by Consultants)

Web Links and Resources

- Diverse “eResources” such as EasyBib, Overdrive, and Freegal found along with databases and Web links at <http://www.poudrelibraries.org/eresources/>
- Video tutorials for some library databases found at the Harmony Library link under “Library Services” at <http://www.frontrange.edu/Academics/Libraries/Larimer/>
- Writing the Front Range at <http://blog.frontrange.edu/>
- National Gallery of Writing, hosted, in part, by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) at <http://galleryofwriting.org/>
- NewEraNews.org “committed to engaging, educating, and training a new generation of active citizens and young leaders in Colorado.” (<http://neweranews.org/>)
- The RSA (Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) as an organization for “enlightenment” based in London (<http://www.thersa.org/>)
- “Essay as Hack,” where Ander Monson “fear[s] for the essay, friends, and its bad reputation....” (<http://otherelectricities.com/swarm/essayashack.html>)
- Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net/>)
- Cliché Finder (Search “life,” for example at <http://www.westegg.com/cliche/>)
- Double-Tongued Dictionary (<http://www.doubletongued.org/>) and Merriam-Webster Open Dictionary for new words and slang (<http://nws.merriam-webster.com/opendictionary/>)

Unique “Booking” Opportunity at Larimer Campus?

According to a recent announcement in *Frontline*, “The Social and Behavioral Sciences Department has placed a bookshelf in the upstairs hallway of Challenger Point, on the east end, to house free books.” Why? “We want to encourage reading for course work and for enjoyment and fulfillment.” Visitors are encouraged to “Read...give it back, keep it...or donate.”

Campus Writing Initiatives

- *The Front Range Review* (literary magazine) blair.oliver@frontrange.edu
- Larimer Campus Learning Communities (courses combining two disciplines, usually including composition) shawna.van@frontrange.edu
- Writers on the Storm (creative writing club) william.foster@frontrange.edu; susan.marshall@frontrange.edu
- Danger: Live Writers! (public readings of student writing) kerri.mitchell@frontrange.edu; blair.oliver@frontrange.edu

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Exchanging Views: A Summary of Consultant Discussions

Exploring the Texas A&M Writing Center's history and consultant guidelines...

February 2011—"The University Writing Center at Texas A&M Helps Students Achieve Success"

Our FRCC Larimer Campus consultants received a link to this "interesting article about a Writing Center," and comments were invited.

One area of discussion centered on the "\$8 per semester student fee" used at Texas A&M to cover "all of its operating expenses" for its Writing Center. There was some agreement that a similar fee, if ever possible with our own economic circumstances, might encourage more visitors (if substantial truth to the idea that payment for a service tends to increase the motivation for one to use it). The article also mentioned some other unique facets of the Texas A&M Writing Center including extended p.m. and weekend hours, training for students to "become paid certified writing consultants," availability of "undergraduate writing assistants," and increasing emphasis on help with "oral communication" (such as podcasts). These are offerings that we can continue to keep in mind and question (weighing the potential pros and cons) in relation to the ongoing development of our own Writing Center.

Consultants were also given a link to the Texas A&M *Consultant Guidebook*, and many commented on its value. (Plans for a new training manual at Larimer Campus are also underway.)

To what extent should a consultant be expected to help a student with content?

April 2011—"How do you advise tutors to handle content on student papers?"

The quote above was part of a listserv posting, offered to consultants for further discussion. Several consultants replied and seemed to agree that, if asked for specific feedback on content that seemed "off-base," their goal should not be to "set the student straight" in detail.

What to do instead? Writing Center Director Kathy Mendt helped to summarize the gist of the recommendations this way:

I don't think we are responsible for teaching course content...but...also, my job is to respond as a reader...[pointing out] when the content doesn't make sense or when I think the sources are taking over...I think trying to "teach" *Hamlet* to the student [a topic example given in the listserv posting] would be a misstep, but I tell students when I am confused about something...also...to say that I am not convinced by a student's argument when I am not....

Kathy also reminded:

Some of the research on knowledge transfer...says that students report that they believe English comp. teachers have no business commenting on their content and teachers in other disciplines have no business commenting on their "grammar...." That's the kind of thinking we should be actively combating.

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Promoting Practice: What We've Been Studying in Meetings and Workshops

"Teaching the Academic Paper" workshop, March 4 and 5, 2011—facilitated by Robert D. Whitemore, Faculty Associate for the Institute for Writing and Thinking at Bard College

This was a highlight of our Larimer Campus offerings in 2011, and described (in part, by Bard) as a workshop to help teachers "establish reasonable and professionally responsible standards for students' academic papers," and that "redefines academic writing and offers methods for teaching students how to use sources, pose key questions, and make personal connections to the topic or text."

Readings included William Cronon's "The Trouble with Wilderness," references to David Dobbs' "The Science of Success" and Paul Connolly's *On Essays*, and Paul Woodruff's "The Silent Teacher." (Thanks to Kathy Mendt, Kerri Mitchell, Alyson Huff, and Crystal Kerr for assisting with this information.)

Some words from Kerri Mitchell on the workshop's value (excerpted here from a larger reflection):

What I took from the workshop is that academic writing is only authentic and valuable after students have made connections to the material and have discovered a path to inquiry....I think the Bard facilitator wanted to take us through an authentic process...remind[ing] us of what students encounter (or should encounter) every time we ask them to write formally....

Academic writing is often viewed as a product, but we would do better as teachers to focus on the process...allowing students to discover genuine ways to enter larger, important conversations in our culture...leading students through a series of less formal writing and thinking exercises...[where they] come to discover their own interests and questions, and they begin to see the merit for building a strong case or argument to support their own opinions and contributions. Once this investment occurs, students are in the right frame of mind to write academically.

Additional thoughts from Crystal Kerr (also from a larger reflection): The workshop challenged a "prevailing opinion...that writing for the academy may produce precise, interesting content but the words themselves and the process would be 'fun' only by accident...the workshop did include creative ways to design a well-constructed critical essay [and other forms of academic writing]."

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Reflecting Outward: Highlights of Surveys, Research, and Feedback

SURVEY/FEEDBACK HIGHLIGHTS: RESULTS FROM OUR WRITING CENTER EXIT SURVEY

In Spring 2011, visitors to the Larimer Campus Writing Center in BP 102 were invited to contribute anonymous feedback via a computer exit survey. Here are some highlights of the findings:

Conclusions regarding the exit survey

- The Writing Center may see more first generation students, Veterans, and single parents than are represented percentage-wise in the general population.
- The majority of students each semester are first-time visitors.
- Teachers are, by far, the most important source of information about the Writing Center. Visibility is the second most important factor in Writing Center use.
- Students need more information about online Writing Center services.
- Students are very satisfied with the consulting they receive...and would recommend it....
- Students want more Writing Center availability, but there is no clear need for specific times.

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SURVEY/FEEDBACK HIGHLIGHTS: RESULTS FROM OUR WRITING CENTER IN-CLASS STUDENT SURVEY

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In addition to the exit survey, an in-class student survey was also conducted.

Conclusions regarding the in-class student survey

- Most students have writing assignments but do not have [perceive?] an incentive from an instructor to use the Writing Center. (Contrast with faculty belief that students need extra assistance with writing and that students are unprepared for college writing.)
- Most students are aware that the campus has a Writing Center but most have not used it.
- Most students want more information about the Writing Center.

Overall recommendations

- Use faculty workshops through the Writing Center and the WAC Program to educate faculty regarding Writing Center philosophy and to assist faculty in helping students write for their classes. Visit classrooms, department meetings, and adjunct in-service meetings to distribute information. Ensure that faculty can share the information with students, and that they understand possible incentives. Remind faculty that they can also bring in assignment sheets for feedback.
- Educate all students about Writing Center services, and especially online services. Improve accessibility to online Writing Center services (use of an alias).
- Increase online service (via improved mechanisms for consultant crossover with synchronous and asynchronous requests).
- Encourage students to return to the Writing Center with other writing assignments.

A HISTORY OF THE LARIMER WRITING CENTER

According to former Writing Center Director Susan Bailor, the first Larimer Writing Center was located in the Oakridge Annex (approx. 1993-1997) and “staffed by adjuncts for a few hours a week.” Therese Loeffler-Clemens directed from approx. 1996-1999 and piloted some on-call services. Blair Oliver followed as Director (and “primary tutor”) for 1999-2000, when the Writing Center was located in the Horsetooth Conference Room with some outreach via classroom visits. Shawna Jackson (now Shawna Van) directed from approx. 2001-2004, as the Writing Center eventually moved into BP 102 G (just remodeled at the time). Kerri Mitchell took over as Director from Fall 2005 to Spring 2010, as the Center eventually moved once again—this time to the common area in BP 102 (good for visibility, though not as private). Kerri’s key goal “was always to increase the usage...,” and for awhile this included some attempts to involve students as consultants and to make “writing help stations” available at the LPSC. (The latter was discontinued as Center visibility improved, and usage seems to have increased significantly!) Kathy Mendt is our current Larimer Campus Writing Center Director, and has worked hard to increase the range of consultants involved across disciplines. (She “created and ran the Larimer Campus WAC initiative” and was the Larimer WAC Program Director prior to this semester.) Kathy is also the recently appointed Chair for Online Learning at Larimer Campus.

Heartfelt thanks to directors past and present, for their invaluable contributions to the evolution of the Writing Center—and for assistance to the Editor to compile the overview above.

Watch for *Writers Elevated* again next semester, with our Issue #3 for Spring 2012!

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