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Words from the Director

Waiting Out Winter and Recessions

It seems as though I have never known a time when there wasn't snow on the ground. I'm sure all of you empathize when I say that both my personal and my professional life have been turned upside down by the volume of snow, the snow days, and the time spent shoveling, plowing, and blowing snow when you really need to be responding to papers. I know that at my wife's school they spent an extra week just trying to complete midterm exams. I keep worrying, too, that all this snow is going to break most towns' budgets for snow removal. There's just no money to be had.

Unfortunately, we're all feeling the impact of tight budgets. Amazingly, the CWP has been able to maintain a steady quantity of professional development contracts last year and this, but the revenue from those contracts is way down. Districts just don't have much money budgeted for PD, and so we find ourselves doing fewer days and more half days per contract, and for less money, too, as superintendents and principals are forced to negotiate for reduced rates to meet their tight fiscal constraints. Sadly, this will most directly impact our programs for students, which are funded by professional development revenue. *Connecticut Student Writers* will still be published for this, its 23rd year, and we will hold Recognition Night on May 10. But the biennial Student and Teacher Writing Conference will have to be placed on hold for an upcoming year, and the Academy for Young Writers at Saint Joseph College will not be held for the first time in more than a decade.

But all news coming out of the CWP office is not bad. Several TCs from the 2007 SI were published along with a couple of the Program Leaders and myself in an NCTE book. A short article I wrote for UConn's alumni magazine has gotten some good buzz for the CWP, and two TCs at EO Smith High School were featured on an NWP audio podcast. All of these are featured in greater detail inside, with links. We've also been encouraged to submit proposals for graduate internships, placing fifth year education students with TCs for their inquiry projects, which broadens the scope and influence of the CWP upon the training of pre-service teachers.

As the saying goes, recessions end, and so we know a time will arrive when revenue will improve and we will be able to restore these student programs, or some modified version of them. In the meantime, we will have to wait out the recession the way we will have to wait out this winter. As you do so, take a look or listen to the publications I mentioned above, and mention the CWP to your administration!

Doodle-Mania: An Interview with Karen Romano Young

Karen Romano Young is a Connecticut author with a wide range of interests that she funnels into her writing. Young has published everything from young adult novels to a children's science series, and her most recent graphic novel, Doodlebug, is earning nation-wide recognition, including being named as one of the Kirkus Reviews Best Children's Books of 2010.

(E-mail interview with Ms. Young by Jessica Mihaleas)

JM: You publish books in such a wide range of young adult fiction topics. What keeps your inspiration flowing? What propels the leap from young adult novels to, say, your Science Fair Winners series?

KRY: I started my career writing nonfiction for Scholastic Magazines. We had to write to deadline every week on every topic from politics to show business and everything in between. I quickly learned that the people I liked talking to most – and whose stories I liked telling most – were scientists. They are such adventures, and the worlds they explore are so beautiful, detailed, and exciting...But all this is a roundabout way of getting to the answer to your question, which is that I follow stories that intrigue me, whether they're made-up stories in my head or real ones that I hear about. I've never been able to settle on any one topic, and writing allows me to follow my nose in this way.

JM: When did you start playing with the "Doodle" idea? Have you always been a "doodler?"

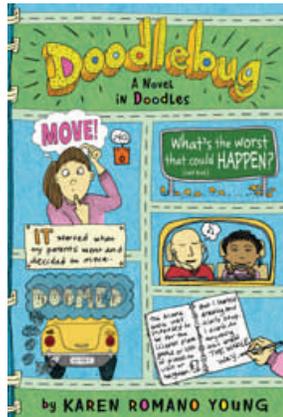
KRY: Yes, I have. I learn best and feel best when I'm drawing. I never thought I had that much ability, but I do have comedy on my side...So one day I decided to try, for something called March Madness, a novel-in-a-month thing a friend started. You can try anything if it's for a finite amount of time! And that's how Doodlebug came to be. Like Dodo, the heroine of my book, I started drawing and I didn't stop.

JM: How is creating a doodle novel different from drafting a written novel? Is the process more fun, more stressful, more creatively demanding?

KRY: It's really, really different. None of my novels has been written in order until Doodlebug...With Doodlebug, I went slowly, moved forward in a straight line, and didn't go back to the beginning and revise. As I worked, I would stop and just work on a picture or lettering in order to consider my next move, always keeping in mind the new threads I was adding to my story...Often I had no idea what I was going to do on a page until I just started doing it. Interesting, terrifying way to work.

JM: Your "Bowhead Doodle" won the CWP's Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest prize for nonfiction. Can you talk a little about the experience that influenced your piece? What made you decide to "doodle" about it?

KRY: The Bowhead Doodle is one of my Humanimal Doodles, a series of handwritten and illustrated articles about humans and animals. It was created this July, after I came home from Barrow, Alaska...As luck would have it, the big celebration of the spring whale hunt took place during my time in Barrow, and this story – about the people who hunt bowhead whales – grew out of it. I used the doodle-writing method to write it because it lets me show the story visually as well as in words, and there was so much about that time that was compelling visually! It also allows me to present the main points of a story – in this case, the major questions about it – in a clear and concise way.



“Often I had no idea what I was going to do on a page until I just started doing it. Interesting, terrifying way to work.”

(Karen Romano Young Interview Continued)

JM: What sort of message, lessons, or influence do you hope kids take away from your work?

KRY: To ask questions. That's what immediately comes to mind. Take Doodlebug. Doodlebug is the story of Dodo, who demands a different response to her way of learning than was offered by her old school, where she got in trouble because of her energy level and interaction with her teacher. She asks herself what she can do to make things better, and the story takes off from that.

And, with the Humanimal Doodles, I'm trying to pose key questions about situations such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill or the crisis situation walrus are in because their ice floes are disappearing due to climate change.

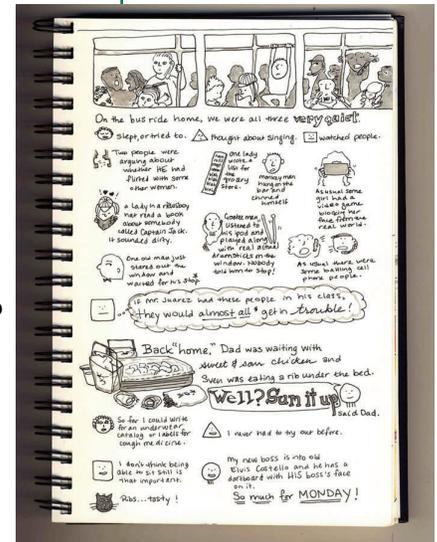
JM: Which venue do you like working with more: doodles or typical novels?

KRY: I love it all.

JM: What advice can you offer kids (or adults!) who are hoping to one day publish their own work?

KRY: Do what you must, do what you love, and don't give up. Push yourself, and push back against anyone who tells you no, including yourself.

For more information on Karen Romano Young and her books, visit www.karenromanoyoung.com



National Writing Project Conference

At this year's National Writing Project Conference, held on November 18, 2010 in Orlando, Florida, Jason Courtmanche, Denise Abercrombie (SI 07), Jane Cook (SI 07), Jessica Cullen, and Kaylee Czajka participated in a roundtable discussion concerning K-12 Writing Centers. Members of the CWP team were well received as they discussed work from a range of schools with student-staffed writing centers. CWP Director, Jason Courtmanche, shared the growing success of CWP's collaboration with the UConn Writing Center in creating student-staffed writing centers in area schools. Denise Abercrombie, Co-Director of E.O. Smith's Writing Center with Megan Magner (TC 2009), explained E.O. Smith's unique peer editor training course, its use of wikispace and cultural outreach programs, as well as the writing center's history with UConn's Writing Center and the CWP. Jane Cook shared her experience working with a Windham Middle School teacher to successfully create an inspiring writing center in a priority district. Jessica Cullen and Kaylee Czajka discussed effective training strategies for students and teachers in student-staffed writing centers in a range of schools throughout Connecticut. The team answered many questions and was inspired by the new ideas shared from writing center directors throughout the nation.

Upcoming Events

Feb 5: 9:00 AM Connecticut Student Writers Reading Day

Feb 8: 5:00 PM Leadership Council Meeting

Feb 12: 9:00 AM Turning Inside Out & Outside In: The Poetry of Social Commitment

Feb 16: 4:00 PM Packing a Punch with PowerPoint

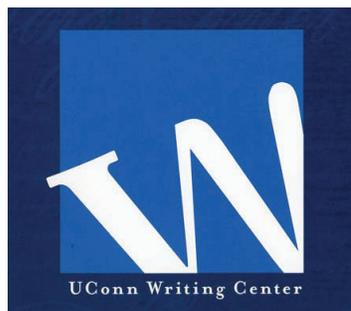
Feb 26: 9:00 AM Use Writing Territories as a Way into a Research Paper

**University of Connecticut Writing Center Earns CCCC
Recognition**
by Jessica Mihaleas

Due to their outstanding performance, UConn's Writing Center has been awarded the 2010-2011 Writing Program Certificate of Excellence from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). The CCCC is the largest and most important professional organization for teachers and researchers in writing studies. As proud Writing Center director Tom Deans explained to me in an email, "Last year only one writing program in the country won [the Certificate of Excellence]; fewer than 30 programs in the U.S. have won it since 2004."

In their announcement concerning the award, CCCC noted that the University of Connecticut Writing Center "was chosen as an exemplar for a large public university." Aside from congratulating the Writing Center on their dedicated staff and tutoring practices, the award selection committee was especially impressed with their "pro-active...desire to reach out to high schools and to forge alliances in other ways."

The Writing Center's award serves as a tribute to all the hard work and effort of students and staff alike. This recognition bolsters the impact of the Writing Center's mission on the University as well as in the area high schools where they have established model writing centers with the help of their partnership with the CWP. To all University Writing Center affiliates, congratulations! To all high school and middle school writing centers, keep up the good work!



E.O. Smith Writing Center Update

On November 4, 2010, the E.O. Smith Writing Center was featured in a program broadcast by the National Writing Project Radio (NWP). Teacher Consultants Denise Abercrombie and Megan Magner had the opportunity to discuss E.O. Smith's Writing Center and its tremendous success over the past two years. Listen to the entire program at

http://www.blogtalkradio.com/nwp_radio/2010/11/04/teachers-and-writers-together-part-2-writing-centers-and-writing-projects or check out the National Writing Program website to learn more about writing centers at <http://www.nwp.org/>

An Interview With First Year Professor Kisha Tracy

“The best way to become familiar with a new system is trial, error, and, hopefully, success.”

1. Thus far, what challenges have you faced as a first-year professor?

One of the most difficult challenges has been learning the needs of the students at my new university. Each school has a different culture and type of student body, and it takes a while to adjust to what kinds of instruction and responses work best. In particular, writing courses require a period of adjustment to assess student skill levels, attitudes, and willingness to work. In addition, every university has a unique philosophy of composition. Fortunately, I have experience in several systems and, thanks to the Connecticut Writing Project, a background in critical thought on composition pedagogy, which has made me flexible in my approaches to instruction. It still, however, takes time to adapt, and I have tried to use this first semester to learn from my colleagues and my students.

2. What (if anything) have you learned from your involvement with CWP that you now apply to your classroom or professional routine?

Several techniques as well as ideas! First, I have never considered myself to be particularly effective with peer conferencing or other related activities. However, after experiencing workshopping at the Institute, I have developed new approaches and attitudes to apply to encouraging my students to work together to improve their writing. In particular, I have started using “response groups” as opposed to “peer groups,” which has changed both how my students participate in the revision process and how I present it. The other major aspect of my involvement with the CWP that has altered my classroom has been my recent inclusion of wikis into my courses. Receiving training and practical experience in wikis during the Institute led me to choose to incorporate them into my syllabi. So far they have been successful, both as a pedagogical tool and a device to help students communicate and share impressions of their writing and texts. The discussions in the Institute concerning the idea of “digital immigrants” and “digital natives” have helped me to design ways to explain the technology of wikis to a wide variety of skill levels.

3. What, personally, did you take away from your experience in the Summer Institute? Did it help prepare you for your first year as a professor?

The Institute gave me a renewed enthusiasm for teaching writing. I had been teaching college writing for quite some time as a graduate student and adjunct, while I still enjoyed it, there are always certain frustrations with these types of courses. By taking the Institute, I was able, first of all, to express those frustrations in a professional environment designed for this purpose. I also had the time to focus on developing new strategies, picking and choosing what would work in my own classroom. As a result, by the time I started my first year as a professor, I was ready to try fresh projects and strategies, thereby increasing my own interest in teaching composition in a new setting. Another benefit to participating in the Institute is that it was a review and an introduction to critical vocabulary, which helped me in multiple committees.

4. Do you have any advice for soon-to-be professors?

My first piece of advice is not to assume that your new school will have the same pedagogical philosophies as your previous one. Be flexible, and be willing to adapt your courses to a new environment. You will do yourself a disservice if you walk into a position with a list of techniques or practices that you will not consider. Along those same lines, do not be afraid to try something. I have found the best way to become familiar with a new system is trial, error, and, hopefully, success. Finally, learn as much as you can from talking with colleagues, from engaging scholarship, and from acquiring as much practical experience as possible.

Early History Project Update by Jessica Mihaleas

History, Progress, and Influence

Last year, the Connecticut Writing Project at Storrs began collecting information for its comprehensive Early History Project, an effort encouraged by the National Writing Project to chronicle the history, progress, and influence of this organization over the years. With specific interest in the years prior to 1991, the days before federal funding, undergraduate intern Ben Miller set out looking for CWP success stories armed with a goal, a long list of questions, and an even longer list of people to contact. Ben collected valuable accounts and reflections from longtime CWP participants Lynn Hoffman (SI '91), Barbara Campbell (SI '84), and Pamela Baril (SI '91). This year, CWP's new undergraduate intern, Jessica Mihaleas, followed in Ben's footsteps with a new list of questions and a mission in mind. She got in touch with Sheila Murphy (SI '84), Steven Straight (SI '90), and Leta W. Marks (SI '84). Each of these individuals spoke of their early days with CWP as unique, eye-opening experiences, and many insist their involvement began their careers as great writers and teachers.

Hoffman took a specific interest in the CWP after "the NWP was referenced in a language arts textbook I was using for one of my graduate courses." She took the initiative of enrolling in the CWP at Storrs' Summer Institute program and was accepted off the alternate list in 1991. Hoffman steadfastly remembers her goal in mind: "I am a writer first and a teacher second. I wanted to learn more about the craft of writing and the art of teaching it."

Straight's experience with CWP began on the other side of the program; as a graduate student, he worked as the editor of this very newsletter. He remembers the tedious tasks of typesetting and pasting pages by hand in Arjona, the old site of the CWP office. When he finally applied and was accepted to the Summer Institute in 1990, Straight "found it, as most do, wildly time-consuming and great fun. My presentation was in using poetry in teaching science, as I recall." As for his sustained involvement with CWP over the years, Straight remarks, "I enjoy nothing more than sitting with committed teachers talking about teaching. It is an art, teaching, and you can never quite get all of it. I learn as much as I teach at the CWP."

Marks, now a retired teacher from Bloomfield High School and University of Hartford, participated in the one of the first Summer Institutes in 1984. She notes the experience "changed my life personally and professionally," as it virtually opened the doors to her writing and teaching career. "Professor Sheidley," the first director of the CWP, "inspired me and helped me with obtaining a position as a T.A. and began my academic work."

For the Aetna Awards Night held on October 29, 2010, the CWP at Storrs' Early History Project was on display alongside traces of other early UConn English Department publications. The display highlighted select quotes from the Early History Project's gracious contributors and included issues of the Summer Institute journals from as far back as 1982—CWP's very beginning. These testimonies serve as a reminder to everyone, in this busy, budget-crunched world, that professional and intellectual development are important tools that go hand-in-hand with great results in both personal and classroom progress.

Aetna Awards Night

by Sean Forbes

The University of Connecticut held the 21st-annual Critical Writing Prize Program on Thursday, October 28, 2010 at the Konover Auditorium.

The Aetna writing in the discipline awards are awarded based on academic categories. Aetna Chair of Writing and Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor Lynn Bloom welcomed award winners and other guests, announcing that there were more awards given this year than in any past year. The program began with just one award in 1894, Bloom said, for freshman English. That number has grown ever since, and in addition to the growth in numbers, Bloom also said the essays are growing in length and depth.

Director of the Connecticut Writing Project, Jason Courtmanche, honored the fourteen 2010 Summer Institute Fellows: Karen Adrián, Laureen Lemire Anthony, Daniel Blanchard, Dara Bowling, Erin Caouette, Erin Haddad-Null, Della Hennelly, Eleisha LeMay, Janet Thouin Lussier, Joan Muller, Tiffany Smith, Melanie Tokarz, Kisha Tracy and Emily Wojcik. Every year since 1982, the CWP has invited outstanding teachers from all disciplines and levels of instruction to participate in a Summer Invitational Institute on the Storrs campus. The Summer Institute provides teachers with the opportunity to study current composition theories, to share their expertise, and to compile their own original writing portfolio. It is where teachers come to improve their writing in order to improve the writing of their students.

Additionally, Courtmanche awarded prizes to the winners of the Teacher-Consultant Writing Contest. The winner for the poetry category was Steve Straight (SI '90), for his poem "Panning: June 1, 1980." Four honorable mentions in poetry were awarded to Denise Abercrombie (SI '07) for her poem "This Poem is on Strike," Dara Bowling (SI '10) for "How I Discovered Poetry," Sheila Murphy (SI '85) for "Rondeau for Tom: Black and White," and Kisha Tracy (SI '10) for "Young River." The winner for the fiction category was Jon Andersen (SI '09) for his short story "Freewrite." Honorable mention was awarded to Stephanie McKenna (SI '05) for her short story "Hungarian Thighs." In the nonfiction category, there were two first prize winners, Erin Haddad-Null (SI '10) for her piece "Perennial" and Karen Romano Young, a local writer who has worked with the Connecticut Writing Project for many years, for her graphic short story "Bowhead Doodle." Award winners read excerpts from their winning pieces. Each of these pieces, along with one creative piece from each of the fourteen 2010 Summer Institute Fellows, were published in *Teacher, Writer: No Unexpressed Thoughts*. The awards and the journal honor those teachers who, while sacrificing their own time in order to teach and inspire their students, still find the time to pursue their own creative talents and interests.

Links

Jason Courtmanche's article detailing the hardships faced today by public school systems suffering from budget cuts uses his son's school, Windham Center School, to explore the consequences that arise from a lack of funding. Read the article online at: <http://www.uconnmagazine.uconn.edu/fwin2010/feature1.html>

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) published *What is College Level Writing?* in 2006, and in response to its vast popularity, have released a second edition that focuses on "practical aspects of teaching writing: assignments, readings, and plenty of examples of real student writing." The book has an online companion website that features an article co-authored by Jason Courtmanche, Denise Abercrombie (SI 07), Jane Cook (SI 07), Becky Caouette (SI 02), Kelly Andrews-Babcock (SI 05), Tara Achane (SI 07), Ginny Bitting (SI 07), Dale Griffith (SI 00), Marcy Rudge (SI 07), and student Lindsay Larsen. View their section, entitled "Writing on the Same Page: Teaching Writing from Kindergarten through College and Beyond" at http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Books/CollegeLevel2/Courtmanche_final.pdf

For more information about *What is College Level Writing? Volume 2*, visit <http://www.ncte.org/books/collegelevel2>.