

## Sightlines

The office of the Campus Writing Coordinator on the fifth floor of Krieger Hall offers a great view of the mountains on clear days. It also provides a fine perspective on some of the exciting work with writing underway across the UCI campus.

Our lead article features the challenging new curriculum for Writing 39C, with a follow-up inside on the national dialogue about plagiarism.

Write together? We also highlight an innovative, two-course sequence in Comparative Legal Cultures developed by a Social Ecology teacher with the support of a CWC Small Grant. The new course focuses on collaborative learning and writing.

Our column on best practices draws connections between reading and writing problems and offers suggestions for helping students adopt more effective strategies for both.

Your responses and contributions to our newsletter are welcome. Send ideas for articles, letters to the editor, successful teaching practices, images, websites, or quotations about writing to the email address below. ☼

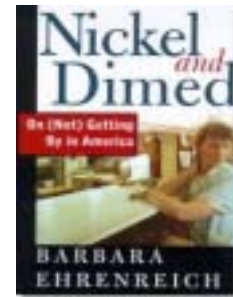
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## New and Improved: WR 39C

This fall the Composition Program at UCI launched a new version of WR 39C, "Argument and Research." Several concerns prompted Ellen Strenski, the Course Coordinator, Lynda Haas, the Assistant Course Coordinator, and several experienced writing instructors to undertake major curricular revision. First, 39C was plagued by what seemed to be an increasingly high rate of plagiarism. Previously, the course was organized around students' individual research topics and projects. While this arrangement allowed students the flexibility to select a public policy issue of most interest to them, it was also conducive to plagiarism. (See page 3, "Writing in the News," for more on plagiarism.)

A related concern was that students did not receive enough direct instruction in how to use and evaluate resources, especially internet sources, in effective and ethical ways. Students seemed unable to differentiate between authoritative and overly biased sites. They also demonstrated the misguided belief that internet sources are "public domains" and therefore not subject to the rigorous academic standards of citation. The new 39C was designed around three main objectives: 1) to connect all sections of 39C with a common text from which a number of public policy issues could be

addressed; 2) to curb plagiarism and teach critical use of research sources, with a significant emphasis on the internet; and 3) to build upon the research components of 39B, "Critical Reading and Rhetoric," more clearly and effectively.



So far, so good. Teachers and students report liking the new course a great deal. It gives students more focused practice in reading and understanding source materials. The result is that students craft arguments about public policy issues with a stronger sense of knowledge and credibility.

This year and next, the common text is *Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich's controversial, first-hand account of low-wage employment. The new writing assignments include an "update report" on the book's major claims, research logs, a comparative source evaluation, and an advocacy essay--all of which provide better preparation for writing in the disciplines. ☼

## Writing Consultant Joins CWC



Shevaun Watson joined the CWC office this fall to work as a Writing Consultant along with Professor Jarratt.

Shevaun comes to UCI from Miami University (Ohio) where she is completing a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition. Having served as the Assistant Director of Miami's Center for Writing Excellence, Shevaun brings several years of experience with writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC) programs and faculty development to UCI's writing initiatives. She worked closely with departments across Miami's campus, including history, political science, and architecture, to coordinate writing goals for majors and improve graduate teaching assistant training. Shevaun has co-led proseminars and workshops for faculty across the disciplines on course design, writing assignments, and effective modes of evaluation and response.

She publishes in writing-across-the-curriculum as well. One recent project surveys various models of faculty development in WAC programs and offers an alternative to working with faculty that is based upon teachers' concepts of themselves as writers. Another article analyzes the kinds of professional development opportunities available to graduate students within writing programs.

Shevaun is available to consult with faculty members who teach "W" courses or otherwise integrate writing into content courses. ✽

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## CWC Small Grant Aids Collaborative Writing Course

Susan Coutin, Professor of Criminology, Law and Society, was awarded a \$3,000 grant from the Campus Writing Coordinator last spring to develop a new course, "Writing Legal Culture: Collaborative Writing and Analysis of Student-generated Data." Coutin's proposed course will be piloted in the winter or spring quarter of 2004-2005. "Writing Legal Culture" will be offered in sequence with an existing course, "The Comparative Study of Legal Culture," in which students read ethnographies about legal cultures of the Cheyenne, colonial Nigerians, rural New Englanders, and other groups, and write their own observations of disputes, or "trouble cases." Students in the new course will work collaboratively to analyze and write about the data generated in the previous class.

Coutin got the idea for this sequence of courses when she realized that all of the valuable data collected by students in the existing "Comparative Study" course were woefully under-utilized. She recognized that patterns illustrating course themes emerged from students' analyses of "trouble cases," but the course was over before students could gain such insights from their work.

"Writing Legal Culture" is an innovative solution to these pedagogical concerns. Students who successfully complete the first course will be eligible to enroll in the follow-up course. The bulk of the reading in "Writing Legal Culture" will consist of the student projects produced in the earlier "Comparative Study" course. In groups, students will organize that information into data sets pertaining to specific "trouble

cases," study one particular data set closely, and write up their findings.

Collaboration is a well-established and much-studied pedagogy. In her research over the summer, Coutin found a wealth of information and scholarship on collaborative writing, student-centered learning, and evaluating collaborative work. She produced a bibliography and an overview of this research, which is available to others at the CWC office (500 Krieger Hall) and on the CWC website <[www.writing.uci.edu/udw.html](http://www.writing.uci.edu/udw.html)>.



Coutin designed the new course to allow students to complete some of their group work during class time. In addition, during the final class meeting, student groups will present their findings. Coutin will still lecture and guide discussions about course readings on the study of legal culture, but she needed to reconfigure class time significantly in order to be able to work closely with the student groups on their projects. She also needed to rethink her approach to teaching, addressing questions such as how a teacher promotes productive collaborative learning, how co-authored student work can be accurately and effectively assessed, and how to find the ideal balance between teacher guidance and student-initiated work. ✽

## Best Practices: Reading and Writing Connections

Often our conversations with teachers about writing turn to concerns about reading. In our view, it is beneficial to see reading and writing as interrelated; working on one supports development in the other. Several factors can contribute to students' trouble with college texts. Studies of experienced readers demonstrate a range of effective reading practices that undergraduates need to learn in college courses. Adept academic readers modify their reading strategies to accommodate their own goals and the particular text they're reading. That is, advanced readers know what they want to get out of a text and how to obtain that information efficiently, and they know how to navigate through a text's generic and rhetorical conventions. Inexperienced readers, however, tend to approach all texts in the same manner, failing to adjust their reading strategies for different purposes and contexts.

Writing is one way teachers can improve students' academic reading skills. Encourage students to swap a highlighter for a pen. Simply highlighting seemingly important terms or passages is often too passive. Instead, urge students to write about the reading directly in the text: to summarize a key point, to note and comment upon pieces of supporting evidence, or to pose a question or counterargument. Teach students to keep track of a text's structure and the author's rhetorical moves by writing "what it says" and "what it does" statements in the margins. Writing alongside reading promotes critical thinking and active engagement with a text.

Another way to help students practice academic reading skills is to "translate" difficult passages. As an in-class activity, having students recast key passages in their own words helps focus discussion on important content areas of a reading while also teaching students to reconstruct the text's rhetorical context, assimilate key terms, and recognize more precisely the gaps in their understanding. Other writing assignments or activities that promote active and critical reading include reading logs, summary and response notebooks, reading guides, or imaginary dialogues with the author. The CWC resource library contains several excellent guides on teaching reading through writing. ✽

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## Writing in the News: Teachers Confronting Plagiarism

A recent editorial in the *New York Times* sparked a flurry of responses from high school and college teachers. On September 9, 2003, Mark Edmundson, Professor of English at the University of Virginia, wrote "How Teachers Can Stop Cheaters." He argues the most effective way for teachers to stop online "paper mills" is to craft better writing assignments: "It's not enough to ask for a careful description of erotic imagery in *Romeo and Juliet*, or the version of nature that Wordsworth develops in 'Tintern Abbey.' We need to go further and ask if those works provide usable truths for ourselves and our students." Edmundson advocates assignments that ask students not only to do rigorous textual analysis but also to relate that analysis to personal experience, thus diminishing students' ability to rely upon typical forms of analysis that can be reproduced from the web. "You cannot buy your opinion from someone else," he argues. But teachers took issue with Edmundson on several different fronts.



One college professor resented having the blame for plagiarism put upon teachers rather than the electronic age. Another pinned the blame on grade point averages and standard examinations, and argued for oral exams and narrative comments as a way to stop cheating. Students' own responsibility in this problem was underscored by another teacher: "Do we really believe that the student who buys an essay online doesn't know she is cheating?" he asks.

Another recent publication that takes a comprehensive view of plagiarism is the September 19, 2003 issue of *The CQ Researcher*. The entire edition addresses "Combating Plagiarism," discussing the internet, copyright laws, historical precedents for "imitation," and the efficacy of commercial online anti-cheating services, such as TurnItIn.com (which is licensed for use by UCI faculty). This rich collection of articles provides a variety of perspectives, including dissenting views arguing that plagiarism is not on the rise. Copies of this issue are available at the CWC office (500 Kreiger Hall), or online at [www.cqpress.com](http://www.cqpress.com). "Stolen Passages," which appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* in 2002, addresses a different side of this issue: plagiarism among college professors and other professionals. ✽

## CWC Faculty Workshops on Writing

During the 2003-2004 academic year, the Campus Writing Coordinator is offering three faculty workshops related to issues of teaching writing. The fall workshop, held on October 28, introduced new faculty to undergraduate writing at UCI. Professors from History, Physics and Astronomy, Sociology, and Dance learned about UCI's writing requirements, as well as the resources and services offered by the Campus Writing Coordinator. **This workshop will be offered again Tuesday, December 9, 1:00-2:30 p.m., in 242 Humanities Hall. All faculty new to UCI this year or last are welcome. Please contact our office (x49531) if you would like to join us.**

The workshop planned for winter quarter is a collaborative endeavor with the Program in Academic English/ESL and the Instructional Resources Center. "Working with ESL Students Writing Across the Disciplines" will be held February 3, 2004, 3:30-5:00 p.m. This presentation is aimed to help faculty address the particular issues of ESL writers. It will also provide information about the various kinds of campus support for ESL students. Registration for this workshop will be invited at the beginning of winter quarter.

In the spring, the CWC will host a panel presentation by faculty teaching innovative "W" courses. The Campus Writing Coordinator works closely with the instructors of upper-division writing courses and wants to showcase some of these courses to a campus-wide audience. The CWC has offered small grants to enable instructors to incorporate writing into their curricula. These grants have yielded excellent results, and faculty who are considering teaching or devising a "W" course may get some valuable ideas from the panelists. ✽

## CWC Resources

The CWC office provides consultations to faculty to answer questions, gather information, and advise on any issue related to the teaching of writing. The CWC webpage <[www.writing.uci.edu](http://www.writing.uci.edu)> offers a wealth of information on many relevant topics.

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Shevaun Watson ([sewatson@uci.edu](mailto:sewatson@uci.edu);  
x49531) for more information. ✽

## Student Writing Awards

The CWC offers cash awards for excellent writing in an upper-division course, for effective public writing, and for a writing portfolio. The deadline for submissions in all categories is May 3, 2004. For more details, see <[www.writing.uci.edu/0304awards2.html](http://www.writing.uci.edu/0304awards2.html)>. ✽

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