Our Fall issue focuses on using e-technologies to teach writing across disciplines; we also include descriptions of the latest tools available on the Read/Write web and some possible applications for your courses.

NEWS FROM THE CENTER

This Fall, the Writing Center will have seen:
- **1150 students**, for
- **2150 appointments,** including
- **570 ESL students**, who had
- **1240 appointments.**

New WAC Website Launched: http://wac.gmu.edu

We're proud of the clean new design of our WAC site, created by Robb St. Lawrence, and of several new features on the site.

Check out "Faculty Resources" and "A Culture of Writing" (under "Program Info").

Speaking of Mason's writing culture, our WAC program has been ranked for the seventh year in a row among the **top 23 programs for Writing in the Disciplines** in the *U.S. News College Issue* (2009)! We are one of only nine public institutions making the list in the company of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Duke, and others.

WRITING HISTORY ON WIKIPEDIA: STUDENTS CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE IN COLLABORATIVE SPACE

by Mills Kelly, History and Center for History and New Media

Not long ago, the faculty in the History Department at Middlebury College banned (or at least tried to ban) their students from using Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org) as a source for history essays. Leaving aside the question of whether or not banning a web resource might actually work, plenty of professors, regardless of discipline, would agree with the goal of encouraging students to veer away from malleable sources such as Wikipedia. *Why then, you might ask, do I require students in virtually every class I teach to write for Wikipedia?*

The first and most important reason is that, unlike my colleagues at Middlebury, I make the assumption that my students will use Wikipedia no matter what I say. Given that reality, I've decided to meet my students where they live academically. One thing I've learned from using this assignment over the past three years is that few students understand just how malleable Wikipedia is. When they complete the assignment I describe, every one of my students understands how the most popular online information resource actually works.

The other reason why I want my students to write for Wikipedia is that I want them to

AN AUDIENCE AND STYLE TRANSITION: FROM PAPER WRITING TO ONLINE PRESENTATION

by Kamaljeet Sanghera, Applied Information Technology

In IT 103, students learn that writing for the Web is different than writing on paper. Web readers scan for information on websites; they do not read every single word posted on a web page, so the writing and presentation style must change when the audience is accessing information online. The goal of our course project is to teach students the difference between web writing and more conventional writing.

In IT 103, a general education course offered by the Applied Information Technology department, students are assigned one large project, which is divided into two parts: part I is a research paper and part II is a website for the research paper. Students first write four to six pages on any new development in the information technology field that they find interesting or potentially beneficial. They include a title page with the GMU Honor Code statement indicating that it is the student's original work, newly created for this semester. A bibliography page includes at least four references relevant to research, three of which must be from different source types. The paper is graded on quality of resources, analysis, integration and conclusion, citation, mechanics / style, and organization and structure.

WRITING HISTORY ON WIKIPEDIA ... *continued from page 1*

understand the difference between an encyclopedia, a scholarly monograph, and a primary source – a distinction that escapes many of them when they first arrive in my classes. There is nothing like writing in a particular form to understand that form, and so by the end of the semester they at least know that an encyclopedia is not a primary source, nor is it particularly scholarly.

Finally, I use the assignment as a way of opening up a discussion about the construction of knowledge in public space. *What does it mean when information is produced collaboratively? How might we assess the "wisdom of the crowd" as compared to the wisdom of credentialed (or uncredentialed) experts?* Given the reality that more and more information available online is produced, at least in part, with input from the general public, I want my students to begin to grapple with what these issues might mean for their own work as scholars.

My assignment is actually rather simple:

• Each student must select a topic from the past that either does not have an entry in Wikipedia or is only represented by a minimal entry (a "stub" in Wiki-speak). If they are working with a stub, they must substantially elaborate the entry that they have chosen. I let them choose the topic of their entry because I want them to write about something they actually care about, rather than something I might assign to them. This approach also has the merit of forcing them to do some research on Wikipedia to see what is and is not covered already.

• Each entry must have sources (otherwise the Wikipedia bots delete it within minutes), each entry must link to other related entries, and the students must also edit those related entries to link back to the one they have created. I ask them to insert a graphic as well, but have made this part of the assignment optional because the Wikipedia syntax that governs images is often daunting for many of my students.

• Once their entry is created, they are enjoined from editing it further. Instead, their task during the course of the semester is to sit back and watch their entry, observing what does (or does not) happen to it. Is it edited heavily? Is it deleted for being insufficiently notable (a standard of evaluation in Wikipedia)? Does anything happen to it at all? And if so, what might the students make of those changes?

• The concluding activity of the semester is a brief essay on what my student-authors have learned about writing for Wikipedia and about the construction of knowledge in a collaborative public space. These essays are often rich with frustration – "How could my entry have been deleted?" or "Why would someone make those changes to what I wrote?" But sometimes they are filled with joy. The happiest of my students is one whose entry ended up on the Wikipedia homepage as the featured entry of the day. If she remembered nothing else about my course, that particular student would remember that for one day something she wrote was viewed by millions of people. Her entry, by the way, was on David and Catherine Birnie, husband and wife serial killers in Australia.

WRITING-INTENSIVE FACULTY ACROSS 5 COLLEGES AND 11 DISCIPLINES PARTICIPATE IN FIRST TAC/WAC LEARNING COMMUNITY

by Sarah Baker, Assistant WAC Director, & G. Morgan, TAC Director

This Fall, Mason's *Writing Across the Curriculum* (WAC) program is collaborating with the *Technology Across the Curriculum* (TAC) program on a semester-long faculty learning community to explore approaches for incorporating technology when teaching Writing-Intensive (WI) courses.

Faculty participants first attended a full-day summer workshop that introduced them to the goals of the learning community and focused on discussing such issues as their learning and writing goals for students, challenges encountered in teaching with writing and teaching with technology, and successes with both writing and technology, as well as an overview of various technologies to use with writing. Starting in September, these faculty met biweekly to read about writing in disciplines and to discuss new technologies that they themselves are trying out (a wiki, a blog, Facebook, Delicious, Twitter, Blackboard, and others). The goal is to help them determine which ones fit with the disciplinary writing and learning goals they have for students

in their WI courses. However, the participants' final projects are intended to benefit not just the students in their courses but also colleagues in their departments who can also benefit from using technology to facilitate writing in their courses.

In response to a reflective exercise that asked faculty, among other things, to describe one thing they have learned in the group that they believe will help improve how they teach student writing, **Shannon Davis** (Sociology) explained how she has "been reminded of the importance of being transparent about the writing process with my students." **Paul Cooper** (Chemistry) adds that he has "become really conscious of trying to engage the students…. My main attempt at this is through real life examples so they can relate the material they learn to the real world." And **Esperanza Roman-Mendoza** (Spanish) frames what she has learned in the group more broadly: "Thanks to our discussions and readings… I was thrilled to see that we all share the same concerns and challenges on

the subject of student writing, like … the need to constantly adapt our expectations regarding how students take advantage of what we think is a more innovative, productive, and rewarding way of learning."

In January 2009, Sarah Baker and G. Morgan will be presenting on this collaborative learning community at the Educause Mid-Atlantic Regional Conference.

TAC/WAC faculty learning community participants:

• *Lynn Constantine* (Art)
• *Paul Cooper* (Chemistry)
• *Shannon Davis* (Sociology)
• *Sue Durham* (Nursing)
• *Tamara Harvey* (English)
• *Giuseppina Kysar* (Earth Science)
• *Kimberly Leighton* (Philosophy)
• *Tamara Maddox* (Computer Science)
• *Chris Parsons* (Environmental Science & Policy)
• *Larry Rockwood* (Biology)
• *Esperanza Roman-Mendoza* (Spanish)
• *Lesley Smith* (New Century College)

WEB 2.0 TOOLS FOR TEACHING WITH WRITING

by Rick Reo, Instructional Designer, DoIT/LSS

Web 2.0 or the **Read/Write Web** are popular terms used to describe a pattern of web technology innovation and mass adoption of free, easy-to-use tools and services that has spurred novel ways of social interaction beyond those of the 20th century "read-only" Web. Here I want to identify a few of the lesser-known Read/Write Web (R/W) web tools with interactive writing features, which can, when combined with good pedagogy, provide the potential to foster writing skills. My focus will be on R/W web tools and associated environments with strong text-based interactivity that are not explicitly designed for writing growth. *Wikis* and *blogs* are obvious examples of this kind of R/W web tool, but let's look at some less familiar tools.

Social Media archive sites like *Flickr.com* (photos), *YouTube.com* (video), *Odeo.com* (audio), *Slideshare.com* (Powerpoint), or *imeem.com* (all media types) combine content management and social networking structures to provide a personal media- sharing environment that supports the merger of multimedia capabilities, especially textual communication through annotation, keyword/tags, descriptions, comments, and group discussions. Each of these tools supports various levels of user interactivity that can be used to construct a personal or professional multimedia document. For example, Levine has collected 50+ R/W web tools that could be used to mix media to tell a story (http://cogdogroo.wikispaces.com/StoryTools).

In addition, *Flickr*, which supports a feature that allows users to annotate photos, also has a slideshow feature that can easily turn a collection of annotated photos into a digital story, or a piece of technical documentation. Personal audio/video production, such as made possible through *YouTube's* easy-to-use video hosting service, or *Odeo*, holds the potential to work with students on audio/video script writing. The social networking aspect of these R/W web services also provide a forum for critique and commentary on people's publicly posted audio/video creations. Students can also be taught how to develop an "idea of audience" through designing a podcast series.

Micro-blogging tools like *Twitter.com* or *Tumblr.com* are designed to enable micro-interactions in the form of brief personal updates or shared information. *Tumblr* supports a wide range of media types to communicate or create "Tumblelogs" as you can see in this example from the Tumblr staff: (http://tumblelog.marco.org/).

Twitter is a real-time short messaging service that only uses text - a single Twitter text post or "tweet", as they are called, is limited to 140 characters; however, links or attachments to other media formats are possible. Twitter can be used like Instant Messaging as real-time back channel in a live classroom or conference to share links, notes etc. among participants across multiple networks and devices. Or, Twitter can be used more asynchronously, like email, to communicate a person's momentary thoughts or activities publicly. Micro-blogging tools may offer interesting applications for interactive writing assignments either as a text-based conversation or mobile journaling tool. See a Sci-fi story example: http://twitter.com/zombieattack

VoiceThread (http://voicethread.com) supports multiple media formats to create a reciprocal one-to-many interactive environment with learners. This tool allows people to leave comments using voice (mic or phone), text, audio file, or video (via a webcam) or combinations of all five ways. I have used it in my online teaching to embed audio comments on student assignments, and the tool enables the students to easily record an oral response back to me, or to choose one of the five other ways to comment. In addition to its affordances for faculty-student or student-student interaction, it has applications for collaborative projects and mobile learning.

In addition to facilitating collaboration and providing alternative means of communication between peers, these tools encourage students to become more conscious of the pressure that ideas like audience and genre exert on their writing.

Want to know more about varieties of *blogs*? We recommend the following "Informal Taxonomy of Blogs," generated by *Doug Eyman* (English):

http://pwr.gmu.edu/blogs.html

A RUBRIC FOR GRADING BLOG ENTRIES

by Mark Sample, English

My class blog is a space for students to be reflective, and to explore tentative thoughts about the significance and interpretative possibilities of specific texts. Posts, I tell them, should "strive to be thoughtful and nuanced, offering questions and insights rather than descriptions or summaries." To help students get a feel for what counts as an excellent blog post, I give them the following rubric. Feel free to adapt this for your class.

Rating & Characteristics

4 - Exceptional. The journal entry is focused and coherently integrates examples with explanations or analysis. The entry demonstrates awareness of its own limitations or implications, and it considers multiple perspectives when appropriate. The entry reflects in-depth engagement with the topic.

3 - Satisfactory. The journal entry is reasonably focused, and explanations or analysis are mostly based on examples or other evidence. Fewer connections are made between ideas, and though new insights are offered, they are not fully developed. The entry reflects moderate engagement with the topic.

2 - Underdeveloped. The journal entry is mostly description or summary, without consideration of alternative perspectives, and few connections are made between ideas. The entry reflects passing engagement with the topic.

1 - Limited. The journal entry is unfocused, or simply rehashes previous comments, and displays no evidence of student engagement with the topic.

0 - No Credit. The journal entry is missing or consists of one or two disconnected sentences.

SAFE ASSIGN AND TURNITIN: A COMPARISON OF TWO PLAGIARISM-PREVENTION SERVICES

by Susan Campbell, Learning Support Services, DoIT

Note: Beginning in the next academic year, SafeAssign will be the only online plagiarism-detection tool Mason supports.

While some plagiarism may be deliberate, often it is unintentional and occurs for many reasons, including students' forgetting to keep track of sources; not understanding the distinction between quoting, paraphrasing and expressing original ideas; lack of clarity about how to cite sources; cultural differences between our country and others or between generations about what constitutes plagiarism; and so on.

Pinpointing where papers might require citations provides useful feedback to students. Plagiarism-prevention services, designed to do this automatically, support a multi-faceted approach to teaching students about plagiarism. Turnitin and SafeAssign, currently available for use by faculty, students and staff at Mason, provide this service.

While many faculty are already familiar with Turnitin, SafeAssign is a newly available tool that is currently integrated with the university's existing Blackboard subscription. This means that SafeAssign is accessible to faculty even in existing Blackboard courses.

Access. While Turnitin requires a student to create a profile before obtaining an account, students access SafeAssign by logging in to Blackboard using their Mason email user names and passwords.. To access SafeAssign, instructors must log in to Blackboard, open a course folder and under the *Build* tab add either the content link "*SafeAssign*" to allow students to submit papers or "*DirectSubmit*" to submit the papers themselves. Instructors may obtain a Turnitin account by sending a request from a Mason email account to Susan Campbell (scampbel@gmu.edu), the campus Turnitin Administer.

Originality Reports. Both Turnitin and SafeAssign services allow instructors or students (at the instructor's discretion) to submit papers electronically for specific assignments. Instructors may opt to submit all final papers themselves or check them on a case-by-case basis. Originality reports, generated after comparing papers with Web content, archived student papers and database sources, show possible plagiarism occurrences. The reports do not eliminate the need for instructors to review matches to verify attribution errors because matches occur with quoted material and information considered common knowledge.

File Formats. Turnitin accepts files from students in the .doc (Word 97-2003), .docx (Word 2007), .html, .txt, .rtf, .pdf or .eps format while SafeAssign accepts files in the .doc, .docx (added with 9/27/2008 software update), .html, .txt or .pdf format.

Archives. Student paper archives for both Turnitin and SafeAssign contain data on papers submitted previously by users of these services. Both services offer a way to exclude student papers from their student paper archives. Turnitin provides assignment settings that instructors may change to keep student papers out of the database available to all other Turnitin users. SafeAssign lets students opt out of adding their papers to the SafeAssign Global Database at the time of submission. In this case, the student papers are added only to an institutional database.

LIBRARY CORNER

by Scott Watkins, Library, Head of Educational Services

Check Out New Interactive
InfoGuides (http://infoguides.gmu.edu)

Students in need of research assistance have a new set of tools at their disposal. This fall, Mason Libraries announced the launch of *InfoGuides*, a set of online resources designed to facilitate the research process for students seeking information in particular academic disciplines. *InfoGuides* will replace the static subject guide pages that the Libraries have previously maintained on the Web with more dynamic and interactive content that is developed and maintained by subject specialist librarians.

InfoGuides are meant to help alleviate the problem of not knowing where to look for information on a subject, by collecting and organizing numerous useful resources in one location. A student who is not sure how to begin looking for information on a subject can start by consulting that subject's InfoGuide. Currently, there are about *100 different guides available*, and development is ongoing.

In addition to their information content, *InfoGuides also provide a number of interactive features for users,* such as the ability to chat with librarians in real time, subscribe to e-mail alerts, participate in
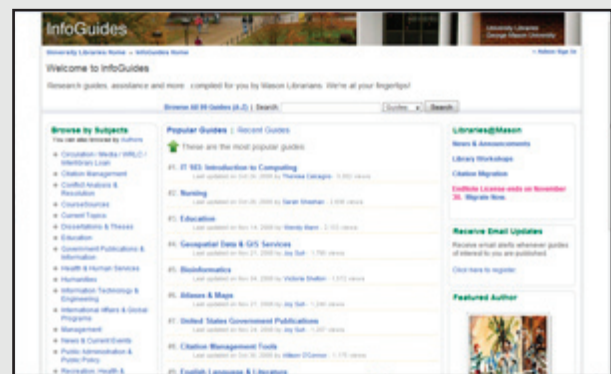
polls, rate resources, and leave comments inside guides.

JC Library expands to Writing Center: research and writing are two components of academic work that go hand in hand and, beginning this semester, the Johnson Center Library is partnering with the Writing Center to provide expanded writing and research assistance to students. Students can get help with finding appropriate resources, navigating the library's databases and e-journals, citing sources correctly, quoting and paraphrasing, and more. Writing Center tutors are in the JC Library on Thursdays from 3:30-4:30 pm, and library staff is on hand at the Writing Center on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 3:00-4:00 pm.

A STYLE TRANSITION FROM PAPER WRITING TO ONLINE PRESENTATION

For part II of the project, students publish the research paper on the Web. The presentation format and audience must now change. Students learn to make decisions relevant to their writing and their content as their class instructors are no longer their only audience. The content will now be publically available on their websites i.e. *http://mason.gmu.edu/ ~username*. These websites may be viewed by their friends, parents, and anyone interested in their topics. Although students are required to incorporate into the websites their instructor's feedback, part II is not designed to expand on the research but to modify/revise content as appropriate for a web audience.

Even though the Internet, the World Wide Web, copyrighted text/images, and browsers are discussed in many lectures, these topics are specifically targeted in XHTML lectures and labs. Students learn how to code in the XHTML markup language and publish papers on the Mason website.

The requirements for Part II of this project include:

Homepage – The title page of the research paper becomes the homepage. Students who have created a homepage for another class usually create a link to their IT 103 title page.

Web pages – The research paper is not presented in one long document on the web site. Instead, students effectively organize their content into relevant web pages that are easy to read and navigate, using hyperlinks to access details. Students rearrange the content so that the first sentence of a paragraph summarizes the entire paragraph. Students also have to create appropriate headings for these web pages. The headings must be detailed enough so the web page reader knows what to expect from the page. Users should be able to access any page and start reading from anywhere on any page.

List – This requirement involves reading the research paper and chunking significant ideas into ordered or unordered lists.

Navigation Menu – For the navigation menu, students insert a table at the top or along the left side of each page. The table contains links to other web pages. The navigation menu effectively enhances the accessibility of the website. This requirement also teaches students the importance of a consistent layout, as they must ensure that the navigation menu can be found in the same location on every page.

Images – A web page without an image is visually unappealing. However, an image which is not relevant to the content is meaningless. In IT 103, students are required to have at least one relevant image on one of the content pages. The image can be created using Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, MS Paint, or other graphics software, and it can be a digital picture taken by a student or clipart downloaded from a public domain. If the clipart is copyrighted, students must get permission from the copyright holder and must indicate that "the permission is received" in their bibliography page.

Bibliography page – The bibliography page contains all references cited in the research paper. In addition, it includes the clipart references and original artwork references.

Other than these basic requirements, the student's overall grade depends on his/her website layout, the effective use of space, consistent format, navigation scheme, and the appropriate use of colors, backgrounds, and fonts. Sometimes students take their websites to the next level: applying cascading style sheets, creating forms, and making wikis and weblogs. Students are evaluated on how successfully they have met all of these assignment objectives and the appropriateness of the page for the intended audience.

As writers, students learn to write succinctly for the web while making sure that each page is complete in and of itself. Because each page must be its own entity, redundancy may occur. Students learn to use more action words, to include subheadings, to avoid over-subdividing the content, and to use the inverted pyramid style for paragraphs. They break up text into bullets, include relevant images to support their research, and organize text into tables. Finally, students must pay close attention to their grammar and spelling to maintain the credibility of their websites.

Aarush Bhutan's IT 103 website (Used with permission.)

W**RITING** C**ENTER** W**ORKSHOPS** P**ROVE TO BE A** B**IG** S**UCCESS**

The Writing Center's series of semesterly workshops continue to be well attended. A total of sixty undergraduate and graduate students from across the disciplines attended our research and writing workshops. And, in its second year, the personal statement workshop, presented by personal statement tutor Judy Adkins, was a resounding success with over 70 attendees. Judy is a TA in the Post-Graduate Fellowships and Scholarships (PGFS) office assigned to the writing center. *All workshop presentations are available under "Resources" on the writing center's website: http://writingcenter.gmu.edu.*

JC L**IBRARY** P**ARTNERS WITH** W**RITING** C**ENTER**

For details on this expanded service, see Library Corner. To celebrate our partnership, the JC Library instructors hosted a Peanut Butter and Jelly party in the library atrium during midterm week. For further information, contact either Kelly Jeon at kjeon@gmu.edu, or Anna Habib at ahabib@gmu.edu.

W**RITING** C**ENTER** T**RAINS** S**PANISH** W**RITING** T**UTOR**

With support from the Provost's Office and led by Prof. Rei Berroa, the Spanish department has partnered with the writing center to train writing tutors for students writing essays in Spanish.

P**OETRY ON** D**EMAND AT** F**ALL FOR THE** B**OOK**

For the third year, writing center tutors hosted a "Poetry on Demand" booth for the audience attending the literary festival. Tutors wrote short haikus and limericks for passers-by who filled out a questionnaire about the content and audience for the poem they demanded.

W**RITING** C**ENTER** S**TAFF** P**RESENT AT** IWCA C**ONFERENCE**

Associate Director, *Anna Habib*, and graduate TA/tutors *Moriah Purdy* and *Ryan Call*, presented a panel at the 25th International Writing Center Association Conference on how writing tutors position themselves as readers of non-native students' writing and writing in the disciplines. Their papers will be posted on the writing center site:
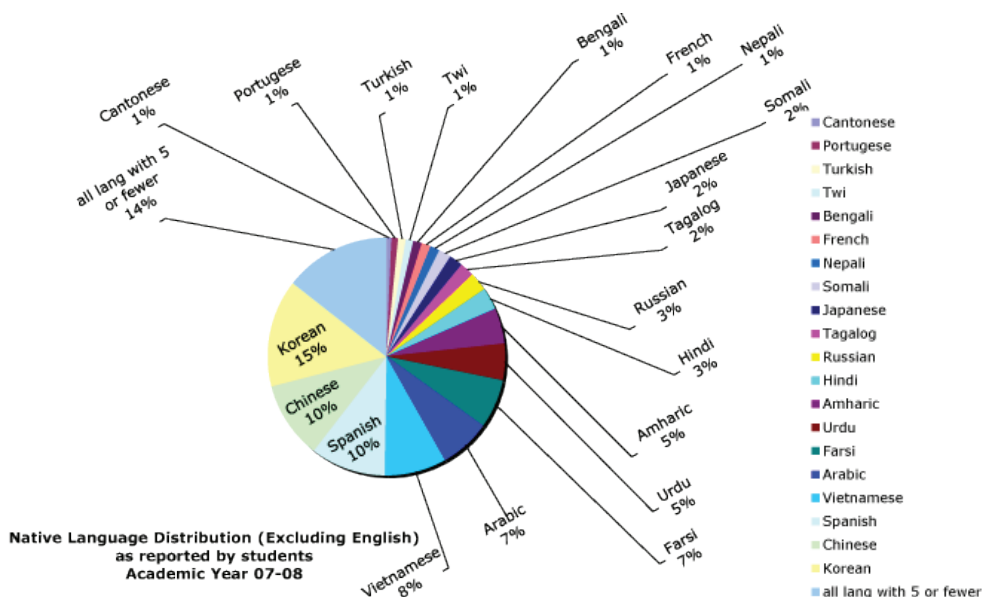**http://writingcenter.gmu.edu.**

W**HAT** A**RE THE** L**ANGUAGE** B**ACKGROUNDS OF THE** ESL C**LIENTS** W**E** S**EE?**

Native Language Distribution (Excluding English) as reported by students Academic Year 07-08

W**ELCOME TO OUR** P**EER** T**UTORS FROM** A**CROSS THE** C**URRICULUM**

- *Romina Boccia*, **Economics**
- *Carolyn Gergel*, **Biology**
- *Nya Jackson*, **Mason Topics Peer Tutor, Public Administration**
- *Claire Love*, **History**
- *Louise Tavey Martin*, **Administration of Justice**
- *Cait McPherson*, **Anthropology/ Archeology**
- *Gordon Ramsay*, **Spanish writing tutor**
- *Scott Silverstain*, **Accounting**
- *Annie Stickney*, **Mason Topics Peer Tutor, Global Affairs**

C**ONGRATULATIONS TO** O**UR** W**RITING** F**ELLOWS**

- *Mike Dupuy* (**Engineering 107/ English 101 with Professors Jeffrey Leaf and Kenneth Thompson**)
- *Tamara Rouse* (**HHS 201: Careers in Health Professions with Professors Thomas Henderson and Emil Chuck**)
- *Shamama Moosvi*, **Undergraduate Research Apprentice with Terry Zawacki and Anna Habib.**

*News from the Center is reported by **Anna Habib,** Assistant Director of the Writing Center*