

# Writers Elevated

Issue #4/Fall 2012

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## From the Editor: Space Travel

**Dear Readers**—November is National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo), and I'd like for a few moments here to mention Ray Bradbury. We were born in the same town—Waukegan, IL—and from there our paths merged and diverged. He passed away this year at the age of 91.

**"The Internet is a big distraction. It's distracting, it's meaningless; it's not real. It's in the air somewhere."**

**"Space travel is life-enhancing, and anything that's life-enhancing is worth doing. It makes you want to live forever."**

While these statements (found at [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com) and [www.notable-quotes.com](http://www.notable-quotes.com), respectively) might give you the impression of a rather confused and contradictory Ray Bradbury (why can't the Internet itself be considered a form of "space travel," for example) what seems clear is that he didn't want us to mix up our spaces. He didn't want us to confuse the virtual "air" of manufactured screens with the "air" surrounding a face-to-face conversation, or to equate the taste of a sandwich eaten outdoors to the taste of one eaten indoors (as mentioned in his book *Dandelion Wine*). He wanted us to be curious about the ways in which human perceptions, needs, and habits might travel and translate across very different spaces—sometimes changing, shifting, and sometimes not so much.

I hope the newsletter reminds you of the ways in which our Writing Center offers its own unique opportunities for space travel—helping students *and* teachers navigate between synchronous and asynchronous environments, between personal and professional concerns, logistical and conceptual details—and how this travel can inspire retention, a desire to stick around to share and learn more.

**--Susan Marshall (Newsletter Editor, Interim Writing Center Director, and Writing Center Consultant)**

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*"You have to know how to accept rejection and reject acceptance."*

*(quote from Ray Bradbury at [goodreads.com](http://goodreads.com))*

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## Fall 2012 Writing Center Consultants

- **Marissa Campbell** – Arts and Letters
- **Marie Flynn** – Arts and Letters
- **Deborah Gengler** – Arts and Letters
- **Ann Healy** – Cherished Community Volunteer
- **Jim Heaton** – Arts and Letters
- **Stacey Johnson** – Arts and Letters
- **Elizabeth (Crystal) Kerr** – Arts and Letters, WAC
- **Therese Loeffler-Clemens** – Arts and Letters
- **Susan Marshall** – Arts and Letters
- **Vickie McLane** – Allied Health, WAC
- **Kerri Mitchell** – Arts and Letters
- **Rhonda Parmley** – Social and Behavioral Sciences, WAC
- **Heidi Petersen** – Arts and Letters
- **David Redus** – Arts and Letters
- **Sonja Scullion** – Arts and Letters, Online Consultant
- **Jim Weis** – Arts and Letters

For more explanation of the “WAC” description next to some of our consultant names, please see “A Note on ‘WAC’” from our Spring 2012 edition.

### Newsletter and Writing Center Contact Information at Larimer Campus

Susan Marshall  
 Newsletter Editor and  
 Interim Writing Center  
 Director (during Kathy  
 Mendt’s appointment as  
 Chair for Online Learning)  
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 Front Range Community  
 College, Larimer Campus  
 4616 S. Shields Street  
 Fort Collins CO 80526

Please contact Susan Marshall with your ideas, requests, or feedback related to the newsletter or to Writing Center positions and services.

### Consultant Biographies

Want to know more about our staff at work in the Writing Center? All potential visitors—students and instructors alike—can leaf through our consultant bio. book available for viewing in our Center. (In fact, you could even make a special drop-in visit just to take a look.) There we’ve provided some pages of text and photos to help you get to know the diverse and inspiring backgrounds of our multi-talented, multi-faceted, vigilant, and ever-diligent consultants. We’re also exploring plans for sharing more consultant information online for your viewing pleasure, including copies of some of their creative and critical works.

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## Retracing Steps: Writing Center Information

**Follow these steps for Larimer Campus Writing Center information and an online service link at our FRCC Web site:** Click on “Current Students” and “Learning Resources & Support Programs.” Then go to “Academic Support Labs” and select “Larimer Campus.” There you’ll find Writing Center information, including a detailed schedule for our physical location and a link to our online services. FRCC students and instructors can also submit their writing online for feedback by entering [www.frontrange.edu/writingcenter](http://www.frontrange.edu/writingcenter).

**FRCC students as well as instructors are invited to visit us at our Larimer Campus Writing Center location in the Learning Opportunity Center (LOC), Blanca Peak (BP) 102. Fall 2012 drop-in hours are M—F from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.:** Here you will also find detailed copies of our Writing Center schedule, showing names of our consultants and their hours of service. Staff at the LOC desk can also answer questions and help direct you to additional LOC services such as tutoring. For answers to “What is a ‘Typical’ Session Like at Our Larimer Campus Writing Center?” please see *Writers Elevated* from Spring 2012. Guidelines and services are also summarized in “The Writing Center is Open!” flier e-mailed to instructors early in the semester.

**Consultants also have access to a range of “Faculty Writing Center Resources” via D2L:** This archive includes orientation and “best practice” materials, WAC activities, tutorials, links to online resources, schedules, and newsletters. As we update and add to this D2L resource, we welcome suggestions from those using it.

**We offer outreach, too:** Would you like a Writing Center staff member to talk with you or your class—or visit one of your campus events or meetings—to provide a review of our services or help you explore a writing-related topic? If so, Interim Director [Susan.Marshall@frontrange.edu](mailto:Susan.Marshall@frontrange.edu) would love to hear from you. Also look for campus ads, announcements, and offerings during in-service week, at resource fairs, and at other points in the semester. Return to [Inside This Issue](#)

## Planning Waypoints: Writing Center and WAC Projects in Development

**Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Fall Workshops—**Fall means WAC workshops underway and a guest appearance by one or more Writing Center staff members to help WAC participants creatively/critically imagine their upcoming roles as consultants. The program description reminds us that “WAC is appropriate for any faculty members who would like to explore how writing can facilitate teaching and learning in their own disciplines/programs, who are interested in learning new pedagogical ideas, and who appreciate interacting with faculty from various fields....The program starts in the Fall for the series of workshops and extends into the Spring for Writing Center participation [14 hours] and completion of program materials....” To learn more, you can contact WAC Program Director [Alyson.Huff@frontrange.edu](mailto:Alyson.Huff@frontrange.edu).

**OWL Initiative—**The “Proposal for a College-Wide Online Writing Lab (OWL)” for Front Range Community College (briefly reported on in the last issue) has now been approved with online consultant training to take place in time for next semester’s classes. As quoted from the President’s Innovation Fund Application, “Over the last three years, OWL use by FRCC students has risen dramatically....This increase is likely due to these factors: Ease of Access, Improved OWL Services, and Increase Online Population.” The application further explains that “The creation of a college-wide OWL will provide FRCC students with one place to access online writing services, one software/hardware standard for writing center consultants, and one pedagogical approach to online writing consultation.” This means that online services for BCC, Westminster, and Larimer Campus writing centers will be merged and share a single point of access, while each campus will also maintain a separate physical location for in-person visits. Watch for more information on this in our course catalogs and online!

**Writing Center Questions in Development—**In Fall 2011, we reported on some recently completed Writing Center “Survey/Feedback Highlights.” Ideas are now in development for some new exit and consultant surveys to help us further update and expand our training and outreach materials, to re-explore our traffic demands and strategies, and further assess our role with student and instructor retention. Return to [Inside This Issue](#)

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

### Resource Feature: Writer's Help From Guest Author Kerri Mitchell

"Grammar is glamour" writes composition theorist, Peter Elbow, in his book *Writing with Power*. Elbow rightly claims, writing is judged by its appearance whether we like it or not. This can frustrate students who have important things to say but lack the ability to convey those things clearly. It frustrates teachers, too. We don't like getting hung up on confusing sentences. We don't appreciate misused semicolons. We cringe to see the word *definitely* spelled as *defiantly*. Grammar *is* glamour, and the student who can write clearly will be perceived as smarter than the student who can't.

As a writing instructor of ten years, I don't have an easy solution to errors in students writing – but I'm hoping our new web-based textbook *Writer's Help* will bring me closer. *Writer's Help*, published by Bedford St. Martins, covers the conventional rules of grammar, punctuation and mechanics, but unlike a traditional text, *Writer's Help* is searchable and student-friendly. A student wouldn't need to know words like "cohesive" or "transition" to find what she needs. Rather, she could search a phrase like, "paper needs to flow" and the website will produce meaningful results. It is also interactive. If a student is struggling with commas, she can improve through interactive quizzes and exercises. The site is also instantly updatable, so when the MLA or APA revises rules for writing, the changes are immediately available to students.

So far, FRCC students seem comfortable with this web based text. Many are digital natives who do most of their writing and socializing online, anyway. But they will need our guidance.

As Elbow suggests, we need to help students find patterns of error. Most students don't make several errors, but the same few errors over and over. Our job is to guide students in identifying these errors, and show them *how* to use *Writer's Help* to address those errors. We should model searching in *Writer's Help*; we should practice some of the exercises with students; and finally, we should ask students to look at their own writing and immediately apply what they have learned to the context of their own work. English teachers and Writing Center consultants are working together to help students identify and eliminate errors in their writing, and the importance of writing spans beyond our ENG discipline. Our hope is that someday, *Writer's Help* will be an integral tool for all of our FRCC classes.

#### **Kerri Mitchell**

English Faculty & Online Lead

Transfer Composition Lead

Front Range Community College - Larimer Campus

(970) 204-8230 [Kerri.Mitchell@frontrange.edu](mailto:Kerri.Mitchell@frontrange.edu)

You can contact Kerri Mitchell to learn more about access to *Writer's Help*, or you can also visit the "Learn More" section at

<http://writershelp.bedfordstmartins.com/ebooks/helphandbook.php>.

#### **Campus Writing Initiatives and Reflective Groups**

- *The Front Range Review* literary magazine ([Blair.Oliver@frontrange.edu](mailto:Blair.Oliver@frontrange.edu))
- Larimer Campus Learning Communities (courses combining two disciplines, usually including composition) ([Shawna.Van@frontrange.edu](mailto:Shawna.Van@frontrange.edu))
- Writers on the Storm creative writing club ([William.Foster@frontrange.edu](mailto:William.Foster@frontrange.edu))
- Danger: Live Writers! (public readings of student writing) ([Kerri.Mitchell@frontrange.edu](mailto:Kerri.Mitchell@frontrange.edu); [Blair.Oliver@frontrange.edu](mailto:Blair.Oliver@frontrange.edu))
- Reflective Practice Groups/"Talking About Teaching" (including meetings for English instructors, those interested in "Thinking Across the Curriculum," and more) ([Barbara.Patterson@frontrange.edu](mailto:Barbara.Patterson@frontrange.edu))

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## Exchanging Views: A Summary of Consultant Discussions

In what ways do you believe our Writing Center is contributing to retention rates on our campus?

October 2012—The article “Writing Centers: The Student Retention Connection” was also distributed to inspire some discussion here.

A point that seemed emphasized by all of our respondents had to do with what Deb Gengler called “personal impact,” that no matter how formal or informal, structured or unstructured a writing assignment may be “A lot of a person’s unique thoughts, education, and vulnerabilities often rise to the surface when one writes.”

While we may support retention in terms of our professional abilities to navigate questions of brainstorming, organization, rhetorical strategies, review of guidelines, use of resources, citation formats, etc., we also support retention with uniquely personalized opportunities for encouragement, reassurance, and empathy. The range, flexibility, and camaraderie of our consultants seems key to this uniqueness. In fact, we are reminded that instructor retention might also be affected by the work accomplished in our Writing Center.

We do provide a uniquely “accessible” place to help one “adapt to college life” (to quote Crystal Kerr) and to experience added “academic, social, and emotional support” (to quote Rhonda Parmley)—and these kinds of benefits can be enjoyed by our consultants and instructors as well as our students. Survey questions such as “What people and/or programs contributed to your decision to stay enrolled and complete your academic goals at FRCC?” (to quote Rhonda Parmley again) might also be helpful to try.

What are some of your thoughts on the pros/cons of requiring visits to the Writing Center?

October 2012—The topic of required visits was introduced at our Writing Center in-service meeting with mention of the anecdote below.

When one FRCC instructor asked her students to visit CSU’s Writing Center for feedback on an assignment last summer (while our Center was closed) she received a note explaining their staff’s concerns with required visits. Some of our consultants have also shared concerns and questions.

There is great appreciation for our instructors who want to raise awareness of the Writing Center and its potential value for their students. One concern with any student visits required for feedback, though, is whether our unique value as a “writer driven” service will be emphasized enough with the requirements. Another concern is with our ability to meet the demands of all of our drop-in visitors when unusually high traffic spikes can develop with sections of students trying to meet deadlines for instructor-required visits.

To help us address these concerns, we want to make sure that instructors and students understand the parameters of staffing and space predetermined and scheduled for each semester. We also want to encourage instructors to consider options in lieu of, or in addition to, their required visits with deadlines: for example, use of our outreach services for class visits or ways to require visits that might involve very wide deadlines. As Writing Center staff and instructors communicate more about this issue, we can better learn what kind of related guidelines or research materials might be helpful to share.

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

### In-Service Meetings and Workshops

In August, Larimer Campus Writing Center staff met during in-service week to reflect on some of their unique experiences and also renew their mutual understanding of Writing Center goals and concerns. The agenda included a Q&A session to help consultants review common strategies for management of the Writing Center and test their reflexes with consultation strategies. Returning consultant Heidi Petersen also helped to review highlights of the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Colorado Wyoming Writing Tutors Conference that she attended in Pueblo, Co (and that was reported on in last semester's *Writers Elevated*). The two-part series *Writing Across Borders* was also assigned viewing for discussion, to help consultants reflect on some influences and differences with student perceptions of writing. The series emphasized an understanding of different cultural contexts to help consultants work with a range of ELL students and improve their flexibility and awareness with writing.

During in-service week, meetings also included reports on progress with the CATS project (re: Writing-Based Classroom Assessment Techniques) and its expansion to ENG 122 courses (from Kerri Mitchell) and plans for reform with developmental ENG courses (more on this in the next section of the newsletter). Workshops included "Writing to Learn" and "Getting Students to Read" (from Alyson Huff) and "Two Perceptions: Aligning Expectations in Writing Assignments" (from Kathy Mendt).

### Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association's 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in Boulder

The October 24, 2012 edition of *FRCC Frontline* mentioned some of the following highlights of Larimer Campus participation at the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association's 66<sup>th</sup> annual convention of which FRCC was a sponsor: "FRCC students were featured in a special "Danger: Live Writers" session...Kerri Mitchell, English (L), was the emcee. Blair Oliver, chair of Arts and Letters (L), gave a presentation on incorporating assessment activities in literature classes. Shawna Van and Matt Stilwell, English (L)...[helped to conduct] a panel about Learning Communities. Peter Beal, art history (L), was part of a panel discussion on program revision and survival of the humanities." (Also look for publication news re: former consultant Shana Salaff in the same edition of *FRCC Frontline*.)

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## Reflecting Outward: Highlights of Surveys, Research, and Feedback

### Some Notes on the Developmental Education Reform Movement and the CCCS

During in-service week at FRCC Larimer Campus, Shawna Van and Matt Stilwell presented some news on changes proposed for our developmental English courses. Shawna (as our FRCC ENG faculty rep. with the Statewide Developmental Taskforce) also provided the Editor with some notes outlining key concerns and ideas related to those plans. Here are some highlights quoted from the notes:

What's the Problem?—The more levels of developmental courses a student needs to go through, the less likely that student is to ever complete college English or math.—Thomas Bailey (2009) CCRC Brief

The Goal—Move students quickly and effectively through their first college level course.

Some of the possibilities—compression models that combine existing levels, mechanisms for bypassing remedial levels, mainstreaming students into college-level courses, integrated reading and writing courses that replace multiple levels of reading and writing...

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## Some Notes on Developmental Education Reform Movement and the CCCS (cont.)

Goal Statement—This does mean a curriculum redesign. These principles should be applied to curricular work: reverse design, what do students really need to know for jobs success, two semesters or less for any student in developmental education—one semester for most students..., an active learning experience included with each lesson, this [as] an ongoing process

You can contact Shawna ([Shawna.Van@frontrange.edu](mailto:Shawna.Van@frontrange.edu)) and also visit [www.cccs.edu/DETF](http://www.cccs.edu/DETF) for more details on the models proposed and research informing this movement.

**“Provoking Thinking”**—Since thinking is indeed a large part of writing, the Editor also asked John Mandley (Lead Instructor—General Psychology I & II) to contribute a piece about “Thinking Across the Curriculum” (TAC) on our campus. If interested to learn more, please contact John at [john.mandley@frontrange.edu](mailto:john.mandley@frontrange.edu).

Welcome to my existential crisis: a crisis not of faith, or identity, but of pedagogy. Within the walls that comprise my classrooms, I continually ask myself what am I doing, and why am I doing it. Thankfully, I may have an answer. That answer takes shape in *Thinking Across the Curriculum* (TAC) which sprang from teaching in a Learning Community, having conversations with a variety of instructors, completing WAC, and attending a Bard College workshop. It was Eric Salahub who coined the phrase *Thinking Across the Curriculum*. Many thanks Eric! So, what is TAC? What are its key objectives? And how might we develop TAC into something tangible? Good questions....

TAC is about moving beyond discipline-specific content and away from any specific form of communication. That’s what makes TAC different from WAC—no writing required. But, you might ask, without our beloved content what do we have left? What we have left is thinking. When a Culinary Arts student creates the perfect dish, when an Anatomy and Physiology student prepares a cadaver, when a Geometry student graphs the Y-Intercept, and when an Automotive student diagnoses an ignition system, are these not examples of thinking? When we strip away our preconceptions and remove our usual qualifiers like “higher-order,” “critical,” “creative,” or “analytical” what we have left is *the emergence of a process through which an idea unique to the student is communicated*.

So we have a fancy definition of thinking. So what? The key objective of TAC is for instructors to move beyond our discipline-specific content without losing that content. Can we find a place where thinking is our primary focus, a place where we help students build tools of inquiry and expression? Here’s where it gets tricky. In order for me—a Psychology instructor—to support student thinking I must use the course content with which I am familiar. As a Psychology instructor I also have an obligation to meet statewide competency standards. It might seem like we have a Catch-22 on our hands, but we don’t. What we have instead is an opportunity to use our content in the service of thinking. Allow me to explain. If I ask students to use the obesity epidemic to explore theories of motivation they end up learning a great deal about obesity and motivation. Students learn it because they thought about it. They thought about it on their own terms, in their own way, within the framework provided by the discipline-specific content called Psychology.

How might we develop TAC into something tangible we can use to provoke student thinking? Help is on the way. Emerging from our new Student Learning Outcomes, we have several college-wide Learning Outcome Teams (LOTs). One such team is the Higher-Order Thinking and Independent Learning LOT, more affectionately known as the HOT LOT. Through the HOT LOT the opportunity to convert TAC from an interesting idea into concrete instructional methods has arrived. Let’s seize the opportunity.

Meet you on the pages of *Writers Elevated* again next semester, with Issue #5 for Spring 2013. Return to [Inside This Issue](#)