



Logo by Terry Dolson

# Richmond Writing Across the Curriculum Newsletter

Issue 27, December 2010

## SPRING 2011 WRITING WORKSHOPS

*Writing Like a Spider:  
An Introduction to Web 2.0*  
5:30-6:45 pm January 24th

What is Web 2.0 and how can you be the spider and not the fly? This workshop, led by Lee Carleton, will briefly review the history of the Web as a foundation for exploring the exciting new tools available that build on skills you already have. From blogs to social networking sites to mobile devices and cloud computing, we will survey basic navigation and practical academic applications of Web 2.0

*Blogging: Impressing General & Academic Readers in 350 Words*  
5:30-6:45 pm February 7th

Anyone can write a blog. Getting readers to respect a blogger's work is another matter. Joe Essid, author of the blog "In a Strange Land" about the use of new technologies, especially games and virtual worlds in teaching, will share tips for attracting readers. He will also discuss how he teaches students to alter their personal style to blog for the hardest audience of all: college professors. Topics will include writing good titles, pitching a "nut graph" to an editor, tagging blogs, using images to good effect, and more. No prior experience with blogging is required.

*What DO Professors Want? A Roundtable Chat with Writing Consultants*  
5:30-6:45 pm Monday February 28th

Join a group of undergraduate experts: writers and Writing Consultants, as Joe Essid moderates a discussion between them and the audience. The students will share their tips for writers and the audience will have many opportunities to ask questions about common faculty "Pet Peeves," ways to save time, methods to avoid writer's block, and other topics.

*Wikis for Writing and Drafting:  
Collaboration on Steroids*  
5:30-6:45 pm March 21st

"Wiki-wiki" is the Hawaiian phrase for

"very quick" but speed of editing is not the only advantage to using a wiki for writing, drafting and collaboration. In this workshop Lee Carleton will review some of the more popular wiki sites, the basics of how to use each one, and what features can significantly empower your composition whether you are working alone or collaborating with a group.

## CONSULTANTS WRITING...

### The Prompt

by Jerry Giordano, Writing Consultant

All writing begins with a question. What do you, the writer, want to argue? What do you want to explain? What do you want to express? The college writer reflects on the posed question, or conducts relevant research, or both, and then engages in a response. Sounds simple, right? Wrong. Yet that type of thinking is often the norm and gets a lot of students, and professors, into trouble.

Writing assignment prompts can be deceptively complicated and require careful reading. As a Writing Consultant, I get an upset stomach when I realize that the writer misread the prompt. My response is always the same. I guide the student through the prompt, asking what each word signals, and their face will gradually go blank with the realization that they did not answer the question as they ask, "Do you think I need to start all over?" I try not to cringe as I squeak out, "That might be a good idea."

In the Eng. 383 class, all Consultants learn a strategy for assignments unclear or confusing to a writer. First, we focus on abstract terms that state a task, such as "analyze closely" or "compare." Next, when a writer and Consultant remain confused, the Consultant lets professors know that writers will seek direct advice from them.

It is absolutely a student's responsibility to carefully read their assignments to ensure that he or she avoids that foul situation, but with the surprising frequency of these incidents, I had to ask, why is this happening? In Eng. 383, we were instructed that understanding the language of the prompt is crucial to developing a strong response. How can you write a thoughtful answer if you do

## Announcements

Happy Holidays! We want to thank everyone for an impressive semester, with Writing Consultants assigned to more classes than at any point in the program's history. Despite the end of all but a few sections of Eng. 103 and all sections of Core, we remained very busy at the Center as well, with, as of the end of November, 243 Writing Center reports sent to faculty.

While work with Consultants in FYS classes will need adjustment in the coming term, we are confident that the Consultants and writers will learn more about the writing process through regular meetings with faculty and writers. See Joe Essid's final piece in this issue for advice on managing communication in classes.

### ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT TERM

Over the winter holidays, we will work on faculty & Consultant assignments for spring. Note that those not submitting the required forms make a lot more work for us; the forms, on the other hand, track into an easily organized spread sheet.

We'll soon put out an e-mail with the URL for the preference form.

For faculty who are currently working with first-year seminars and will continue with FYS in Spring, unless you state otherwise you will be assigned the same Writing Consultant(s) you now have.

not understand the question? Understanding requires more than close reading, and I have noticed that the prompts assigned to students are sometimes poorly worded, confusing, or make premature assumptions about what a student might know.

For instance, let's pretend a professor assigns an essay question about racism and sexism in America. The prompt reads, "Explain how sexism and racism in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* shape Sethe's identity." Note that the prompt does not explicitly state that the writer ought to draw comparisons or make connections between racism and sexism, even though some professors may expect that and grade accordingly. While an essay test question usually specifies the expected type of response with words like "define" vs. "explain," writing assignment prompts tend to make more assumptions about how students will answer.

I believe that the quality of writing in this campus could significantly benefit from a cooperative effort between students and faculty to both interpret and craft writing prompts more analytically. No doubt, faculty should hold students accountable for carefully reading writing assignment prompts, but writers should also take responsibility for asking faculty when a prompt seems unclear.

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## **Richmond Writing Center & Community Impact**

by Lee Carleton

***"Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with some of our staff, share your knowledge, and host us for lunch. Not only did we gain a lot of valuable information, but the student Consultants came away from the visit filled with inspiration."***

These words of thanks were recently sent to us in a card written by Lindsey Leeth on behalf of the Wildcat Writing Center of Deep Run High School in Glen Allen. This expression of gratitude is certainly encouraging but it represents something more - the positive impact our Writing Center can have in our community.

Sometimes the results of our work do not come in a celebrated publication but rather in more subtle ways like the ripples that emanate from a stone dropped in a pond. The ripples in this case come from UR alumna Elizabeth Jones (now Elizabeth Berry) and her participation in our WAC program that enhanced her preparations for teaching.

Elizabeth's experience in our program motivated her to write a grant to start a writing center at Deep Run. They received the grant and their center is now a reality. The central mission of the Richmond Writing Center may not be to specifically promote high school writing centers, but it's not hard to see how such centers enhance our mission of promoting writing as a process and as a tool for learning in all disciplines. Hosting the Wildcat writing Consultants was an encouraging reminder of the subtle but powerful ripples of positive impact we can make in our community. Sometimes service is superior to celebrity.

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## **Opportunities for Excellence: The "Next Level" for Consultants**

by Lee Carleton

As you head home for winter break, take a moment to consider some upcoming opportunities to build upon your work as a Consultant in our Center and increase your chances of winning our coveted "Consultant of the Year" award or other resume-worthy recognition.

Why not take your Consultancy "to the next level" and contact us about one or more of the opportunities below?

*Consultants are encouraged to:*

- \*Submit short pieces or cartoons for publication in our newsletter.
- \*Assist with a Writing Workshop.
- \*Participate in Consultant Interviews.
- \*Plan & host a "culture of writing" event on campus.
- \*Maintain & develop digital projects.
- \*Plan & coordinate other events.

To those Consultants already engaged in some of these opportunities we send a hearty "thank-you," and we stand ready to honor your contributions with a solid letter of recommendation for grad school or employment.

If you are interested in one or more of these options, please let us know and we'll meet for an informal chat about the possibilities and your role in making the Richmond Writing Center a jewel in the crown of our university - and your resume!

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## **Communications Breakdown? Faculty & Consultants, Never Fear**

by Joe Essid

We field a number of requests every term from those in the program who have not heard from a faculty member or Consul-

tant. A few ground-rules will improve this in the Spring.

*Faculty:*

- \*Require that Consultants give you between 45 and 60 hours of work during the term, and no more, unless you work that out with your Consultant. This is the range we expect for them to earn their stipend.
- \*Put requirements for meeting Consultants and expectations for drafts in the syllabus.
- \*Ask Consultants to meet every student in your class twice for mandatory discussions of a draft or preliminary step (proposals, bibliography, etc.).
- \*Meet with your Consultant at least once, in person, to review the syllabus and assignments.
- \*Require students to submit something approaching a rough draft. Many writers turn in notes or have nothing for the Consultant.

*Consultants:*

- \*Reply to all faculty e-mail promptly. Let your faculty member know when you cannot do so.
- \*Be realistic about your semester. Request a shift in the Writing Center, with regular hours, rather than a class when you have a difficult semester.
- \*Do not let problems with writers or a faculty member fester. Meet your faculty member and, if needed, contact Joe Essid with questions.

***Do YOU have a photo, an announcement, cartoon or idea for our next newsletter?***

Please contact Joe Essid (jessid@richmond.edu) or Lee Carleton (lcarleto@richmond.edu)