

MUSINGS



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Dates to Remember

- Monday, May 28: Campus Closed for Memorial Day
- June 2: Textbook Adoption Inservice 9:30-12:30
- June 8: Commencement
- June 10: Spring quarter classes end
- June 12: Grades due

FROM THE CHAIR: TRANSITIONS...

...and other things.

As the year comes to a rather rapid close, I must take a pause to reflect. After coming back in October from my recuperation period, I realized that I had to hit the ground running to catch up with the rest of the Sinclair world...little did I know, but the ground itself was also moving! At the speed of light we saw new leadership in the Humanities, Psychology and Chemistry. Not only will I say good-bye my Dean and mentor, but to my Division, as well! At a time when there is a tremendous effort to ascertain the reasoning behind the failures of our students in achieving their educational dreams, our department celebrated the outstanding work done by our composition students and creative writers from across the Miami Valley with the esteemed Spectrum Award. I surmise that with all that is going on, I can't possibly sing Auld Lang Syne without offering some parting kudos.

Thanks to Dr. Richard Jones, Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Under your leadership, not only has our department and the division flourished, but each and every chair under your tutelage has grown to know just what stellar leadership means. I will miss our chats, that were truly wisdom-filled mentoring sessions that helped me find my way in this realm called "department chairpersonship." Hopefully, you will find peace in test giving and paper grading. Remember, you love numbers. If not, look at the pictures of those grandbabies and that will keep the smile on your face.

Thanks to you, the Achieving the Dream Writing Action Teams, and Developmental Education colleagues. Strapped with a monumental task of crafting the college's strategies for addressing the needs of our at risk students in English and Math,

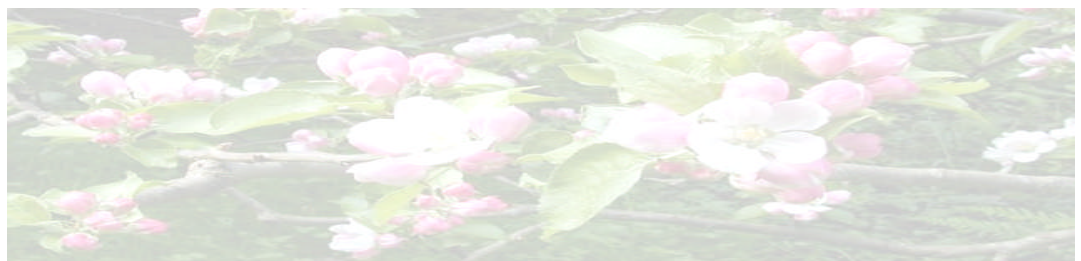
you engage your charge with utmost diligence, creativity and professionalism. I believe that we have begun to put into place mechanisms for intervention that will give us bountiful data this coming Fall and Winter.

Thanks to my partners in crime, Professor Teresa Prosser and our lovable nemesis, Dr. Linda Pastore. We form a rather awesome trio, and by God will help these students Achieve their Dreams...at least in written and mathematical form!

Thanks to Professors Kate Geiselman, Tim Waggoner and Chuck Freeland. We do celebrate writing in the most classy way. As the writing gets better and better each year, so do the Spectrum Awards! Kate, as my students would say, "The 2007 Spectrum Awards was off the hook!"

Thanks to the entire full and part-time English Faculty. In this year of monumental change, in this era filled with accusations of elitism and forced defense of our own pedagogy, there remains one constant: No matter what we will be called, where we will be placed, we will teach English... the type of English that we have been professionally trained by the finest institutions in this country to teach! We will put student success that the top of our personal rubrics...and will continue to produce some of the Miami Valley's most skilled writers who are prepared to take their places in today's workforce, transfer to our nation's colleges and universities, and be hailed by all as purveyors of the highest forms critical thinking. Those thoughts WILL BE impeccably written and yes, grammatically sound!

Jack Bennett



PRINTED AND PRESENTED

During Spring break, **Tim Waggoner** turned in the manuscript for *Blade of the Flame 3: Sea of Death*. The book will come out from Wizards of the Coast, Feb. 2008. He has signed to write a supernatural thriller titled *Beneath the Bone* for Wizards of the Coast. It's scheduled for Sept. 2008. Tim's recent short story sales include "Swimming Lessons," forthcoming in *Horror D'oeuvres*, Delirium Books, 2007; "The Right Thing," Amazon Short, 2007; "Conversations Kill," forthcoming in *Cemetery Dance* no. 60, 2007; and "Country Roads," forthcoming in *Legends of the Mountain State: Ghostly Tales from the State of West Virginia* in October 2007.

In June, Tim will be attending the summer residency for Seton Hill University's MA in Writing Popular Fiction program, in which he serves as a faculty mentor. During the residency, he'll also be teaching a module called Making the Leap, dealing with what it takes for writers to move from skilled amateurs to published professionals.

Finally, Tim will be attending the following conventions as a featured author/writing panelist: Marcon, May 25-27, 2007, Columbus, Ohio; InConJunction, July 6-8, 2007, Indianapolis, Indiana; Gencon, August 16-19, 2007, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Paige Huskey's "A Holland Tale" is forthcoming in June 2007 in *Special Gifts: Women Writers on the Heartache, the Happiness, and the Hope of Raising a Special Needs Child*.

Chuck Freeland has the following poems in print or forthcoming: "Not Yet the Sounds of Speech" and "Progress as a Way of Historical Thinking" in *The Cincinnati Review*; "Concerning the Mazurka Chopin Dictated on His Death Bed" in *Poetry International*; "Twilight of the Big Finish" in the *GSU Review*; "Homage," "A Fabled Youth," and "Happy Endings" in *Triplopia*; "Very Bad Poetry," "Principal Landmarks of the Sidereal Evolution of the Globe," and "Your

Word of the Day" in *The Stone Table Review*; "His Vipers, He Writes" in *42opus*; "An Enquiry Concerning the Yodeling Knives" and "An Enquiry Concerning the Dispersion of the Phyla" in *Shadow Train*; "What the Penis Allows is a Kingdom Without Feathers," "Eros and (Fill in the Blank)," "Cave Painting," "Amphibian Canto," and "Translation" in *Flights*.

Ed Davis led a lively discussion of his story "The Boys of Bradleytown" to Paige Huskey's Short Story class of seniors at The Villas of Brookhaven in Brookville on April 4 (and found that Paige really does her homework when she presents a speaker to her class!). This past April, he read his work and conducted a brief workshop at Wilmington College's first-ever writers' workshop. Former colleague Gary Mitchner presented the keynote at his alma mater. Though attendance was sparse (okay, almost nonexistent), what they lacked in quantity they compensated for in quality of attendees. Ed also attended the tenth annual John Gardner conference in Susquehanna, PA on April 2 and deemed it "great." Among other things, he got to meet Gardner's son, Joel, who's making a movie based on his father's life, tentatively entitled *Sunlight Man*.

Liz Christensen's proposal was accepted by Association of Business Communications, and she will present at their national convention in Washington, D. C. in the fall.

Kate Geiselman and **Sally Lahmon's** proposal, "Creating a Community of Writers in the Online Classroom" was accepted by the Ohio Association of Two Year Colleges. They will be presenting at the OATYC conference in October.

William Loudermilk served as drama-ture, assistant director and performed as Lord Montague in the Edison State Theatre production of *Romeo & Juliet*. There were six performances at the end of April with attendance of over 1000 people, including 700 high school students.

"A little Madness in the
Spring is wholesome even
for the King."

—Emily Dickinson

TEXTBOOK INSERVICE

New texts have been selected for each of the courses in the Composition Sequence. An English Department meeting, distribution of the new textbooks, and presentations of the selected books (with a question/answer segment) by the publishing companies is scheduled for Saturday, June 2, from 9:30-12:30 in the Forum, bldg. 14, on the second floor. Lunch will be served at noon. Please RSVP to Fortunate by May 20th. The Chair will send a reminder note to everyone as the date approaches.

NOTES FROM DEV: SHARYN HUNTER

"When I first started doing professional development workshops, I always opened them up the same way: 'So what kinds of things are you doing now?' And I always got the same reply: silence. If it isn't polite to ask a group of dinner guests about their religion, it's even worse to ask a group of teachers about their teaching."

The opening narrative is taken from Steve Peha's piece "There's No Practice like Best Practice: Making Sense of the Research, Recommendations, and Rhetoric of Professional Teaching." While I have known the silence Pera describes, the last teacher workshop I attended had few moments of silence.

Late in March but early on a Saturday, ENG and DEV teachers met over breakfast rolls and coffee and proceeded to be honest with each other. At first, it was hard not to attribute the honesty to the sugar (candy tempted us on each table, thanks to Tina Onder); once we began sharing our ideas with the whole group, it became clear that the honesty was a product of professionals

who share a common goal: student success. In regards to my small group, after brief introductions, we dove into the task at hand. There was no room for shyness; we waited patiently for each other to finish but wasted little time advancing personal insights and suggestions. What am I getting at here? The ENG/DEV Studies in-service experience was not the usual teacher workshop. The silence was replaced with engaging discussion, which allowed many of us to gain insight and perspective from our peers. This was a valuable experience, and I look forward to another opportunity to share best practices with colleagues who have replaced silence with louder voices, speaking on the behalf of students.

Editor's note: Sharyn Hunter is the editor of the Developmental Studies Department newsletter. In the spirit of the collaboration that began in earnest on Mar. 31, the editors have decided to exchange articles for their respective publications, as yet another way to continue the dialogue between our departments.

ACHIEVING THE DREAM

Bright and early on May 17, the Best Practices work group from the Writing Success initiative presented the findings of the mid-quarter classroom interviews conducted this year. (To see the results, please visit the Best Practices Master Course.) Turns out, our students feel that we are doing a good job, that "showing up" matters, and that they can succeed in our courses. (Not surprising to us, of course!)

However, the work group is taking this information a step further, and has identified a number of categories into which responses fell: engagement, writing process, grammar and mechanics, and many others. They will be collecting ideas and activities to enhance student success in these areas and will ask faculty to commit to

adopting some of these practices for Fall quarter.

Two training and information sessions about this initiative will be held during Summer Institute: Wednesday, July 18 and Friday, August 3. Both sessions will be held from 9am-noon in room 14-114. All English and Developmental English faculty should plan to attend one of these sessions. The rewards are not intrinsic only! Attendees will be compensated \$50.00 for the half-day session. A reminder email will be sent out shortly before registration opens. Please be sure to register as soon as you can. All Institute sessions are available to all faculty; registering early will ensure that English and DEV faculty have first dibs.

FROM THE TEAMS

The Creative Writing Team reports that the 33rd Annual Writers' Workshop took place April 12-13. Our keynote speaker was *New York Times* bestselling author Omar Tyree. Other presenters were science fiction writer John Scalzi, poet James Reiss, and nonfiction writer Gail Taylor. Our own **Becky Morean** presented sessions on screenwriting. The latest edition of *Flights* took wing this quarter, thanks to editor **Jamey Dunham**. Also, the Spectrum Awards banquet was held on May 14, where all 96 guests, expected and unexpected, enjoyed an evening of good food, great music by the G. Scott Jones Freedom Ensemble, and the sparkling wit of our faculty. A special thanks to **Fortunate Finley** for her hard work in ensuring that all award recipients received their prizes.

"Spring being a tough act to follow, God created June"

—Al Bernstein

WARNING SIGNS? BY TIM WAGGONER

Faculty and Staff

? Chair:

Jack Bennett

? Secretary:

Fortunate Finley

? Faculty:

Kay Berg

Susan Callender

Adrienne Cassel

Liz Christensen

Ed Davis

Jamey Dunham

Chuck Freeland

Kate Geiselman

Sarah Kiewitz

Sally Lahmon

William Loudermilk

Lisa Mahle-Grisez

Becky Morean

Carol Nancarrow

Tina Onder

Caroline Simmons

Vicki Stalbird

Lisa Tyler

Tim Waggoner

• Tech support:

Doug Greathouse

• Student worker:

Carley Taylor

• Newsletter Editor:

Kate Geiselman

On April 16th, 2007, Seung-Hui Cho – an English major at Virginia Tech – shot and killed 32 people and wounded many more. Because Cho wrote violent plays in his creative writing classes, national attention has been focused on what, if any, responsibility writing teachers have to identify warning signs of potentially violent behavior in their students. Following are several quotes from writers and teachers that may help further our own departmental discussion on the issue.

Tyler Dilts from California State University at Long Beach makes a persuasive argument for not censoring student writing: “The question we need to ask ourselves and each other is whether writing about issues and experiences that illuminate the darker parts of the human experience is a worthwhile endeavor. I think if we are honest in our answers, we must say that it is. How can we suggest that we should limit our students’ freedom to write about the stuff of life, which we claim informs great literature? If we’re not careful, this double standard between what we consider ‘real’ writing and ‘student’ writing runs the risk of not only curtailing creative expression, but, even more significantly, of isolating and censoring those writers who most need to express themselves” (qtd. in “Critical”).

Sam Maurey, a creative writing student at Amherst College, echoes Dilts point succinctly when he says, “A creative writing class should be a place where you can write things that are disturbing without people thinking you’re disturbed” (qtd. in Berger).

Alexander Chee, visiting writer at Amherst College adds that there is a “typical male student” who “writes things that try to shock.” Chee urges teachers to keep such works in perspective. “[These students] break certain cultural taboos, but in those cases, the students are usually quite socialized and not the kind of shut-down loner we saw at Virginia Tech” (qtd. in Berger).

Edward Falco, playwriting instructor at Virginia Tech, told his students in an e-mail following the shootings that “There is a huge difference between writing about violence and behaving violently” (qtd. in “Critical”).

Josh Corey of Cornell University is uncomfortable with the notion of writing instructors as psychological watchdogs. “This intersection of the academic discipline of creative writing and mental health and crisis prevention frankly takes me aback. In what sense has my scholarly and literary training prepared me for ‘helping students in distress?’” He goes on to ask, “Is it

really a creative-writing teacher’s job to counsel disturbed students and to search their work for evidence of pathology? And should we accept the culture’s further demand to view ‘creative writing’ as thinly veiled narratives of the pathological, as opposed to the difficult art of possibility that it is?” (qtd. in “Critical”).

Writing in *The New York Times*, Joseph Berger concludes that “Writing teachers are not therapists, and writing, as therapeutic as it may be, is not therapy by other means. So teachers [should] try to focus on the craft.”

However, Berger goes on to say that “There is a case for delving deeper . . . when the darkness of the prose matches the student’s mood or behavior. A Sylvia Plath-like exploration of depression may be more alarming when it is matched by a Sylvia Plath-like withdrawal and deep unhappiness [in real life].”

Stephen King, who once wrote a novel called *Rage* that deals with a disturbed high school student taking a class hostage, discusses his own experience with a troubled student: “As a teacher, I had one student – I will call him George – who raised red flags galore in my own mind: stories about flaying women alive, dismemberment, and, the capper, ‘getting back at THEM.’ George was very quiet, and verbally inarticulate. It was only in his written work that he spewed these relentless scenes of gore and torture” (qtd. in “Critical”).

The University of Notre Dame’s William O’Rourke suggests how teachers might be able to divine whether a student writer truly is in need of counseling. “It is difficult for a teacher to think a young person is a monster, but it wasn’t so much Cho’s writing that has been exposed that showed that, but his lack of contact, his absence of speech, his signing his name as a question mark, his aloneness” (qtd. in “Critical”).

Please e-mail your thoughts on this important issue to me at tim.waggoner@sinclair.edu. I’ll collate your responses for a future newsletter so that we can continue this vital conversation.

Works Cited

Berger, Joseph. “Deciding When Student Writing Crosses the Line.” *The New York Times: Education*. 2 May 2007, late ed.: B7.

“Critical Mass: Creative Writing and the Virginia Tech Massacre.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education: The Chronicle Review*. 11 May 2007. 7 May 2007 <<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v53/i36/36b00401.htm>>.