

University of Missouri-Kansas City-Composition E-Newsletter

Editor: Lauren Obermark

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A Note from the Editor

Welcome to Issue 12 of the Composition E-Newsletter. We are certainly concluding this year with a strong edition that will hopefully give all of us lots to think about as we relax over the summer, and perhaps think about classes we are teaching in the fall. The four writers in this edition are each sharing pieces of their experience at the 2008 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC or 4Cs), which took place this April in New Orleans, Louisiana. As you will see, each shares a different aspect of the conference, making it clear that this is certainly an experience any writing teacher could benefit from!

First, **Kristin Huston** discusses how valuable CCCC can be even if you don't consider yourself a "rhet/comp" person. Then, **Cynthia Knight** articulates how a panel inspired her to consider making archival research part of her composition pedagogy. **Glenn North** extols the valuable connections and learning experiences for poets attending CCCC. And, finally, **Katie Manning** reflects on how CCCC panels forced her to reconsider the multi-faceted identities that her students bring to the writing classroom. Ultimately, once you take in all these stories, you'll hopefully finish this newsletter inspired to attend next year's CCCC in San Francisco—it truly is an experience that offers so much to *all* attendees!

Feel free to contact me with feedback, questions, or concerns you may have about this issue. And, on that note, this will be the last edition of the Composition E-Newsletter I will be editing. It has been a fun and exciting learning experience acting as editor this year. I thank anyone who takes the time to read this fabulous publication, and I especially thank those who have been kind enough to submit great articles. We'd have no newsletter at all without those fantastic folks!

Happy Reading,

Lauren Obermark-Assistant Director of Composition
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Composition Program Announcements

Sosland Teaching Awards for Writing Instructors

All adjunct writing teachers and GTs are invited to apply for the English Department's Sosland Teaching Awards by preparing and submitting teaching portfolios by **June 2, 2008**.

By preparing a teaching portfolio and applying for a Sosland Teaching Award, you are not suggesting you are THE BEST teacher in the composition program; instead, your portfolio should demonstrate your interest in teaching and your commitment to becoming a reflective practitioner. Your portfolio might contain a statement of your teaching philosophy, sample student papers, typical assignments, student evaluations, excerpts from teaching journals, and just about anything else that you feel best represents your important work in the composition classroom. Teachers who have been recognized in the past have done more than assemble an

archive of classroom artifacts; instead, they have demonstrated their efforts to think critically about their own classroom practices.

Deborah Minter and Amy Goodburn's book on teaching portfolios, *Composition, Pedagogy, and the Scholarship of Teaching*, offers wonderful suggestions about constructing a teaching portfolio. Copies are on closed reserve at Miller Nichols Library. Check under Jane Greer's name at the circulation desk.

The portfolios of experienced and new teachers (less than two years in the classroom) will be evaluated in separate categories. Awards may be as high as \$1000.

Why You Should go to CCCC, Even if Rhet/Comp is Not Your Primary Discipline

By: Kristin Huston (knbd7f@umkc.edu)

I admit it, even though my research and teaching interests lie primarily on the literature side of the English discipline, I have a warm fuzzy spot in my heart for composition. I love teaching composition, I love taking rhet/comp classes, and I love being involved in the Composition program here at UMKC. So, going to CCCC really is a no-brainer for me. It's a fun conference, you meet lots of great people, and you get to go to a mind-blowing amount of really interesting panels on an expansive variety of topics. But even though I knew what a great time I would have at CCCC in New Orleans this year and that I would be able to see a wide variety of panels, I did not anticipate how nicely one of those panels would dovetail with my own research interests.

Among the many fabulous panels I went to this year, I attended one at 8:00 a.m. called "Biomedical Meltdown: Sites of Change in Healthcare." This panel was focused on rhetoric pertaining to disease. One of the three presenters was, ironically, ill, and unable to attend and, when I showed up to the panel, there was only one other audience member there. A few other people trickled in, but because we were such a small group, we were able to have a fairly intimate discussion of the presenters' papers, rather than a more traditional panel where the presenters talk at you for a specified amount of time and then you are permitted to ask questions.

The presenters, Lu Ellen Huntley of UNC Wilmington and Mary Cardinale of Utica College, were both engaging and interesting. Dr. Huntley began the session by asking us what we thought about when we thought of health insurance and used our responses to segue into her paper which dealt with the medical coding used by insurance companies to determine whether or not they will pay for your claims. She argued that these codes, despite the fact that they are numbers associated with diseases, are rhetoric, and that the more we know about these codes, the better we can understand how this rhetoric shapes our interactions with the insurance company. Mary Cardinale examined how the female body has been composed in advertisements for medicines, like those that treat osteoporosis. Cardinale began with Bakhtin's theory of the dialogic and also examined advances in neuroscience to help us understand the ways in which we understand these images as rhetoric.

I left this panel completely blown away and inspired. Because my own research focuses on how the female body is represented in nineteenth century literature, art, and medical texts, I had specifically chosen to attend this panel in the hopes that it would be relevant to my research. I was not disappointed! I took extensive notes during both of these presentations and later that

day I started to muddle through those notes and make sense of how what they said, especially Mary Cardinale, related to my own work.

The main thing that I took from this panel, though, was not a greater sense of modes in which I could pursue my own research, even though that was definitely present. It was, instead a sensation that CCCC is a valuable tool, no matter what your discipline interests, to expand your horizons and engage in conversations that will challenge and shift your notions when you look at your own research. Not only was I able to attend panels that helped me think about what I do in the classroom (both the literature and the composition classrooms), but I was also able to uncover ideas that will have a lasting impact on my future research and my dissertation! If you have been hesitant about applying to, or going to, CCCC, thinking that you're not really a "rhet/comp person," I would strongly encourage you to lay that aside and go! You will be amazed by what you can learn!

CCCC Inspires Archival Ambitions for Composition Pedagogy

By: Cynthia Knight (csk7cf@umkc.edu)

The CCCC in New Orleans was incredible! It was inspiring to see so many instructors, who share the same passion for teaching composition, gathered together. I feel rejuvenated from the conference, and full of ideas to incorporate into the composition classroom.

One particular session that I attended inspired me to think about adding archival research into my pedagogy. The session was "Literacy as Resistance for Portuguese Americans, African Americans, and Japanese Americans." The panel included UMKC's own alumni Paige Van Osdol from the Ohio State University, Columbus, presenting "'We have climbed, and will continue to climb': The Epideictic Rhetoric of School Yearbooks as a Strategy of Resistance;" Kate Vieira from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, presenting "Entre Nos: What New England's Portuguese-language Press Can Teach Us about Immigrant Literacies at the Turn of Two Centuries;" and Mira Shimabukuro from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, presenting "Writing 'Quiet Americans': Japanese Americans Talking Back during Mass Incarceration."

Each presenter was passionate about her topic, and I was struck by the vested relationship between each researcher and her archival research. While I understand that all three presenters are PhD students, I remember sitting in the audience and wishing that I could capture a tiny portion of the pride and ownership of research exhibited by Van Osdol, Vieira, and Shimabukuro and infuse my own students in the composition classroom with that kind of zeal.

I believe that introducing archival research into the composition classroom through a spiraling pedagogy could inspire an enthusiasm in students regarding their own projects. While college composition students do not have the ability or time to travel for their archival research, there are many new databases, such as *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*, available through our own Miller Nichols Library, which will allow students full text access to periodicals from the 19th century. According to Mark Turner in "Time, Periodicals, and Literary Studies," periodical archival research will allow students an eye into "socio-historical processes." In turn, I believe that throughout the semester students can continue to build upon that initial archival research with each successive essay.

Clearly, the panel presentation by UMKC's own Paige Van Osdol and her two peers revealed unique and brilliant rhetorical research; however, as a composition instructor attending the CCCC, I not only left with informative information about their research, but I also left with ideas for a new archival based research pedagogy for my composition students.

All This and Poetry Too: A Poet Finds Community at a Composition Conference

By: Glenn North (gand36@umkc.edu)

I have to admit it, when I decided to attend the Conference on College Composition and Communication, it was strictly for professional development. (I should also admit that I was excited about making the trip to New Orleans!) I knew that I would find information and resources to help me reach my goals as a composition instructor, but I didn't think I would find much there in the way of poetry, which is my field of study. Upon receiving the massive (350+ pages) conference program, I saw that there were numerous sessions, programs, activities, etc. for poetry and other genres of creative writing. As I mapped out my schedule, I made plans to attend the "(Spoken)Words and Actions, Documentary and Performance session," the "What We Really Value in Contemporary Poetry" session, and "The Twenty-First Annual Poetry Forum." In the "(Spoken)Words" session, I met Quincy Scott Jones of Arcadia University, who offered some intriguing insights concerning Spoken Word Pedagogy in academia. In the "Contemporary Poetry" session, I was amazed to learn about the efforts of Michael Theune of Illinois Wesleyan University and Bob Broad of Illinois State University to implement empirical research methods for mapping the values of contemporary poetry. I even had the opportunity to share some of my poetry at the "Twenty-First Annual Poetry Forum." After the forum, I stayed up into the wee hours of the night with several extolling the virtues of verse. We exchanged contact information and vowed to keep in touch.

However, it was the "Poetry Slam and Social Justice" session that resonated with me the most. It was there that I met spoken word artists/activists Asia Rainey of the New Orleans Outreach program and Asali De Van, Director of the Akoben Poetry Festival. These two very talented and highly motivated women are demonstrating how poetry and the spoken word can inspire youth, build community, and cultivate artistic responsibility. For instance, the Akoben Poetry Festival has numerous initiatives including the *Youth Poetry Project* in which poets make themselves available during the week of the festival for in-class and assembly performances for any New Orleans area school which submits a request; The *Katrina Memorial Monument* in which poets, with the assistance of a local architectural firm, will design, build, and erect Katrina Memorial Monuments at the sites of the levee breaches and the Morial Convention Center; and *Project Innocence*, a program that calls for poets to commit hours of research and administrative support to a local community agency dedicated to the overturning of wrongful convictions. Ultimately, the festival becomes a way to catapult poets into action.

With New Orleans as the location of the conference, seeing up close and personal that this city, full of our fellow citizens, is still reeling from the storm, the need for social activism, volunteerism and plain old brotherly love became achingly evident. To that end, I am exploring the possibilities of attending the Akoben Poetry Festival in the fall. I left Louisiana inspired, revitalized and excited about becoming a more active participant in next year's 4Cs conference. There is a community there that I want to be a part of. As a member of that community I want to work toward exploring ways in which writing instruction can create better citizens. It is so important that we be about the business of equipping our students to become stronger writers but as I once heard English 225 instructor, Shelia Honig, express, of what value is that training if it can't "help us in the business of living?"

CCCC: Reflecting on Student Identities

By: Katie Manning (kdm7cd@umkc.edu)

After last year's CCCC, I wrote about my happiness at finding an atmosphere that was inclusive and friendly to creative writing and about my joy at connecting with scholars from UMKC and elsewhere. This year's CCCC was just as exciting as last year's conference for these reasons and more. I know I will remember many things about this trip to New Orleans—getting stranded by the street car with Kristin and Henri, watching a tattooing for the first time in my life, eating beignets daily—but I will also remember that this year's conference created a new challenge for me. I attended two panels that spoke to students' identities in ways that I hadn't deeply considered before, but that will forever affect my teaching.

The first of these panels included presenters from UMKC, Cynthia Knight and Muffy Guilfoil, as well as a former UMKC professor, George Williams. Their panel was entitled "Teaching Writing through the Lens of the Body: Disability in the Composition Classroom," and they spoke from their personal experiences with students who had physical and psychological disabilities. This panel made me realize that I will have students in my classes who may be hiding a disability—from minor hearing impairment to severe bipolar disorder to autism. Such students may have a variety of reasons for withholding this piece of their identity, but this is not the point. The issue is that I, as an instructor, need to create a safe space in my classroom where disability can be openly discussed rather than remaining a taboo topic. Perhaps I can take more time on the first day of a course to discuss options for disabled students and welcome them to talk with me privately. Also, I need to be conscious of the individual students in my classes. Even if I knew the disabilities that some of them bring into the room, I couldn't respond to any disability with a one-size-fits-all method. I need to be sensitive to the needs of the specific students who are in front of me. Is this an impossible task? In some ways, yes. I know that I will never be able to meet all of my students' learning needs perfectly at all times, but I can certainly try to be aware and to employ a variety of teaching methods and writing assignments to reach my students wherever they happen to be.

The other panel that greatly affected me was called "Exploring Student Diversity, Gender, Religion, and ELL." The first speaker, Julie Myatt, shared pieces of her dissertation that explore how representations of students in films affect real students' perceptions and identities. She concluded her presentation with the question: "What narratives of student identity are you privileging?" The other speaker, Heather Thomson Bunn, presented a piece of her dissertation as well, which explored religious identity in the composition classroom. She surveyed writing professors and Christian students at a secular university to find out what assumptions these groups had about each other, religion, and composition. She shared one African American student's comment that continues to haunt me; the young woman said something close to this: "I know my race is acceptable in my writing, but my identity as a Christian is not. Why do I have to leave out that part of myself?" Bunn claimed that anxiety is the immobilizing force here: students feel nervous about judgment, and teachers are desperate to avoid a religious debate. She also concluded her presentation with a challenging question: "Why are we choosing to allow or leave out certain identities?" This panel made me think about the student identities that I may privilege or silence in my classes. Race and gender are great in class discussion and writing, but what about sexuality or religion? To go back to the previous panel I discussed, what about

disability? Should these experiences and identities be equally valued as topics for discussion, writing, and critical thought in my composition classroom?

I'm still pondering all of these things myself, so forgive me for not having tidy answers and pedagogy tips just yet. I do hope that my reflections on these panels might challenge other instructors to evaluate their own assumptions about student identities, to readjust ideas of inclusiveness, and to find ways to welcome the complex students they find in front of them each semester. Feel free to email me to further discuss and brainstorm about these things!

Department Calendar

Please visit the English department website for the calendar of current events:
www.umkc.edu/english/calander.