

Citings

Department of Rhetoric and Writing Studies Newsletter

March

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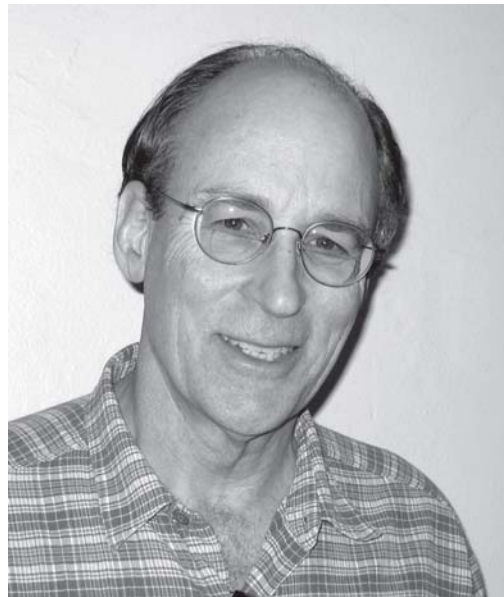
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Issue 1

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Summer Reading Author Visits Campus



Tracy Kidder

Pulitzer Prize winning author Tracy Kidder visited the San Diego State University campus on March 11 and 12. Mr. Kidder's book *Mountains Beyond Mountains* was the SDSU summer reading selection of 2007. His visit was originally scheduled last October, but postponed because of the wildfires. Mr. Kidder participated in a variety of events during his two-day visit, including a book signing and several lectures.

On March 12, the Center for Teaching and Learning sponsored a conversation and lunch with the author for SDSU faculty. The instructors in attendance, who represented a variety of disciplines, discussed how they incorporated *Mountains Beyond Mountains* into assignments. Mr. Kidder reacted positively to the projects of the RWS faculty, claiming to appreciate the value of having students identify arguments in his text.

Department Undergoes Self-Assessment

Glen McClish

In addition to the usual Periodic Evaluations that occur during the spring semester, three additional investigations that warrant the attention and support of DRWS faculty and staff will be conducted over the next few months.

The first is a study of RWS 92A. The course, which is required of all entering SDSU students who have not demonstrated writing competency through AP, SAT, or EPT scores, has been a staple of the department's pedagogy for many years and essentially serves as the gatekeeper for the Lower Division Writing Program. The taskforce formed to investigate the course will take up several important questions. First, what student learning outcomes are most essential for students as they prepare for college-level writing? Second, what sort of final exam or project would best assess these outcomes. For the last few years, the final

for RWS 92A has stressed rhetorical analysis of a series of articles on a given topic. While most department faculty see the importance of rhetorical analysis to student success, it's also the case that a heavy emphasis on such analysis at the developmental level may be jumping the gun because other—more basic—student learning outcomes are shortchanged and because RWS 100 and 200 are the obvious places to delve deeply into such skills.

Third, how should the final grade for RWS 92A be determined? In the past, we've required students to pass an in-class final to pass the course. This approach has helped us to maintain relatively consistent standards among sections, and it's guaranteed that grades are based on the work students actually produce in a timed setting. (Take-home

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Raising Student Engagement, Artfully

Liane Bryson

During the last few years, a number of faculty have included the analysis of visual arguments in to their courses in innovative ways ranging from the viewing and making of documentaries to importing still images into their texts. Katie Hughes, who has designed various approaches to teaching visual rhetoric in all of her RWS courses, has also found ways to bring her special interest, art, into the classroom to teach visual rhetoric and engage students in experiences many have never had before. Katie notes that, while perhaps the most easily accessible way of studying visual rhetoric is through advertising images familiar to students, art can be more subtle and off-putting. Many students think of art as something 'over there' and not something to seek out and study. By bringing art into the curriculum as a form of visual rhetoric, that distance breaks down.

Katie says that through reading applicable texts and viewing art works in tandem, students become knowledgeable, thus demystifying the artist and the art, and they become empowered to analyze and become

critics as well (assessing the success of the art's ability to argue or persuade). The excitement of this process is discernable, not only in their essays—which are by far the most inspired and carefully written pieces of the semester—but in the discussions within small groups. Many students who experience art for the first time say they had never been to a gallery or museum before. Perhaps not surprisingly, quite a few students do extra research on the artists because they are so interesting to learn about.

As luck would have it, SDSU has its

own Art Gallery on campus and last semester's exhibit focus, The Graphic Imperative: International Posters for Peace, Social Justice & the Environment 1965 to 2005, fit nicely with a broad range of RWS themes and readings, including those raised in Tracy Kidder's book *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. Art director, Tina Yapelli, made specific accommodations to open the gallery outside of the regular hours so Katie could hold her RWS classes in the Gallery and provided the necessary informational

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Katie Hughes and her Students Peruse Poster Art in Campus Gallery

RWS Instructors Prepare Hoover High Students for SDSU

Since the beginning of last semester, DRWS instructors Liane Bryson, Cali Linfor, and Pat Morgan have been involved in a project called the *College Avenue Compact for Success*. The goal of the project is to work within the community to see that local high school students are prepared to come to SDSU after graduation.

The RWS instructors are part of a collaboration with Hoover High School, meeting with teams of teachers to ensure that their courses are aligned with the appropriate state standards. Cali and Liane have been meeting with Hoover's 9th grade English teachers to help them review and revise their curriculum so as to provide a better fit with college readiness skills. Pat is working with beginning algebra and geometry. They have an all day meeting with 9th grade teachers once a month and work with smaller groups during the week. They design assessments

and help teachers develop lesson plans.

The plan is to work year by year through the courses so that a complete sequence will be aligned by the time the first Hoover Compact students are ready to apply to SDSU. Liane Bryson described the process: "We established what 9th grade students should be able to do at the end of 9th grade and helped teachers focus on the teaching of these basic textual analysis and writing skills. When the 9th grade curriculum had been designed, we started working with 10th grade teachers to develop a 10th grade curriculum based on the 9th grade entry level textual analysis skills. Once the 10th grade curriculum has been developed and teachers have been trained, we will repeat the process with 11th and then 12th grade."

Ultimately, the plan is for Hoover teachers to be familiar with college level reading and writing skills with a specific focus on

rhetorical analysis, to understand how these skills are also their English Language Arts standards, and to know how to offer students a curriculum that begins with the basics, evolves logically, and builds in complexity in each subsequent grade level.

According to Liane Bryson, "We're trying to simplify and clarify what currently is an overly complicated and confusing curriculum."

The College Avenue Compact is similar to one already established between SDSU and the Sweetwater District. Hoover students who sign the Compact (this is its first year) and who complete the prescribed sequence of courses successfully will be guaranteed admission to SDSU after they graduate. College Avenue is intended to make Hoover students college ready starting with the 2007 cohort of 9th graders slated to graduate in 2011.

Papers, etc.

Cezar Ornatowski presented "Writing, from Stalinism to Democracy: Language Pedagogy and Politics in Poland, 1945-1999," at "Writing Research Across Borders," 3rd International Conference on Writing Research, University of California, Santa Barbara, February 22-24, 2008.

Cezar also published the following papers:

Congratulations!

Jennifer Sager and her husband, Matt, welcomed their new daughter, Lily Grace, into the world on January 24.

Faculty Focus: Hedda Fish

Hedda Fish was raised by her grandmother in Brooklyn, but attended high school in Los Angeles. After graduating, she wrote copy for an advertising agency that asked her to model bathing suits for the L.A. Home Show, one of their clients. Her compensation was new Jantzen and Catalina bathing suits.

During that time, Hedda attended night classes at Los Angeles State. After graduating with honors, she began teaching night classes at LA City College and spent some years teaching at Culver City and Beverly Hills High (pre-Monica Lewinsky).

She and her husband, Dave, lived in Massachusetts, while he completed his doctorate at Harvard. When Dave landed a job with the San Diego School District, they moved back to San Diego, where Hedda began, and is still, teaching at Mesa College.

She was eventually hired by SDSU's English Department. When the DRWS was created, Hedda became one of its first lecturers. She has taught many different classes for the department—100, 200, 305W, 500 and 509. She has also taught a course covering the literature derived from the Bible at USD and the UCSD Extension.

Hedda does a great deal of work in assessment, reading for our WPA, the AP in Florida and the TWE in the Bay Area.

What does she like most about teach-

"Between Efficiency and Politics: Rhetoric and Ethics in Technical Writing" was reprinted in *Readings for Technical Communication*. Ed. Jennifer MacLennan. Oxford UP, 2008. 311-320.

"Rhetoric, Religion, and Politics in the Negotiations Between the Church and the Authorities in Poland, 1980-1989." *Forum Artis Rhetoricae*, 8-9 (January-July, 2007): 6-29.

"Autonomy of the University: An American Perspective." In *Autonomia Uniwersytetu: Jej Przyjaciele i Wrogowie* [The Autonomy of the University: Its Friends and Enemies]. Ed. Jan Kieniewicz. Warsaw, Poland: Artes Liberales, 153-169.



ing? "The student who is astonished to find that he or she is actually a good writer, the revelation for some that proofreading does make a difference, the Summer Bridge program with those kids who can't wait to be "real" college students, and a thousand other examples. My husband also enjoys my teaching, as I can support him while he is retired!"

Hedda says her favorite non-work activity is talking to her three sons. "I'm so happy they all have successful careers and a sense of humor and I adore my grandchildren. I love discussing politics, morning coffee with colleagues, reading, and having dinner with old friends. I adore sports, especially the Chargers and the Padres."

Alumni News

Suzanne Bordelon

Michael-John Depalma, who graduated in Fall 2004 from our M.A. program, recently had his article "Austin Phelps and the Spirit (of) Composing: An Exploration of Nineteenth-Century Sacred Rhetoric at Andover Theological Seminary" accepted for publication in *Rhetoric Review*.

In addition, he coauthored, with Jeff Ringer and Jim Webber, "(Re)Charting the (Dis)Courses of Faith and Politics: Kenneth Burke's Pentad, Sharon Crowley's Toward a Civil Discourse, and Barack Obama's Pentecost 2006 Keynote Address," which will appear in the fall edition of *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*.

Michael-John is a doctoral student in Composition Studies at the University of New Hampshire. His academic work focuses on the various ways that rhetoric and religion bear upon one another in theory and in practice.

A Reminder Regarding Excessive Absences

Albert Moorin

Lately I have received numerous requests to miss class for one reason or another, often with good, solid excuses, such as meeting one's significant other, giving the dog a bath (a really important event), and climbing a mountain. Also, some have been sick and missed several classes over the past four weeks. In many instances students want to miss class and not have it affect their grade in any way. Such an idea is irrational.

Remember, you are allowed three absences during the term. For special occasions with family and friends, such as celebrating your cat's birthday, you have holidays and the spring break. Let me stress to you that every class is crucial—you learn something new about rhetoric, about articulate writing, and, most of all, about yourself. When you miss even one class, you cheat yourself out

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Self-Assessment

work, as we know, is more difficult to regulate.) On the other hand, requiring a “high stakes” test has disadvantages. It encourages teachers to “teach to the test,” which can limit the development of a full range of reading and writing skills. Students who do not perform well on timed exams (and, by definition, all RWS 92A students fit in this category since their placement in the course is based on low test scores) can be seen as inherently disadvantaged by such an assessment. Most people I’ve talked to aren’t in favor of eliminating the exam, but there is some support for moving away from the “high stake” approach. For example, it may be prudent to integrate the exam into a portfolio assessment of student accomplishment. This is, as you may guess, a controversial subject within the department, so our best—and most diplomatic—deliberation will be required.

Fourth, how can we best support RWS 92A faculty? For the last three or four years, the course has been staffed entirely by San Diego City College faculty, most of whom do not officially teach for San Diego State University. Given that they operate under a different contract, system of evaluation, and

Absences

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of your education, a priceless benefit. Aside from that important reason, you are responsible for everything covered during that class, including anything mentioned, due, or assigned.

Students who miss classes do worse on tests and essays and also miss out on class exercises, as well as the sequence of learning objectives. The result is always lower grades. So if you make a decision to miss a class or two for whatever reason, realize that there is a price to pay. If the price is worth it to you, then go for it. If not - be in class, do all the homework, and continue to improve your skills. No one can do it for you.

I wish you continued success in this class by your coming to class and doing all that is required.

pay structure, what sorts of interactions and documents would help them to succeed in this course? How should we make important information available to them? These are the central questions to be addressed by the RWS 92A taskforce.

In addition to evaluating RWS 92A, we will also be taking a careful look at RWS 280. With respect to this course, which prepares upper-division students who earn low scores on the WPA for their “W” course, we need to revise the student learning outcomes so that they best reflect the skills these students need. We would also like to develop, to quote Carol Sweedler Brown, an “explanatory text which will introduce the general pedagogical philosophy of RWS 280 so that new instructors will have an overall focus as they plan their course.” Additional tasks will be to establish common assignment types for the four required papers and to revise the format of the final. Although the exam will probably continue to emphasize the

Students Engage

Continued from Page 2

materials on the artwork. The art seen in the gallery visit was used as sources to incorporate into the research for Katie’s project 2, which focused on arguments in *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. Clearly, the students enjoyed the novelty of having class in the art gallery, but for some, the engagement went beyond the novelty aspect. After holding her morning class in the SDSU Art Gallery, Katie was there with her afternoon class and spotted one of her morning students (not knowing she would be there) who had returned with some friends to re-visit and share with others.

All four of Katie’s fall 2007 class projects engaged students in reading, thinking about and evaluating art and are available for viewing on the DRWS Instructors’ Resource Site. Click on “What Works” to find them. And check out the offerings at the SDSU Art Gallery <http://artgallery.sdsu.edu/>, their current and future exhibitions.

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analysis of argument, significant changes concerning the kind and length of the readings, the topics featured, the nature of the prompt, the scoring criteria, and the scoring process will be considered.

The final assessment concerns the department chair. As required by departmental policy, we will be conducting a full review of my work. Surveys have been sent to tenured and tenure-track faculty, lecturers with one- and three-year contracts, and staff. Questions consider the handling of personnel processes and procedures, resource management (budget, facilities, and equipment), communication skills, and general leadership (shared governance, effective liaison between DRWS and the administration, accessibility, credibility, and fashion sense).

I hope you will participate in these important evaluations. Carol Sweedler Brown, who is charged with facilitating the three projects, stands ready to field your questions and put you to work.

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