

Teaching with

WRITING Across the Curriculum

wac.gmu.edu

Fall 2009

writingcenter.gmu.edu

One of the central concerns about teaching with writing that faculty across the disciplines express is how to deal with plagiarism. The focus of this issue is on helping students avoid plagiarism and steps to take when they plagiarize in spite of our best efforts.

Our WAC newsletter has a new name and a new look!

We're also online at:
wac.gmu.edu/program/newsletter

Writing Center News

Meet new Writing Center director **Anna Sophia Habib** on page 6

So far this year, the Writing Center:

- saw **1029** students, for a total of **2786** appointments;
- conducted **6** workshops in October with **over 80** attendees;
- The Writing Center is staffed by **over 25 graduate and undergraduate peer tutors**, who provide tutoring four days a week from 9:30-7:30, Fridays from 9:30-2:30, and, starting at mid-semester, Sundays from 11:30-4:30.

In Fall 2009, these students were selected to participate in the experiential course CHSS 390: Peer Tutoring in the Disciplines:

- **Jessica Brechick**, *English/History*
- **Kyle Ferrier**, *Government/Econ*
- **Brett Tank**, *Finance/Economics*
- **Romina Boccia**, *Economics*

And these former peer tutors were chosen as writing fellows:

- **Simone Erchov**, *Psychology*, in Comm 305 with Prof. Mark Hopson
- **Caroline Gergel**, *Biology*, in intro Geology labs with Prof. Guisepina Kysar
- **Katie Kane**, *English/Music*, in Music 332 with Prof. Tom Owens

Why Students May Be Confused about Plagiarism and How To Help Them Avoid It

See the pullout page inside for questions you might ask to decide whether students are deliberately plagiarizing or just don't quite understand the rules. You'll also find advice on ways to reduce the opportunities and the temptation for students not to do their own work.

Upholding Academic Integrity: The Writing Center Helps Educate Honor Code Violators

"Students who plagiarize will often receive a sanction of working with the Writing Center to better understand what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite appropriately. The goal of the Office of Academic Integrity is to educate students so that they don't violate a second time," according to director Donna Fox. *See p. 5.*

Cyber-Plagiarism and the Copyright Connection

Continued, rampant plagiarism of intellectual property via the Web (also called cyber-plagiarism) may result in an array of unintended societal consequences, in addition to the immediate and long-term personal ramifications defined by one's school, employer, or professional associates. Giving credit where credit is due will diminish the impact of plagiarism and foster a climate of balance between creators and consumers. *See p. 5.*

AND ALSO...

Peer Tutor and Writing Fellow Alums Report Professional and Personal Benefits

Undergraduates who had taken the one-credit experiential CHSS 390: Peer Tutoring in the Disciplines course within the past 10 years were sent a survey asking them about what communication and community skills—academic and interpersonal—they felt they had acquired through the experience and how they were applying these skills in their lives after college. All of the respondents gave glowing reviews, with several saying the experience played a role in their being awarded prestigious graduate fellowships and entry-level jobs requiring strong communication skills. *See p. 2.*

Noted Second-Language (L2) Writing Scholar Paul Matsuda Speaks at Mason

A well-known scholar of both second-language writing and sociolinguistics, Prof. Matsuda met with faculty across the disciplines to talk about best practices for working with L2 writers and also gave a well-attended evening presentation. *See p. 6 for story and strategies.*



Peer Tutor and Writing Fellow Alums Report Professional and Personal Benefits

MASON'S PEER TUTORS ARE EXCEPTIONAL STUDENTS AND WRITERS FROM AN ARRAY OF DISCIPLINES WHO HAVE BEEN INVITED TO TAKE THE EXPERIENTIAL PEER TUTORING COURSE, CHSS 390, WHICH ALLOWS THEM TO JOIN A STAFF OF PREDOMINANTLY GRADUATE TUTORS FOR UP TO THREE SEMESTERS. ALTHOUGH THEY ARE UNDERGRADUATES, THE PEER TUTORS WORK WITH THE SAME RANGE OF CLIENTS AS THE GRADUATE TUTORS DO, AND MANY GO ON TO WORK WITH PROFESSORS AS WRITING FELLOWS. TO UNDERSTAND MORE ABOUT THE BENEFITS THESE UNDERGRADS EXPERIENCED AS PART OF THE WRITING CENTER COMMUNITY, WE SENT SURVEYS TO 63 ALUMS FROM THE PAST 10 YEARS TO DISCOVER WHAT ACADEMIC AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS THEY FELT THEY HAD ACQUIRED AS TUTORS AND HOW THEY WERE APPLYING THESE SKILLS IN THEIR LIVES AFTER COLLEGE.

Peer tutors come to the writing center from fields as diverse as finance, biology, and anthropology, and they typically go on to continue work in those fields. Whatever their background, the 27 alums who responded to the survey said that their time in the program gave them skills that proved broadly applicable. Of the respondents, 88% said they used the skills they gained and the overall experience at the writing center in either the hiring process for employment or the application process for grad school.

AFRA SAEED AHMAD, A **PSYCHOLOGY** MAJOR AND HONORS STUDENT, SAID THAT THE EXPERIENCE "HELPED ME GET SELECTED FOR A FULBRIGHT. THE FULBRIGHT IS A PROGRAM WHICH PROMOTES MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN COUNTRIES, AND I MENTIONED IN MY APPLICATION THAT, IN MY HOST COUNTRY, I WOULD GIVE BACK BY TUTORING." Afra is now tutoring ESL students in the writing center at the University of the United Arab Emirates in Dubai, where, she says, she draws on past tutor training every day. Another former tutor from **anthropology**, **Alex Antram**, attributes the peer tutor experience to her being awarded a graduate teaching assistantship in anthropology because she "learned pedagogies that can be applied in teaching any discipline, including lesson planning, alternative approaches to instruction, and how to help unconventional students excel."

The peer tutoring experience proved beneficial in other professional environments as well. **Emily Kayser**, an **English** major who graduated in 2000, said that she still included peer tutoring on her resume because "in my experience, employers have a real desire to find people who are proven, efficient communicators." Former **religious studies** major, **Gillian Parish**, a 2004 alum, noted, "Even when I created my CV, it was informed by the kind of keen-eyed arrangement of material the writing center work fosters." **Ahriel Harris**, an **accounting** major who spent four semesters as a peer tutor and a writing fellow, wrote, "I've referred to my writing center experience as a universal skill

"I developed the ability to speak to different audiences with more confidence than I might have, which I use now in my work as a public accountant when I work with corporate accounting managers."

- Ahriel Harris
Accounting Major

set, one revolving around more than just the ability to process numbers." **Romina Boccia**, an **economics** major, said, "I was interviewed extensively

about my writing center work as I applied for a summer internship with a public policy institute. I also had a professor include it in his recommendation for me to attend grad school."

MANY OF THE ALUMS SAID THEY USE THE SKILLS THAT THEY LEARNED IN THE WRITING CENTER IN THEIR CURRENT OCCUPATIONS. TO ILLUSTRATE, **Shabnam Tehrani**, a **business** major who works as a financial analyst, wrote that the analytical skills she learned in her time at the writing center allowed her to "better analyze financial statements and catch mistakes," and even prepared her to "conduct meetings because of my enhanced communication skills." **Ahriel** also noted, "I developed the ability to speak to different audiences with more confidence than I might have, which I use now in my work as a public accountant when I work with corporate accounting managers."

All of the alums noted that their own writing skills improved overall. Many said they developed a greater awareness of how specialized disciplinary writing is in the context of the diversity of writing projects they saw in the writing center. As **English** major **Angela Panayotopoulos** put it, "Not only did I become even more familiar with the practicalities and writing rules, I also learned to be more attentive to different methodologies and the fundamental key components of academic writing, so my own style has been enriched." **Romina** credited at least part of her 2009 Hayek Award for the best essay in economics to her writing center training because of the critical eye she developed as a tutor.

ON A SCALE FROM 1 TO 5, WITH 5 BEING THE HIGHEST, ALUMS RATED PEER TUTORING AS A 4.7 IN IMPORTANCE IN THEIR OVERALL UNDERGRADUATE EXPERIENCE. IN EXPLAINING HER TOP RATING, **Tonka Dobрева**, an **international affairs** major, wrote that her experience "helped me connect with other writers, communicate and get feedback from them as well." In fact, while improved writing skills certainly had something to do with the alums' overall positive experience, the second largest role that the program played for them was in creating a sense of community. Tutors not only spent time with one another and with students seeking their help, but also were mentored by the graduate tutors. **Angela**, for example, said, "I found myself surrounded by a great team who were equally devoted to the tutoring task, and, for that reason, proved all the more inspiring. Everyone helped each other, and the atmosphere was extremely encouraging as well as instructive." **Alex** said "The writing center became my home away from home as an undergraduate."

It seems clear from the peer tutor alums' survey comments that the peer tutoring program is very much a success. **Sean Sullivan**, a 2004 **economics** alum who will earn an econ PhD and a JD degree from the University of Virginia this spring, put the general consensus into these words: "Working at the writing center greatly expanded the foundation of my undergraduate education, and what modest accomplishments I have since made have leaned heavily on that support."

Reported by Ben Wilkins, MFA TA/tutor

Why Students May Be Confused about Plagiarism and How To Help Them Avoid It

For students, source acknowledgement is often a murky, confusing process that varies from the popular world to the academic one, from high school to college, from one discipline to another, and from one classroom to another. Students are constantly learning new rules, relearning rules they misunderstood the first time, and adapting to increasingly complex writing tasks. It makes sense that they would sometimes make errors.

Widespread serious citation errors can create a document that is in effect plagiarized, even if the student didn't intend that outcome. Faculty must judge whether to report such students for cheating. Sporadic citation errors may indicate that a student is still learning the process. Faculty may choose to designate a grade penalty for such errors—as they might do for errors of fact or insufficient argumentation—without labeling such problems as cheating.

Here are some questions you might ask to decide whether students are deliberately plagiarizing or are still trying to figure out what needs to be cited, when, and how.

by Terry Myers Zawacki, WAC Director, and Shelley Reid, Composition Director

Are your students making serious citation errors, which may stem from misunderstanding?

- Might uncited material have seemed like “common knowledge” to the student? (What is considered common knowledge may vary from field to field and even teacher to teacher.)
- Might a student have misunderstood whether a particular source needed citing? (Some faculty tell students that textbooks, handouts, or commonly used sources do not need citing.)
- Might citation problems reveal a student unsure of when to quote and when and how to paraphrase? (Students in some disciplines are told that they don't need to quote phrasing that's five or fewer words or add citations more than once per paragraph.)
- Is some source material incompletely, inaccurately, or inconsistently documented, as might happen with poor note-taking, unfamiliarity with a new format, or carelessness?

Are your students deliberately plagiarizing?

- Did the student copy someone else's work and present it as his/her own?
- Did the student ask someone else to write the paper for him/her?
- Did the student purchase a paper or download one from the Internet?
- Did the student “patch write,” i.e., copy and paste passages from other sources without attribution?
- Did the student make up sources?

Plagiarism is cheating. It should be reported to the Honor Committee.

Help Students Avoid Plagiarism: Ways To Reduce Opportunities and Last-Minute Temptations

- Include in your syllabus an explanation of plagiarism and your policies on plagiarized work.
- Ask students for a proposal for their research and/or to commit to a topic early on.
- Discuss with students what their original contribution should be and what it might look like: source-material choice? synthesis? analysis? proposals? separate from or integrated with source material?
- Break your assignment into parts: prospectus, drafts, annotated bibliography, thesis, and rough outline.
- Give students clear guidelines for using, citing, and documenting sources. Ask students about their uncertainties and/or confusions about using sources.
- Spend time in class practicing how to paraphrase and document sources relevant to your field/assignment.
- Ask students for frequent updates on their research and research process.
- Require different kinds of sources such as two books, one website, three articles.
- Make time in class for students to write about one or more of their sources and how the source helps them develop their argument.
- On the day the paper is due, ask students to write about their research and writing steps, the writing choices they made about structuring the paper, and how they chose which sources to use.

Plagiarism websites you can use with your students

The effective prevention of plagiarism can make detection unnecessary. The resources below suggest strategies for reducing students' ability to plagiarize and some include interactive tutorials.

The Library at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. A compendium of links to websites on plagiarism prevention and detection. <http://library.uncc.edu/display/?dept=instruction&format=open&page=920>

Plagiarism Tutorials: University Libraries, University of Southern Mississippi. Interactive pre-tests, quizzes, exercises, and post-tests. <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php>

“Avoiding Plagiarism”: The OWL at Purdue University. Good explanations for students, examples, and exercises on “safe practices.” <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>

“You Quote It, You Note It!”: An interactive tutorial for students. <http://library.acadiau.ca/tutorials/plagiarism/>

“The New Plagiarism: Seven Antidotes to Prevent Highway Robbery in an Electronic Age” from *The Educational Technology Journal*. <http://www.fno.org/may98/cov98may.html>

For additional sites and information on plagiarism prevention, see Mason’s WAC site at <http://wac.gmu.edu/supporting/plagiarism.php>

Upholding Academic Integrity: Writing Center Helps Educate Honor Code Violators

WHILE THE MAIN FUNCTION OF THE OFFICE FOR ACADEMIC INTEGRITY MAY APPEAR TO BE TO PUNISH students caught in the act of cheating, its mission statement explicitly states that its goal is to “promote and support academic integrity throughout the university community by educating its members, fostering an environment where students can be recognized for high levels of integrity, and upholding the university honor code through a student based honor committee.” This mission works to everyone’s benefit, Donna Fox, Associate Dean in the Office for Academic Integrity, explained, as the task of “promoting and supporting high standards of academic integrity on campus” involves educating students about Mason’s standards and what exactly constitutes academic dishonesty. “In many cases of plagiarism, the student simply does not understand what it is,” Fox said. “We always hope that students will act with great integrity. But, in those cases where there is a lapse in judgment, our Honor Committee can impose sanctions that stress the importance of integrity.”

“Plagiarism is the most common type of charge that is brought to the Honor Committee for review,” according to Fox. “Students who plagiarize will often receive a sanction of working with the Writing Center to better understand what constitutes plagiarism and how to cite appropriately. Our goal is to educate these students so that they don’t violate a second time. Over the last academic year, no student

who worked with the Writing Center was found guilty of a second violation. This tells me that the association between my office and the Writing Center is working effectively!”

A wealth of information and resources for faculty and students, along with a link to the Writing Center, is available on the Academic Integrity website: <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/>.

Reported by Brian Fitzpatrick, MA TA

Steps to take if you suspect an Honor Code violation <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/proceduresforms.php>

- Report suspected violations to the Honor Committee in a timely manner.
- Fill out an accusation packet. They can be found on the Academic Integrity website.
- The Honor Committee will promptly notify the involved student(s) in writing.
- A five-member panel of Honor Committee members will meet with both the student and the person(s) reporting the alleged offense.
- If the student is found responsible, a sanction or sanctions will be determined by majority vote of the panel.

Library Corner: Cyber-Plagiarism and the Copyright Connection

EVER SINCE HUMANS HAVE BEEN WRITING, IDEAS HAVE BEEN REDISCOVERED, REWORDED, REWORKED, OR reinvented and claimed as one’s own. That is, credit to the original creator has been occasionally overlooked or ignored by an idea perpetrator. Eventually the term “plagiarism” evolved to encapsulate this theft. Not a weighty crime equal to more heinous offenses, like kidnapping. . . but wait! The Latin word *plagium* actually means “the crime of kidnapping” (OED), so the concept of plagiarism has etymological roots in a crime of theft.

What does plagiarism have to do with copyright? Copyright law extends legal protection to a creation that meets basic criteria—it must be an expression that’s original (but not necessarily unique) and fixed in some medium so that others may experience it. As the word denotes, copying a work is a right, among others, awarded the author or creator of that work. For example, when an individual uses or “copies” information from a book—through direct quote, use of a concept, or paraphrasing—without acknowledging the original author, that action is called “plagiarism.” One is stealing intellectual property that legally belongs to another.

Accessibility to music, film, text, images, and more via the Internet has made the act of plagiarism easier than ever, although certainly no more legal. Copyright law does not take into account the form of a work, only its content. Consequently, the law protects the content on a website the same way it protects text read in a printed book, music heard on the radio, or art viewed in a museum. The difference is in digital accessibility, not tangibility.

Continued, rampant plagiarism of intellectual property via the web (also called cyber-plagiarism) may result in an array of unintended societal consequences, in addition to the immediate and long-term personal ramifications defined by one’s school, employer, or professional associates. These consequences have already emerged in twentieth-century legislation governing control over creative freedom.

Copyright duration has extended to the lifetime of the author plus 70 years, with further extensions a real possibility. Appropriate decisions for a fair use of content (a section of the law that allows one to use portions of in-copyright material for non-commercial purposes without permission of the owner) are constantly being challenged by rightsholders, to the point of inanity (YouTube posts are a case in point). Although these consequences may stem from an underlying greed, rightsholders’ concern for their lack of control over digital content is real and deeply felt. At the same time, consumers are fearful of using copyrighted content without permission, and this fear inhibits research, education, and the creation of culture, among other things. The inexorable march toward criminalization of digital creativity may be throttled by responsible and ethical use of intellectual property. Like the daily actions we take in minimizing the impact of global warming through recycling, bicycling, or opening a window, our decisions to “give credit where credit is due” will diminish the impact of plagiarism and foster a climate of balance between creators and consumers. More importantly, our sense of self-respect will grow.

[The work of Lawrence Lessig was an inspiration for this brief article.]
by Claudia Holland, Head, Copyright Office

Meet New Writing Center Director Anna Sophia Habib

IN FALL 2009, ANNA HABIB BECAME ACTING DIRECTOR OF THE WRITING CENTER WHEN TERRY ZAWACKI CHOSE TO STEP down from the position she'd occupied for more than 10 years. Terry continues to direct the WAC program and co-chair writing assessment, and she's also an associate professor in the English Department.

Anna, in her previous role as associate director, managed the complex and wide-ranging operations of the writing center with skill, pedagogical expertise, and an inclusive managerial style, no small achievement in a center that employs over 25 graduate tutors and peer tutors at any given time and sees an average of 2300 students a year for approximately 4500 appointments. A former tutor and teaching assistant herself, Anna has had the opportunity to experience writing center work from this perspective as well and so has expertise as both a tutor and a writing teacher.

In her new role as acting director, Anna oversees writing center operations at four locations, and she works closely with other academic programs, the libraries, University Life, Career Services, the English Language Institute, and other units across campus. In the fall semester, **writing center collaborations** included:

- Joining with the instructional librarians to place library staff at the writing center and vice versa several days a week;
- Developing a new peer-tutor course to support University Life and Project LEAP living-learning initiatives;
- At the request of the China 1-2-1 program, offering grammar workshops focused on the needs of Mason's multilingual writers;
- Running workshops with Broadside reporting and editorial staff on the basics of news writing, journalism fundamentals, and AP style;
- As part of the National Day on Writing celebration, partnering with Career Services to provide a seminar, workshop, and one-on-one tutoring sessions centered around resume and cover letter writing; and
- Continuing to offer a semesterly series of workshops on the Research Process, How to Build an Argument, How to Make your Essay Flow, Grammar Bootcamp, and Writing Personal Statements for scholarships and graduate school.

A Mason alum, Anna completed both her undergraduate degree in English and her Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing (nonfiction) and is currently working on a memoir titled *A Block from Bliss Street*, recalling her experiences growing up as a child of the Lebanese civil war. In addition to her new role, Anna continues to teach as a term faculty member in the English Department.

Reported by Jessica McCaughey, MFA TA/Tutor

Noted Second-Language (L2) Writing Scholar Visits Mason, Oct. 2009

ON OCTOBER 8, PAUL KEI MATSUDA, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF LINGUISTICS AND L2 WRITING AT ARIZONA STATE University, met with faculty and staff from across the curriculum, the English Language Institute, and the writing center to talk about best practices and the research on working with writers from diverse language backgrounds. His evening presentation, "World Englishes and the Teaching of Writing," drew an audience of nearly 100 students and faculty, reflecting the wide interest in this topic and mirroring the concerns, in our increasingly globalized university, of the sponsors for Matsuda's visit: The English Language Institute, The Provost's Office, Professional Writing and Rhetoric Program, Linguistics, Writing Across the Curriculum, and the School of Management.* Following are a few of the many **points of interest** from Prof. Matsuda's visit:

- Students often acquire the specialized terminology of the discipline more quickly than sentence syntax.
- It is easy to forget that multilingual students have to work much harder than native speakers just to get to a base level of writing competence. When teachers put a strong emphasis on correctness, these students may not feel confident enough to express the knowledge they possess.
- Different disciplines and workplaces have different levels of tolerance for grammatical errors, so we don't always know what their definitions are for "good writing," especially for L2 writers.

Some **strategies to try**:

- To see how students have matured as writers over the course of the semester, ask them to respond to the same in-class discipline-based prompt at the beginning and end of the course. Students can also compare their responses and reflect on the improvement they see.
- Use examples/models when giving an assignment. Use several strong examples so the students understand that they have choices as writers.
- Reflect on your own experiences as writers and readers, and keep in mind that it takes time to develop these skills.

* Matsuda's talk is available on DVD to the Mason community upon request to Terry Myers Zawacki at tzawacki@gmu.edu.

by Judy Hadley, GRA in Linguistics

TEACHING WITH WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The George Mason University WAC Program Newsletter

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