

## CWC Offers Grants Genre and Disciplinary Writing

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For the third year, the Campus Writing Coordinator is pleased to be able to offer Small Grants to Improve Undergraduate Writing. These grants (maximum of \$5,000) are intended to facilitate instructional improvement related to undergraduate writing at UCI. Faculty, lecturers, and graduate students are encouraged to apply. The deadline for submissions is **Tuesday, June 1, 2004.**

All proposals must aim to improve writing across the curriculum in some significant way. The CWC invites projects that involve collaboration with the CWC staff, and proposals including faculty from more than one school or department are welcome.

For more information about successful proposals, visit the CWC website <www.writing.uci.edu>. Contact Susan Jarratt (x49533; sjarratt @uci.edu) with questions.✉

to design projects. But we also see assignments that pay little attention to the type of writing involved or its significance within the discipline.

Writing researchers have been studying the importance of genres as “environments for learning” and guideposts for exploring unfamiliar cognitive and disciplinary domains (Charles Bazerman, “The Life of Genre, the Life in the Classroom”). Bazerman advises us not to take lightly the choice of genre in which we ask students to write, and further to make those choices visible to students as a way of habituating them to ways of being in specialized fields. More that “ritual repetitions,” genres are dynamic reenactments of professional knowledge production: invitations to students to join a scholarly community under

construction and reinvention through their very participation.

The practical application to be drawn from this new work with genre is that talking with your students about the type of writing you assign and its function within your research specialization may help your students produce better writing and find their way more expeditiously into a scholarly and professional community. Articles about genres and writing in the disciplines, as well as model assignments, are available upon request from the CWC office (x49532; 500D Krieger Hall).

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### Name that Genre

In this issue of *Writing Coordinates*, Writing Consultant Shevaun Watson opens a window onto student experiences with writing in her account of our interview-based research in progress. Students from all across the campus have come up to our airy fifth-floor office in Krieger Hall and talked with enthusiasm, passion, wit, humor, and sometimes frustration about their writing lives as UCI students.

We've heard inspiring accounts of the powerful effects of committed teachers in every field who work with student writers. Some of our participants map out their writing paths with clarity and confidence, relating how they have moved successfully from the more general writing instruction in first-year courses to the specialized work of upper-division, discipline-based writing. But we've also heard from students who find themselves a bit at sea--moving from course to course without a sense of direction where writing is concerned.

One theme that merits attention in these early results is confusion about genres: what do you call the writing you assign? In reading through “W” course syllabi, we've found teachers specifying genres from research papers to policy arguments, legal briefs to lab reports, descriptions

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### Researching UCI Student Writers: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

*“My writing improved tremendously from 39A+, 39B, and 31. They prepared me for my other classes.”*

*“I haven't written for more than three years--not since Humanities Core.”*

*“I couldn't have done so well in my writing courses without all the help I got from LARC, my TA's and my professors.”*

*“I wish I could have done more writing in my other classes. Like they say, use it or lose it.”*

*“I regret putting off upper-division writing. It turned out to be a great class.”*

These are just a few of the comments we've received from students participating in the current Campus Writing Coordinator research project. “Retrospective Writing Histories of UCI Undergraduates” seeks to gather detailed narrative accounts of students' writing experiences through hour-long interviews. Thirty-five juniors and seniors enrolled in “W” courses this winter and spring volunteered to talk to us about their writing. These case studies will provide some much-needed qualitative data to complement existing sources of information about the efficacy of writing instruction on campus. This study aims to use

students' histories of college writing to help chart a future course for undergraduate writing at UCI.

The position of the Campus Writing Coordinator was created in 2001 to foster a culture of writing across the campus by forging connections between first-year and upper-division writing, a charge which invites exploration of existing practices, attitudes, and conditions pertaining to writing. Students' perspectives on the current writing scene at UCI are an important component of such information gathering.

Students participating in this study represent seven schools and a wide variety of majors. The sample is also balanced in terms of gender, English-only and bilingual speakers, as well as transfers and “native” UCI students.

During their interviews, students are asked to reflect upon what they learned in both lower- and upper-division writing courses: What do they believe to be the quality and value of these courses? What drives their course selections? Do they perceive connections between first-year composition and writing in their majors? In what other courses are they asked to do writing? We also seek to understand how students see

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## CWC Recognizes Excellent Student Writing at May 25 Awards Ceremony

Each spring the Campus Writing Coordinator invites upper-division students from all disciplines to submit exemplary papers to the CWC writing contest. Now in their second year of existence, the CWC awards acknowledge student writing achievements in three categories.

Excellence in Academic Writing in an Upper-Division Course honors both the student and the course instructor for the paper that best represents mastery of writing skills demanded by a specific discipline. The award for Effective Public Writing recognizes excellent student writing directed to audiences outside of the classroom about a matter of public concern. The winning paper must demonstrate the timeliness of an issue and rhetorical dexterity in presenting the case. An award is also given for the best Writing Portfolio, a collection of a student's writing from various courses representing a range of styles, forms, and disciplinary contexts.

Submissions in all three categories are up significantly this year. Student submissions come from a range of disciplines, such as ICS, Literary Journalism, Women's Studies, and Biological Sciences. One collaboratively written paper by three Engineering students was published last winter in *California Engineer*.

**The awards ceremony will be held on Tuesday, May 25, 3:00-5:00 p.m. at the Phineas Banning Alumni House.** All are welcome to attend this year-end CWC celebration.✉

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## Student Profile: ICS Senior Hopes to Teach Math with Writing

After completing her degree at UCI this spring, Melissa Wong will join more than 3,000 exceptional college graduates who will teach in low-income communities through Teach For America. An Information and Computer Science (ICS) major, Melissa will teach math to secondary school students in the Bay Area for at least two years starting this fall.

Like other Teach For America recruits, Melissa has ambitious teaching goals. She hopes to improve her students' math abilities by two grade levels in one year. One way Melissa plans to help her students achieve this growth is through writing. Though math comes more easily than writing for Melissa, she has learned the value of writing in a variety of courses at UCI. She found the lower- and upper-division writing courses "very useful." "My writing has definitely improved," she says. Melissa understands that writing practice will not only enhance her students' literacy skills, but it will also aid their comprehension of mathematical concepts.

Melissa plans to have her students keep math journals. Rather than teaching and testing rote memorization of formulas, Melissa wants students to write down their thought processes while they work through math problems. As she has learned in one of her education courses this quarter, math journals involve "meta-level thinking." "They help you think about your thinking," she explains. "Math journals will help students really understand. I want students to construct their own ideas. I want them to build on previous knowledge and skills on their own as much as possible. I don't want



ICS senior and future math teacher, Melissa Wong

them just to practice problems."

Melissa also wants students to write about their emotional responses to doing math. She recognizes that not everyone likes math as much as she does and that some students have negative feelings about it. If students note their affective responses, as well as their cognitive processes, Melissa hopes to be able to identify where and why students get stuck or give up on problems.

She has gained these insights by keeping a math journal of her own. Though Melissa is an accomplished student of math, she has still found great value in recording her own thought processes when she tackles unfamiliar mathematical problems and grapples with advanced, new concepts. She also uses her math journal to reflect on her current experiences tutoring three local high school students in math. She was surprised at how difficult it was for her to "recall earlier math," a common theme in her math journal these days.

Based on her own experiences with writing, along with the pedagogical strategies she has been learning in her education classes, Melissa is prepared to challenge her students next year to become better mathematicians, and maybe better writers, too.✉

## "W" Course Highlight : Sociology 110W

When Judy Stepan-Norris decided to convert her research methods class, Sociology 110, into an upper-division "W" course, she didn't have to make many changes to her regular syllabus. "I have a lot of writing in every course anyway," she remarks. "It makes sense to give students credit for the writing they're already doing." It made especially good sense for a research methods course where, as she puts it, "students get it by doing it." As a writing course, 110W offers a "hands-on approach to methods," she explains.

Stepan-Norris offered 110W for the first time winter quarter 2003. Structuring it deliberately as a writing-intensive course involved identifying specific writing goals for her students and committing more class time to explicit writing

instruction without sacrificing time to teach content. Her main goal was to have students produce at least one polished piece of independent written research they could use as a writing sample when applying for graduate school, internships, or positions after graduation.

Stepan-Norris also wanted to help student form better writing habits. "Many students are not in the habit of proofreading and editing their papers," she notes. Stepan-Norris and her TA worked with 110W students to create and revise drafts. She estimates that about one-third of the students produced drafts and sought help with revision before handing in final versions of each major paper. Both she and her TA provided extensive written comments on each of the three papers. She also

assigned seven short in-class writings to address key methodological concepts, as well as two essay exams.

For the first time through, 110W was a success. Stepan-Norris surveyed her students and more than half felt their writing improved as a result of the class. "Writing is something that will reflect on your future in some way," Stepan-Norris maintains. "Students should welcome the chance to improve such an important skill."✉



Judy Stepan-Norris, Professor of Sociology

## CWC Writing Research: Students Tell it Like it Is

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themselves as writers and how they manage their writing tasks. We are collecting samples of these students' writing from their upper-division "W" courses. These papers will offer additional insight into the kinds of writing students are producing as juniors and seniors across the disciplines. Information from this study will be shared with various groups on campus, such as the Writing Board, Lower-Division Writing Committee, Associate Deans, academic counselors, and writing faculty.

A preliminary review of the interview data reveals several key themes. First, many students, especially those outside of Humanities, report not doing much writing, if any at all, between first-year and upper-division writing. Perhaps most striking is that some students express regret or dissatisfaction with this situation. For instance, one student, an Economics major, wished he had taken several more writing classes

than those required. "If I had taken more writing classes, I would have more confidence as a writer. I think students need a lot of practice writing. At least I do," he explained. Another student reported that his upper-division writing course in ICS was difficult because he had been away from writing for so long. "I was out of practice. It was really hard to get back into writing," he remarked.

Another recurring topic among these students is the difference between lower- and upper-division writing. Most students we interviewed reported liking and learning a great deal in their first-year course, whether the 39W sequence or Humanities Core. The experiences among first-year writers seem to be fairly consistent and generally positive. Most characterized the first-year course as difficult and not necessarily their favorite class, but one that served them extremely well. In contrast, students' experiences in upper-level writing seem to be much

more varied. Some students noted that their "W" course did not "feel like a writing class," as one put it. Many say the upper-level writing course is significantly easier than both their first-year writing course and their other major classes.

A third point of interest gleaned from the study is that students seem to have difficulty identifying the kinds of writing they are asked to do in both lower- and upper-division courses. They use "essay" and "summary" as catch-all terms to describe their assignments, even when pressed to consider other modes of writing, such as analysis, argument, or commentary. Many of the students we interviewed struggled to articulate the genres, purposes, and audiences of the papers they write.

Many other findings are sure to emerge from this study. We intend to use these rich and varied student responses to formulate concrete plans to support and improve writing instruction on campus.✉