



inside english

Journal of the English Council of California Two-Year Colleges

TYCA Pacific Coast: a Region of the Two-Year College English Association of NCTE

Volume XXVIII, Number 2

Spring 2001

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inside english

A Journal of the English Council of California Two-Year Colleges

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inside english welcomes articles, reviews, and other writing of interest to instructors of English in two-year colleges, as well as letters in response to articles or on issues of concern to English faculty. Poetry is also welcome, as are manuscripts for the occasional columns, "Part-Time Faculty Concerns," "One Good Idea" (describing a single classroom technique or approach), "Point of View" (an argument, opinion, or philosophical essay), and "Talking Back" (a substantial response to a previously published article). Articles should be no more than ten double-spaced typed pages; reviews, five pages; and letters, two pages.

Although a detailed "Policy and Style Sheet" is available on request, in general, manuscripts should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *The NCTE Guide for Non-Sexist Language*. Spelling should conform to *The American Heritage Dictionary* and citations to the *MLA Style Manual, edition here*. Articles and reviews should be titled, with the author's name and college under the title; the author's name and college should be placed at the end of poems and letters. All submissions should be double-spaced throughout and each page numbered. When appropriate, parenthetical citations and a Work(s) Cited page in MLA style should be included. A cover letter that includes the title of the submission and the author's mailing address, and telephone number, a separate brief biographical statement in the third person, a self-addressed stamped le-

gal-sized envelope, and a self-addressed and stamped 9"x12" envelope should accompany each

Editor's Column

Ending on a High Note

Well, the semester is almost over, and I'm sure you've found it as busy as I have. Sometime in the rush of closing up shop for the summer (or for the week or two before summer school), I hope you find the time to read this excellent issue of *i.e.*

The issue opens with a pair of articles written by faculty at Chaffey College, **Barbara Beaupre** and **Michael Dinielli**. Barbara's article deals with an issue that has long been close to my heart: the professionalization of the writing center. In her insightful article, first given as a CCCC presentation, Barbara reminds us once again that working in a writing center is a professional endeavor demanding training and a professional attitude. Of course, before you can staff a writing center with professional writing tutors, you have to get it funded. That's where Mike Dinielli's article comes in. He describes the process he and others went through in getting the writing center built, staffed, and operating.

Next is an article by **Brian Tobin**, who offers some arguable advice about teaching composition. His piece is followed by **Marlene Martin's**. In it, she describes a workshop she attended in Denver at the CCCC. The workshop, and her review of it, offer some sensible guidelines for online composition courses.

The theme of the last issue was Shakespeare, but I didn't have **Jeannette Weber's** article then to include. I have it now, and it describes her sabbatical project coordinating a faculty production of *As You Like It*. It's a fascinating project and well worth the price of this issue.

Finally, we conclude with a piece by **S. Kay Murphy** on teaching T. Coraghessan Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain*. Kay allows us into her classroom, and we are the richer for it.

P. Kevin Parker
Orange Coast College



President's Column

ECCTYC 2001: Monolith Meets Star Child

At the spring 2001 meeting of the English Council of California Community Colleges, the Board took a satisfied look at its updated web site; several things about the site merit highlighting. First, the web site designed by Lois Powers and Jesse Hemstad has moved to: www.ecctyc.org Second, in its present state, people can now search for available teaching posts; read an updated history of the organization; engage in stimulating conversations via the ECCTYC list serve; and locate names, snail-mail and email addresses, phone numbers and FAX numbers of various ECCTYC Board members and liaisons. If your English Department has not sent Kevin Parker its web address, please take it upon yourself to do so, or encourage your chair or dean to do so; we would like resource material on the site to be as inclusive as possible.

In the spirit of accessibility and practicality, Pete Marcoux, a new board member from El Camino College, created a discussion board for posting responses to topics and ideas of interest. Then Kevin Parker, the newly confirmed ECCTYC web tender, linked it to the site. Parker also informed the Board that it had an unused list serve. Like CalComp, its CSU counterpart, the ECCTYC list serve also can provide a resource for inquiry and response among colleagues throughout the state on English matters. Let's activate that dormant list server at once! Then we can converse on important issues, ranging from good practices in instruction to assessment, placement, and course evaluation methods. Right now, for instance, I am particularly interested in the grading systems used in the second course of college composition (i.e., A, B, C, D, F or A, B, C, no credit.) Hard copy surveys are splendid, of course, yet sometimes situations call for something more immediate—instances where a message board or list serve might facilitate rather than postpone discussion until an acceptable forum becomes available. Contact Pete Marcoux at pmarcoux@elcamino.cc.ca.us or Kevin Parker at sophist@ecctyc.org to add your own email address to the list.

Quality conferences and workshops abound during the last half of 2001. As a presenter, participant, or just observer, I hope you all have been making plans to attend *ECCTYC 2001: Capitol Ideas*, in Sacramento, October 19-20, at the Double Tree Hotel. Our impressive list of guest speakers—punctuated by an array of practical, innovative, and cutting edge workshops and general sessions—offer something for everyone.

Workshops range from sessions on composition to rhetoric, popular culture to critical thinking, hiring faculty—and getting hired—to writing textbooks and professional articles, using technology in instruction to writing creatively, loading and class size to matriculating students and articulating curriculum. *Capitol Ideas* should be a grand event. Thanks in particular to Perri Gallagher, the 2001 Conference coordinator, as well as Claudia Stanger, Sara Blake, Peter Sotiriou, Michael Dinielli and

www.ecctyc.org

the rest of the ECCTYC Program Committee for their diligent work.

During the Fall Semester 2002, ECCTYC will sponsor a Shakespeare conference at the San Diego Globe. We will keep you apprised on the details. Meantime, you can contact Peter Raleigh, Co-Director of Area IV, as well as the instigator and coordinator of The *MJC Shakespeare Academy*: peteraleigh@juno.com; he will organize and chair the 2002 event, involving all segments of the academic community—two and four year colleges and universities alike.

Outside of ECCTYC, I would like to encourage one and all to attend the national YRC conference in composition and literature for two and four year colleges and universities this summer. At the Beach Resort (Great Western), the only beach front hotel in Monterey, the YRC conference will kick off on June 21 and conclude at noon on June 25 (two hours before the Annual Monterey Blues Festival begins!). Consult the YRC web site, <http://members.tripod.com/~YoungRhetoricians/index.htm>, or see the registration form at the back of this *inside english* edition.

The ECCTYC Board continues to grow and change while many of its familiar faces move onto new roles, new responsibilities. Please welcome our newest Directors, Pete Marcoux and Lee Herrick, to ECCTYC. Already they have demonstrated impressive leadership skills in the organization. Sally Fitzgerald, former Region II Co-Director and First Vice-president of ECCTYC, now represents us all as our TYCA liaison. Although Janice Albert's departure will be missed, Fitzgerald's high profile on the TYCA Board assures ECCTYC of a constant, powerful voice at the national level. Finally, Margaret Rooker, former Area I Co-Director, will step into the First Vice-President's position.

In sum, the 2001-2002 academic year promises to be lively and exciting. Before the close of the Spring 2001 semester, however, I want to ask all of you to (1) check out the new ECCTYC web site at www.ecctyc.org, go through the ECCTYC position papers and let us know areas where you would like the English Council to focus some attention, (2) familiarize yourselves with national TYCA (Two-Year College English Association), (3) get on the ECCTYC list serve and engage in cyber dialogues, (4) check the ECCTYC message board and post a note that will generate a statewide conversation about a given issue, (5) register for the YRC conference in Monterey June 21-23, 2001, and (6) register for *ECCTYC 2001: Capitol Ideas*, from noon October 18 until noon October 20, 2001. Have a great summer

Practicing Academic Discourse with the Developing Writer: The Role of the College Writing Center

Barbara Beaupre
Chaffey College

While instructors seek to help students succeed, faculty and administrators do not always agree as to how this goal can be accomplished. Nor do they agree on what constitutes academic discourse. David Bartholomae says students have to “appropriate a specialized discourse” (273) as though they were members of the academy, finding some compromise between personal history, convention, and the history of a discipline. In many cases the problem boils down to a conflict between student voice and acquired language patterns that differ from the mechanically correct language presumed to be a part of academic discourse. We know there is a considerable difference in the words we casually speak and the words used in college classrooms. How can we encourage our students to express ideas in a language that captures their environment and still maintain the clarity of lan-

guage valued as academic discourse? Writing center tutors offer students a unique opportunity to improve their writing through guided questioning and discussion that is not usually possible in a classroom situation. If the challenge for college English instructors is to help students from diverse backgrounds cross the bridge from social communication to academic discourse, then, today’s college writing centers can make important contributions in helping students succeed.

The assumption for many college professors is that academic discourse is a hallmark of the educated. It is a form of communication that is accepted and expected both academically and professionally. Typically, academic discourse entails the conventions of a particular discipline’s writing form. Students begin to engage cognitively with

their disciplines and their writing reflects a language shared by those who teach them. As writing teachers we know that along with helping students to generate ideas, and examine the thinking of others, a level of grammatical correctness is certainly an expectation for the so-called “educated” in society. As a writing center tutor and administrator, I must find ways to teach both grammatical correctness and the terms that explain classroom concepts. This is necessary for our students to develop the writing strategies that will help them succeed in the classroom as well as satisfy the expectations of colleagues across campus who expect clear writing as a component of academic success.

Muriel Harris reminds us that there are no pat teaching strategies that work for all students. Rather, there are multiple ways to reach students. Writing Center tutors, be-

cause they work one-on-one with students have the opportunity to personalize a student's writing experience through discussion. By questioning, and looking at a student's example, the tutor can determine how closely the student's thoughts were captured in their writing. Determining purpose and assessing what a student has produced provide a starting point for considering strategies that might improve writing clarity. This is what Harris refers to as "ongoing diagnosis."

The idea of ongoing diagnosis is a key consideration, particularly when working with developmental writers whose needs are so varied. Many students come to writing center tutors halted by the very idea of starting a writing assignment. They may have briefly read the assignment, but their lack of familiarity with academic language make the directions a mystery too difficult to decode. In this instance, the writing tutor provides valuable modeling for the student by providing the language to interpret the assignment directions. Having the student read the directions aloud and explain what is expected are the first steps in help-

ing a student grapple with deciphering a new language. As with any language, only practice will make the language of academic discourse part of the student vocabulary. We need to act in ways that invite student participation: giving eye contact, voicing interest, and asking questions. Maureen Neal reminds us (88) that talk is more easily generated and responded to than writing. If we engage our students in conversation and practice the words that are unfamiliar with them, students can "try on" the words in a risk free manner. The "trying on" of words is part of the acquisition of any new language.

"Trying on" new language can take many forms. Just as students don't always recognize a messy room when they have one, they don't notice a disorganized paragraph or essay. In the same context, just as when a parent cleans a child's messy room, the child assumes the parent will take care of the room. Similarly, a tutor who cleans and organizes a paper assumes responsibility for that paper. Instead, tutors can model recognized terminology to help a student understand more complex concepts. For ex-

ample, a paragraph with too many different items in it is like storing silverware next to a toothbrush. It doesn't belong because it isn't organized. Most students of whatever age or background can grasp a concept if the terms used to explain it are in words they find familiar. Once they understand the concept, they are more likely to put it into effect.

The strategy of providing academic words related to recognized concepts is a practice called "interdiscursive linking," a term coined by Randall Popken (68). Popken explains that one way developing writers acquire new patterns of discourse is by comparing or contrasting the features of the discourse they are trying to acquire with those of discourses they have already mastered. The idea sounds strikingly similar to scaffolding, a much used buzzword in education. Though the concept may not be new, the application of this concept to adult developing writers gives college writing teachers more incentive to tap into prior student writing experience. Whether that experience is jotting down memos at work, writing letters, or scribbling notes, it provides

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The Chaffey College Writing Center: Dream Deferred, Then Realized

Michael M. Dinielli

Chaffey College

When Laura Hope-Aleman and I were hired as full-time English faculty at Chaffey College, the college, it seemed to us, was mired in a series of intrigues and reorganizations. These activities meant little to us at the time, mainly because we were first year contract employees who were thrilled to have a job. Our enthusiasm spilled over into our classes, and we dove head first into the numerous pools of professional activities a college has to offer. Although we were snagged in the nets thrown by several committee chairs, we did not drown. In fact, we emerged from the frenzy as respected, hard-working composition and literature professors dedicated to student success.

The year was 1990, and we quickly realized there was little support on campus for student writers, especially for those students in transfer level courses. Some support was

available for students at the basic skills levels and for those in non-transfer level courses. However, interdisciplinary transfer students generally had to fend for themselves or seek help from their instructors. Laura and I, both used to support services such as writing centers, wondered what we could do to make a Chaffey College Writing Center a reality.

We lobbied and lobbied and lobbied. These efforts were met with shrugs and an occasional "No me importa." Although campus-wide interest in a writing center was minimal, the English department was in a growth mode, hiring new faculty and replacing retiring ones. This new blood invigorated the department and created a support base for a writing center. Soon, a proposal was written, was approved by the department, and was submitted to the Dean of Arts and Humanities.

In 1998, Partnership For Excellence (PFE) funding was made available to the college. The money vultures came out *en masse*. The English department joined the hunt and convincingly made the case for an interdisciplinary writing center. The administration and faculty joined collegially to implement the proposal for a writing center using Partnership For Excellence funds allocated to the college. The Governing Board gave final approval in 1998, and a site in the library was chosen for the Writing Center.

Architects were selected, plans were drawn and revised, and contractors were chosen. The Dream, often deferred, was being realized. Naturally, there were delays in funding and construction. These setbacks did not affect negatively the optimism the Writing Center created. In fact, students, faculty, and administrators kept a vigil on the Center's progress, and they were

thrilled when the Writing Center was completed in time for the fall semester, 2000.

The English department felt that a successful Writing Center requires a large and versatile space. The periodicals section of the Library was moved, and the Writing Center was born. Once renovated, the Center was divided into four areas: a reception center, a tutoring area, three conference/small group rooms, and a peripheral computer area. The reception area "captures" the students as they enter. The receptionist, using a computer, signs in and signs out students and provides Institutional Research with collection data on a weekly basis. The tutoring area consists of a series of round tables and chairs to accommodate one-on-one conferencing. Of course, at these tables, teachers and tutors are able to assist more than one student at a time. The conference rooms, or "quiet rooms," are designed for small group tutoring, mini-courses, and private conferencing. The peripheral arrangement of computers was selected because of its unobtrusiveness with other activities. E-mail tutoring, drafting, word processing,

self-tutoring, and researching are the primary computer activities in the Writing Center. Despite the variety of processes, the most important role designed for the Center is person-to-person tutoring, at all levels, and across the disciplines. In theory and in practice, the English department insists that live tutoring be the *raison d'être* for the Writing Center.

Surprisingly, staffing the Writing Center did not pose too big a challenge. Partnership For Excellence (PFE) funded a full-time tenure track English professor (whom we refer to as the Writing Center Specialist), a full-time classified instructional assistant, certificated (i.e., academic) hourly instructors, and peer/graduate student tutors. Additionally, classified hourly personnel were hired to augment the data intake/out-take station to insure coverage during Center operation. In March 2000, the Writing Center Specialist was hired, and by opening day, August 21, 2000, instructional and clerical support was in place. The numbers look something like this: one Writing Center Specialist, three clerical assistants, fourteen certificated hourly instructors (some

full-timers working hourly), and sixteen peer/graduate student tutors. These employees cover the sixty-four hours the Center is open each week of the semester.

In its first two months of operation, the Chaffey College Writing Center has experienced successes and disappointments. In sixty days, more than 6,500 student hours have been logged in. That translates into hefty Full-Time Equivalent Student (FTES) numbers. These students were tutored, live and on-line, attended a variety of workshops, completed lab assignments, and used the computers for drafting, research, and revision. Writing Center tutors were also provided for sixteen hours a week at each of the College's Success Centers in the off-campus locations in Chino, Fontana, and Ontario. So it has been an exciting and busy opening semester for the Writing Center. Much of the experience has translated into student access, service, and success.

As I mentioned, some problems have occurred. At times, tutoring has been of varying quality. Students and professors have men-

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Teaching College English Composition

Brian Tobin

Lassen College

College students don't write as well as they used to. Why, back in my day...OK, things change. Students are bigger, stronger, healthier, savvier, and in many ways brighter than ever. Still, they don't write as well as they used to. This makes teaching college composition more difficult than ever.

Some say surrender. Even though research has consistently shown a relationship between high TV watching and low learning levels, schools of education like to write it off as simply different learning styles. For example, from the College of Education at the University of Texas at Austin came this gem:

We have become a nation of TV watchers. Declining newspaper circulation rates prove it. If TV is the way we absorb information, then using video as an instructional delivery mechanism makes good sense.

Even though, by the mid 1990s, about half the incoming freshman at the University of California at

Davis had to take remedial English, a consortium of corporations and colleges wants computers to assume the professorial role. The president of an outfit called EDUCOM has opined that "when the computer takes over the classroom, the professor becomes the guide on the side instead of the sage on the stage."

I think not. James H. Billington, the Librarian of Congress, put it best, "Our democracy and, more than ever, our economic vitality depend on the kind of active mind that the print culture—the culture of the book and of the newspaper—has historically nurtured, and that television, feeding an essentially passive spectator habit, does not."

Good writing should be as potent, forceful, and clear as good gin. Consequently, I offer my own recipe for teaching it. Like all rules, they are better observed in spirit than in letter. Like all rules, they are better bent or broken than result to flummery. Anyway, for what they are worth:

Avoid group activities.

I once learned something profound at a conference. Having met a couple of veteran college instructors from St. Louis, we were breaking bread and recounting the day's activities. I told them I had become trapped in a group therapy session. They laughed and offered the very great wisdom that anytime you enter a room and the desks are circled, flee. Groups can neither read nor write. And, as far as college composition is concerned, "sharing" is simply pooling ignorance. "Brainstorming" is the same.

Avoid journal writing.

I once went to a parent/teacher conference for one of my sons. Proudly displayed amidst his work was his journal. Thumbing through it, I noticed grammatical, syntactical, and spelling errors. When I pointed these out to the teacher, she pointed out that journal writing went

uncorrected—it was supposed to get the creative juices flowing. I ceased going to conferences.

But aside from the anecdotal, the idea in college composition is to exercise intellect over emotion. Avoiding journal writing is a start.

Limit video and computer use.

In light of the very definition now of “prime time,” schools need not contribute to the habit. Some, however, hail computers as the wave of the future for education. Maybe so, but their role as a means rather than an end has blurred. By creating an information glut and providing opportunities for play, they may even limit the range of thought in classroom application. David Gerlenter, a professor of computer science at Yale thinks so:

Most important, educators should learn what most parents and teachers already know: You cannot teach a child [read college student too] anything unless you look him in the face. We should not forget what computers are, like

books—better in some ways, worse in others—they are devices that help children mobilize their own resources and learn for themselves. The computer’s potential to do good is modestly greater than a book’s in some areas. Its potential to do harm is vastly greater—across the board.

Use lots of chalk and red ink.

The only way to teach writing is to show students style, to have them write, and to critique it. No one likes to be patronized. College students are plenty sophisticated enough to discount the trendy blather about self-esteem. They are paying for an education and they expect standards and red ink. Teachers do something that no video or computer can do and that is to be critical. Besides, as anyone who has ever written much for publication knows, writers must have a thick skin to suffer the fistfuls of rejection notices that are inevitable.

Define purpose.

College composition is not creative writing; it is

not journalism; it is not technical or business writing. Though all forms may influence one another, college composition involves critical thinking through the use of academic style. To this end, the teacher must emphasize the active voice, the third person, consistency in number and tense, and the use of short words and short sentences. The goal is brevity and clarity. Authorities from Struck and White through William Zinsser recognize these forms. In applying facts to a judgment, the writer must remove herself from herself to all possible extent. Effective forms aid reason through dispassion.

Use books.

If college composition is not about reading books, it is about nothing. Reading and writing are inseparable as surely as thinking and writing are inseparable. Any cultivated thing will do. I like Laura Esquivel and Willa Cather. I think Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, and George Orwell are well nigh indispensable. The teacher cannot force anyone to read, but she can ask questions, assign reviews, and discuss style. Good writers put words together in unique

ways. Reading begets understanding. College success is impossible without reading. Learning to write is impossible without reading.

Finally:

So, this has been my recipe for teaching college composition. Like all teachers, I flatter myself that my methods work. The teacher may metaphorically add her own dash of vermouth and an onion or an olive to taste.

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I recently wrote a critique, "Despotism and the Passive Voice," of an article which appeared in the Spring/Summer 2000 issue of inside english. The article in question was entitled, "A Theoretical Framework for an English Composition Classroom: The Dialectical Exchange as the Focalization of Learning." It was all too easy to critique. Yet, the critic contributes little if he cannot define his own view. To this end, I humbly offer my own English composition classroom

Of Protozoans, Philosophers, and Distance Learning

Marlene Martin

Monterey Peninsula College

*Organic life, we are told, has developed gradually from the protozoon to the philosopher, and this development, we are assured, is indubitably an advance. Unfortunately it is the philosopher, not the protozoan, who gives us this assurance.—Bertrand Russell from *Mysticism and Logic**

Like the rest of real life, the Conference on College Composition and Communication is big and complex. We composition instructors strive to teach our students to limit their topics and to prioritize their research and writing to a manageable scale. In an avalanche of information an individual can feel like a single snowflake caught in a blizzard. This spring at the 4 C's in Denver, as I tunneled through the storm of cyberspace information that now envelops communication, I was reminded of students who feel overwhelmed by their research/thinking/writing tasks.

Following my own advice to students writing a paper, I narrowed my topic—in this case I chose a focus in which my own literacy skills are far too weak: teaching composition in a world of

cyberspace. Because I don't want to be an instructional protozoan on a fast-changing planet, I'm struggling to evolve as an academic animal. Since—like most administrations—the Monterey Peninsula College administration is enthusiastic about offering online courses, I hoped to learn more about such technological issues as teaching online and using websites in traditional courses.

I arrived in Denver a day early for a pre-conference workshop entitled "Knowing When to Say When: Critically and Consciously Implementing Distance Education." Workshop leaders included faculty Susan Kay Miller (Chair) and Brooke Estabrook of Mesa Community College (Mesa, Arizona); Kevin Eric DePew of Purdue University; Joseph Williams of Syracuse Uni-

versity; Colleen Reilly of Indiana University (Kokomo, Indiana); Lisa Cahill, Veronica Pantoja, Patricia Webb Peterson, and Rochelle Rodrigo of Arizona State University; Mark Hara and Jami Blaauw Hara of North Central Michigan College (Petosky, Michigan); and T. A. E. Fishman of State University of West Georgia.

The workshop was designed for teachers with little or no experience as either a student or a teacher in an online course and thus was perfect for me. The key issues covered in the workshop included:

- creating instruction applicable to the lives of students,
- helping students meet real and immediate needs through online learning,
- facilitating effective online exchanges between

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As We Love It: Faculty Perform Shakespeare

Jeannette Webber, PhD

Santa Barbara City College

To fully understand Shakespeare's dramatic powers, we should see his plays rather than merely reading them. So we all agree (apart from a few Harold Blooms among us who believe that no production can equal the one in the reader's imagination). Community colleges are the perfect place to introduce students to live Shakespeare.

The Theatre Arts department at Santa Barbara City College does not do Shakespeare. In the past, the English department has invited occasional professional actors and directors to visit campus for a week, giving classroom workshops and a one-man show for which we charged a small fee to offset the fee of the artist-in-residence. This year, as part of my sabbatical project, we tried something different with our visiting artist.

James Edmondson of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival came to SBCC for our Flex Day in-services in January and a long holiday

weekend in February to direct a faculty production of *As You Like It*, which ran for seven performances over two weekends in March. Twenty-seven faculty actors participated, from several departments besides English, most with no previous acting experience. Others took responsibility for costume design, wardrobe, props, lighting, publicity, and business details. English students at all levels had the chance to see live Shakespeare and the faculty gained a rare opportunity for professional growth.

At our last two performances, the audience jumped to their feet for a standing ovation. Students got a kick out of seeing their instructors on stage, and participating faculty made comments like, "It's the best thing the English department has done." When colleagues said, "That was much better than I expected," we took it as a compliment: we weren't just dancing dogs.

Would you like to try a faculty-acted Shake-

speare production on your campus? For the first time, the producer/associate director should definitely be someone on sabbatical: I would have found it impossible to run all rehearsals and coordinate the endless details had I been teaching. Other essentials: a director who will give your cast the same respect and guidance he would professional actors, a shortened script, and most of all, full commitment of the faculty to devote the time and effort necessary for a strong show and to include the play in their curriculum.

Jim Edmondson created an imaginative show using our facility (a 140-seat lecture hall with only one stage entrance, but double aisles for great running entrances and exits) and gave us wonderful insights into Shakespeare from the actors' perspective.

Professor Emeritus Lorraine Belmont adapted the script by cutting bits of lines and speeches but leaving the story intact if rather slimmer. In re-

hearsal Jim played a little with this adaptation, always keeping in mind a two-hour limit. Travelling companies in Shakespeare's day may have done much the same!

Actors were learning their lines before our January sessions with Jim. (He had met the cast when he stopped by campus for a day in November to complete the casting, using as the audition piece, Jaques' "All the world's a stage" speech as a means of talking about Shakespeare's language.) Performance anxiety is a powerful goad! During those three days, we focussed on emotion, motivation, and meaning, sitting in a circle. The wardrobe team measured actors and the musical director (who also played Jaques) began working with the singers. Our show was set in the land-grant rancho days, so he used melodies from early California for "Under the Greenwood Tree," "Blow thou winter wind," Hymen's marriage song, and "It was a lover and his lass." Overall this was a very musical production, with a fifteen minute prologue of songs from the period sung by actors in costume, and Touchstone, guitar slung on his back, singing some

of his jests.

When Jim returned for the long weekend in February, he blocked the entire show scene by scene and we ran through it twice. I kept extensive notes as did each actor on his and her script—and then we were on our own. For three weeks (all too brief!) we rehearsed every afternoon, and all day on the weekends during the three-week rehearsal time. Two judo teachers choreographed the wrestling scene between Orlando and Charles, and the costume designer outfitted everyone handsomely, most in more than one change of costume. Props were minimal: four small benches that remained onstage at all times, garlands, deer antlers, bows and arrows, the bloody handkerchief, and wreaths and bouquets for the final wedding scene. Students in a theatre-makeup class volunteered their expertise for each performance.

How did we get students to attend? Tickets were five dollars each and came with a student packet with the cast of characters, a summary of the action, a critical introduction, the "All the world's a stage" speech, and a student reaction form. We had to

charge admission because the production was supported by the English Instructional Enrichment Fund, not the college budget. Buying a ticket for a particular show made it more like a real theatre experience (though cheaper than the movies) and students could attend for free if they ushered.

Though some instructors assigned the play for extra credit and introduced it only briefly, the majority of instructors taught the play. We shared ideas at a faculty roundtable. In brief, with one class session, characters and the initial conflicts can be introduced, with a little time for looking at the language. In two class sessions, students can walk through the play, wearing the name of their character and ad-libbing lines after the teacher describes the scene. (The Barnes and Noble summary works well for this activity.) More time can be devoted to looking at the speeches. With more class time, students can look at the characters and relationships and discuss different ways of interpreting them, read the script (we published our adaptation and sold it cheaply in the bookstore) or part of it, and af-

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Words of Anger, Words of Truth: Using *The Tortilla Curtain* to Teach English 1A

S. Kay Murphy

Chaffey College

The border between Mexico and California has, for decades, been so fraught with political warfare, racism and xenophobia that it has been referred to as the “tortilla curtain.” Hence, T. Coraghessan Boyle chooses the same appellation for his masterfully written, gut-wrenching novel which portrays a world of haves and have nots that F. Scott Fitzgerald could never have envisioned.

The novel speaks to California’s community college students on two levels: First, they often consider themselves among the disenfranchised. Attendance at a two-year college instead of a university is perceived as being less arduous, less rigorous—and certainly less respectable. In addition, California’s large population of Mexican American and Chicano students is reflected in the enrollment at our community colleges. Many of these students who still struggle with perfecting their knowledge of English as a second lan-

guage know that they must be successful here before they can go on to pursue academic careers at the university level.

For these reasons, and because I absolutely love the craftsmanship and intensity of this novel, I began teaching *The Tortilla Curtain* to my English 1A students. Admittedly, in the more subversive role of teacher, I believe that exposure to good literature creates an opportunity for self-exploration, reflection and an authentic review of one’s values. In teaching this novel, I want to reach out to the disenfranchised, to tell them they are not alone in their struggle, while at the same time turning over some stones in the garden of my students’ minds, seeking to expose the insidious insects of prejudice and injustice.

The novel has dual protagonists. Delaney Mossbacher is a white, upper-middle-class writer whose wife, Kyra, earns high dollars in real estate. They and Kyra’s son from a previous marriage live a com-

fortable, well-insulated life in an exclusive, Los Angeles canyon neighborhood. In stark contrast, the Mexican, Candido, has slipped across the border with his young wife, America, promising her that they will start a new life in California. These two live in the canyon as well, but not in a newly constructed home with built-in appliances; they live in the canyon itself, camping next to a stream, hiking out each day to try to find work—without being caught by the INS.

In the opening scene of the novel, the paths of the two men cross when the “sad bundle of bone and gristle” that is Candido is launched over the side of the canyon “like a Ping-Pong ball shot out of a cannon” by the “high-resin-compound bumper” of Delaney’s Acura, to lie “as a doll flung in a corner by an imperious little girl.” Candido is badly injured, but Delaney, angry, inconvenienced, and more concerned for his “freshly waxed” car than for the

man whose very life depends on his ability to do manual labor, offers him twenty dollars and leaves him in the canyon to survive however he will.

Thus begins the cycle of trouble compounding trouble for Candido and America, which eventually spirals downward with such force that one reads the climax of the novel only through a hope that something, somehow will happen to change the course of the inevitable for the desperate couple. Meanwhile, Delaney, his wife and neighbors bicker about erecting a fence around the housing tract that will keep the undesirable element of coyotes—and illegal aliens—away from their homes.

The book lends itself to many different types of writing assignments. Generally, I begin with separate descriptions of Delaney, Kyra, Candido and America. This amounts to a prewriting exercise in which students basically list as many characteristics of each one as they can recall. What is helpful here is that Boyle has provided us with characters who are anything but stereotypical; each is complex in his or her own way, similar to the depth of

the characters in the film, *American Beauty*.

Next, I ask the students to choose one of the four and do a character analysis. The key here is to help them understand that “character analysis” means more than a flat description. I want them to tell me how a character behaves, and what his or her motivation is for behaving in that way. Beyond that, I ask them to write about why they chose that particular character; what is it in that person that resonates with them? I realize that this is a bit off the well-worn path of traditional character analysis. And I don’t care. If we are assigning reading that will make our students better people, they’ve got to indulge in some real self-examination before any change can take place. And there is no better way to know how we truly feel about something than to write about it.

The character analysis paves the way for an essay which compares and contrasts two of the characters. More often than not, students choose Kyra and America as their subjects—and understandably so. There is a stark contrast between the pampered, self-important Kyra and the strong, courageous, though

pitiful America.

The most compelling essays are the persuasive essays that are generated from our discussions of racial prejudice, immigration laws, civil rights and citizenship issues. Often, these topics evoke strong emotions and I have found myself more than once fulfilling the role of referee instead of facilitator. Still, an open forum in which views are honestly expressed offers yet another opportunity for students to fine-tune their values, strengthen defenses, and experience solidarity with others.

Of course, there is a wealth of other possible topics springing from the novel: Autobiographical (Discuss an incident in which you felt that you were discriminated against. How did it come about? What were your feelings? Did it change you in any way?); Opinion (What is your opinion of Candido’s treatment of America, both physically and psychologically? How much, if any, of his behavior toward her is culturally motivated? If they were citizens, say, your next-door-neighbors, would you feel that his behavior was appropriate?); Classifica-

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teachers and students,

- facilitating effective online exchanges between students,
- fostering a community of learners in an online course,
- assisting students to assess their ability to succeed in an online course,
- lowering the high attrition rate characteristic of online courses.

Participants in the workshop asked questions and examined answers though many issues are so complex the answers are like organic life itself: evolving—as you will see from the following workshop summary:

Question

What populations are better served by online learning as opposed to learning in a traditional classroom?

Answer

Among the populations most effectively served by online learning are the following: students with irregular schedules such as policemen and firemen and people who must travel for their work, pregnant students, students with new babies or with young children, students with health conditions that do not allow them to attend traditional classes, and stu-

dents who live in remote areas that would require long commutes to class.

Question

What factors promote the success of online learning?

Answer

· Students are far more likely to succeed in an online course if they are proficient keyboard users. The slow typist will find chat rooms very frustrating.

· Instructors need to ensure that students are using appropriate software. Everyone needs to have Word 97 or higher, and it is best to use just Word and not have some students using another program such as WordPerfect.

· Students need efficient modems. Cable hook-ups or dedicated lines are a major advantage in ameliorating student and instructor frustration.

· In synchronistic classes (classes that meet with all students online at the same time), instructors need a backup plan in case everyone cannot get online or students get knocked off line.

Question

How will students who have difficulty following the format of a traditional course outline and the course reading require-

ments be successful online? Can we predetermine which students are, in fact, most likely to succeed in an online course?

Answer

The most successful students at online learning are those who are motivated, assertive, disciplined, and independent. Workshop leaders suggest giving students a self-selection questionnaire either at the beginning of the semester or during the registration process. Attrition rates in online courses tend to be higher than attrition rates in more traditional courses. Student self-assessment could help with this problem.

Question

Will online courses facilitate students getting degrees through diploma mills?

If we don't know a student, how can we figure out whether or not that student is writing or simply downloading a paper from one of the websites created for that purpose?

Answer

Instructors who have taught online say that since online students must do a great deal of writing, it is even easier for an online instructor than a traditional instructor to spot the old "Fishy Voice"

problem with a student paper. Instructors quickly become familiar with a student through chat room dialogue.

In addition, using sites like www.turnitin.com, instructors can check to see if a paper has been turned out by one of the websites that sell essays to students.

Question

As a writer working on my fourth textbook, I am especially interested in the question of intellectual property. Who owns the course once an instructor does all the work to create it?

Answer

If an instructor is paid by the college to create a course, the college may own the course. Of course, how much an instructor is paid must be weighed against how much time it took to create the course. Certainly who gets paid for what will be a matter for contract negotiation.

Question

Administrators are eager to facilitate online courses because they believe such courses will make colleges a lot of money. Will administrators simply be able to use canned courses once an online course is created?

Answer

Certainly in Califor-

nia teaching conditions and contracts will continue to be governed by faculty associations and faculty senates under the guidelines of the California Education Code.

Question

Does teaching become an impersonal activity, depriving instructors of the sense of working with students?

Answer

Instructors teaching online say they are more involved than ever with students. They also find that they can design courses so all students must participate—even that wallflower in the back row who only mumbles if called on during an entire semester.

Question

Does grading essays online take more time?

Answer

While some instructors said that grading online is far more time-consuming than grading a conventional paper, other instructors have found short cuts for tasks such as in-text indication of error. The more experienced instructors said their online grading is both more thorough and less time-consuming.

Question

How do instructors make effective marginal

and in-text comments?

Answer

Word has some very helpful tools for commenting on mechanical errors and telling students where in their handbook to review the mechanical rule they violate. Many publishers have software available to help with this review.

Question

How is online learning impacted by the Americans with Disabilities Act?

Answer

There are access problems with the Americans with Disabilities Act for blind students and for deaf students in courses using audio components. There are some changes being made in programs such as WebCT to help make these programs more accessible.

Question

What are the advantages and disadvantages of asynchronous versus synchronous classes—that is classes that meet with everyone online at the same time as opposed to classes in which students are not online as a class?

Answer

Many instructors recommended hybrid classes in which students actually meet face to face. There are various plans from meeting times ranging from twice in the semester—once at the

beginning of the course and once near the end—to courses that meet for an hour a week. Instructors have more control in and get more immediate class feedback in synchronistic courses.

After the half-day workshop, I better understand the issues involved in teaching online courses, and I'm impressed by the enthusiasm for the courses expressed by those already teaching them. When I have a big block of free time, I may indeed design such a course. However, my intellectual evolution has a ways to go before I am ready to trade my chalkboard for a keyboard.

Martin has taught at Monterey Peninsula College since 1972. Among the many places she has published are Christian Science Monitor, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle, and San Jose Mercury. She has written two college composition textbooks, Practicing the Process: A Basic Text, (Harper/Collins, 1989) and Review and Revise (McGraw-Hill, 1989), and co-authored Writing Wisely and Well (McGraw-Hill, 1993). She is working on another textbook for McGraw-Hill.

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tion (There are certainly different degrees of morality in this novel. Who are the persons of greatest integrity? What makes them so? Who are the lowest?); Narrative (Describe a scene from the novel which you find particularly compelling, then discuss how it relates to the theme of the novel as a whole.)

The essay topic I save for the final exam is this one: How would you define the American Dream? In *The Tortilla Curtain*, what is Boyle attempting to state concerning the American Dream? Is his view a cynical one, or is it realistic? Or both?

What I get, as an end product, are final exams I truly enjoy reading, even though some will be disturbing in their cynicism and/or tenacious adherence to stereotypes and bigoted behavior. Using a novel such as this creates a coherence for a class that is, by nature, composition-driven; rather than spending a semester scanning separate, unrelated readings from which flat writing assignments are generated, we work together through a deeper, richer reading and response experience that will ultimately

help us define who we are and what we believe.

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ter the show, analyze our interpretation and the insights they gained from seeing it live. Written assignments range from filling in the student reaction form to a fuller response to the production.

This is a very brief account of an exciting and unprecedented event at Santa Barbara City College. Feel free to contact me if you would like more details. We did make a video of our production.

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a starting point for student connection to academic writing.

The task for the instructors of developing writers is to work from what is established, particularly in a writing center. The tutor is continually providing the language of academic discourse for the student to begin using to identify what he or she has already been doing. The student can begin to name a used activity and practice it intentionally. For example, telling a student that the scribbled notes the student has used to start the assignment are a necessary step in prewriting can empower the student and help her see that though she may not have had the terminology to describe her activity, she was already on the right track. This modeling and practice with academic terminology offers familiarity, making it easier to use. In a classroom setting, a student may be reluctant to offer an opinion because he feels inadequate to express what he has no name for. With a tutor, the student is given an opportunity to hear a new term, to comment on it, and to understand how his behavior relates to it. Pointing out that established

patterns are part of a recognized strategy can validate a student's effort and promote confidence. The student is more apt to take a risk with the language of academic discourse because a supportive tutor can reduce the weight of authority often imposed by an instructor who assigns grades.

Linda Flower reinforces the pattern of working from student input. One of her strategies for generating ideas includes the process of "playing your thoughts." This process can include brainstorming, staging a scenario or even playing out an analogy such as, what does this topic make you think of? The tutor helps the developing writer generate his own information through continual questioning. The process can be extended by an astute tutor who looks for cue words that tap into a network of associations and ideas. To accomplish this successfully, the tutor must have a working knowledge of the writing process and a sincere desire to help students discover their ideas. The focus of the conversation must be the writer's thoughts and helping that writer find words to put his/her thoughts into written form. When the

writer lacks the vocabulary, the tutor can help by supplying a word, but the ideas behind the words belong to the writer. In this case the process for acquiring academic discourse is first oral, gradually shifting to written. The process between tutor and student is collaborative.

A successful tutor keeps the focus of the conversation directed to the student's ideas. It is imperative that as writing teachers and tutors we recognize that the goal of our teaching is to help our students put their ideas on paper. Emotional turmoil and certainly a sense of frustration can result when the elite language of the university contradicts the language that binds together family and friends. Our role as writing teachers is to help students connect personally with what they are writing. That can only happen when they see a link between what they are discussing in the classroom and their lives outside the classroom.

Those students who come empty-handed to a writing tutor often haven't thought seriously about the assignment other than as a chore to complete. They may be confused by the assignment directions

and have no idea what the instructor, and in this case audience, expects. If academic discourse is the language of thinkers, then we must stimulate our students to interact with the ideas that are part of their assignments and give them examples of how the information fits into their current experience. To accomplish this task involves translating academic terms into words that make sense to the writer. Words like “summary” and “analysis” that many instructors take as givens must be discussed and explained. Tutors have the obvious opportunity to rehearse and explain these new terms with a student in a nonjudgmental context.

Practicing academic terminology is a preliminary step in acquiring academic language. Students must also be connected to reading material that is meant to stimulate their thinking. In a recent article in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, Alan Devenish writes of using classic Greek dramas to engage his community college English students. While these students are squeezing in an English class between a home, family, and full time job, the need to connect to the uni-

versal experiences of finding truth and honor amidst human weakness is still valid. Devenish writes how the transformation from academic agenda to personal meaning occurs when students, because of an assignment, “slow down and engage in language in ways unknown to their hurried, short-term, needs-driven lives” (411). How does Devenish engage his students in Greek drama, a subject so seemingly far removed from our frantic urban existence? Not only does he pair his Greek dramas with more contemporary writing such as *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, a novel set in colonial Nigeria, he reminds students that the deeds done in the tragedies have their everyday counterparts in contemporary society. The supermarket tabloids and talk show topics of incest, self mutilations and suicides which feature the fears and secrets least admissible in our normal, public lives are discussed and portrayed in Greek drama in a fashion that shows the complexity of human experience.

What I liked most about Devenish’s article isn’t simply that he is using a variety of texts to engage his students. Rather,

Devenish helps students connect to academic discourse by tapping into a framework of their experience that already exists. He does this by creating dialogues for students to interact with the texts. One way he showed this was a preparation exercise for *Oedipus*. He asked students to respond to a prompt that described the following scenario.

You’re at a party. At some point a drunk shouts out that the people you think are your parents are not your real parents. The next day you ask your parents about your origin. They reassure you, but something still nags and you consult someone who is reputed to have special powers of knowledge and sees into the future. You ask this person about your parents and are told only that it is your fate to kill one parent and marry the other. What do you do now?

Whether students recognize the scenario as part of the Oedipal drama or not, the question now becomes one that can be considered on a personal level. Imagining ones’ self in such a situation is the beginning

of generating ideas related to a 2500 year-old drama. The key issue is stimulating student thinking and practicing reflection. Many of our students come to the community college classroom with little experience interacting with a text. As instructors, we supply the terminology for ideas that may be floating around without an identity to connect them to what is often perceived as another unapproachable world.

Joseph Ng sees teachers as cultural agents. He accomplishes this by what he describes as “a negotiation between down sizing the authoritarian literary expert and inviting active voices” (419). He speaks of relating his own experiences as a Chinese born educator to connect to his students. It is not necessary to be an ethnic instructor to relate our response to a piece of writing. In teaching ethnic literature to returning adults students in downtown Los Angeles, I may have been the only white person in the classroom, but I shared numerous life experiences with my students. Telling how I responded to a text opened the way for my students to share their own experiences. When we discussed “The World of Our

Grandmothers,” by Connie Young Yu, I told my students how different my mother’s life was from my own. This was a starting point for discussion and connection from personal experience to literature. When reminded of the common thread of so many of our life experiences, students are freed to express what they know. When they begin to connect their life experience to the ideas covered in literature, they can begin practicing academic discourse.

The idea of making connections between our own experience and the experience of those in literature is at the heart of academic discourse. We ask our students to read a story and pull out what is valuable. In so doing, we want them to make these connections with the terms and phrases that we use in a classroom setting. We want those common words of academic communication to become part of a practiced and useful vocabulary. What is typically valuable to most readers is the familiar chord that a writer is able to touch. I start my students out with connecting to short stories by pointing out similarities to family experience. Sandra Ciscernos, in “Only Daugh-

ter” paints a graphic picture of growing up female in a Hispanic home dominated by males. When students are introduced to terms such as “gender bias,” their own experience can be viewed from a new perspective, simply by the ability to identify a previously unlabeled situation. Students need to be reminded of this, usually with a specific example. After identifying a common experience, it doesn’t take students long to attach an underlying meaning to the behavior. Practicing the pattern of making connections with a broader idea in mind, such as personal freedom, harassment, or power is key to preparing students to examine the ideas of others. Reflection and critical thinking don’t automatically happen. Students need the opportunity to engage in these activities, find value in them and then do them intentionally.

Simplifying a complex concept with a recognized experience not only helps our students to make connections, it can validate their own ideas. The issue is particularly significant to developing writers since they typically lack both confidence in their writing and reinforcement for their

ideas. If we think of education and the teaching of writing as empowering our students, validation of their ideas is critical. As teachers of writing we must take care not to make form and usage the focal point of our comment least we dismiss and extinguish the emotion expressed. At the same time we must model the terms and examination techniques that will bridge the gap between street jargon and academic discourse. This is no small task, but we need to acknowledge the importance so our student can do the same.

As I visited various academic departments on my community college campus, I heard remarks such as "I'm so glad there is finally a writing center. Now you can help my students clean up their sentences." One instructor from anthropology questioned me as to whether the writing center could teach his students how to write scientific reports according to his directions. Even after explaining the role of writing center tutors as helping students practice the writing process, the expectation of many of our faculty is the writing center is a fix-it shop. This simple reduction in the explanation of what consti-

tutes academic writing exemplifies the split within our institutions as to what academic writing is and how it should be fostered. Is it our job to assist students in becoming models of academic discourse, confident in their use of commas and standard white English? While this expectation is part of what many consider academic discourse, a more important consideration is including those previously excluded from the academic and professional rewards of clear writing and supported thinking. Writing decisions as negotiation rather than commands are the difference between empowerment and prescribed writing. Collaborative decisions based on what is acceptable in a particular context is a democratic approach that includes students and helps illuminate the realities of writing for a particular audience.

We can best inspire students by showing the relevance of learning to their situations. Empowering a student by validating a powerful account is one way of making writing relevant. There is no one method or technique to reach any student. Academic writing includes a variety of styles and forms and can be explained in a

variety of ways. As teachers and tutors, we need to bridge the language gap between our students' spoken language and academic discourse. If it sounds like I am suggesting that we act as interpreters and guides, I am. Students come to us to make changes in their lives. We can help provide the vocabulary and practice for them to express their spoken thoughts effectively on paper and more importantly, we can foster an atmosphere of validation and collaboration that honors what our students bring to our classrooms.

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tioned this inconsistency to the English department. Despite aggressive marketing, many students, faculty, and staff are not clear as to the purpose and role of the Center. At peak times, traffic flow has resulted in congestion. This backup has resulted in some disgruntled students. Students with appointments have had to wait. Again, this translates into questionable service. I am sure there are some other problems I have not covered, but the frequency of the ones mentioned merited immediate attention. I think we have addressed the glitches in a timely manner.

The English department has developed a much closer relationship with its Writing Center. A departmental advisory group has been formed to evaluate and recommend proposals, to develop an evaluative process for student success and tutoring effectiveness, and to serve as a “think tank” for the Writing Center Specialist. To relieve congestion, a “triage” structure has been adopted to improve traffic flow. Students with appointments will not have to wait, and if there are waiting students (e.g. walk-ins), they are in-

involved in an activity so the wait time is not perceived as wasteful. To maximize tutor time, more in-class workshops have been added. To insure more consistency in the quality of tutoring, follow-up tutor training has been implemented. A special training program has been created for peer tutors. A greater emphasis has been placed on group tutoring; students with similar assignments and issues can be tutored together, rather than individually. In short, the English department has addressed the Writing Center’s shortcomings, real and perceived. Today, we’re not only a “new” Center; we also have an improved one. With close monitoring and dedicated professionals, this improvement will continue.

I like to think of myself as a man of vision, but reality keeps interfering with this perception. Tutor and part-timer contracts end with the semester; professionals, continuing and new, have to be hired and trained. Our on-line English offerings have tripled for the spring; this means that on-line tutoring needs will increase dramatically. Where will we find competent on-line tutors on short notice? These challenges

and more are all part of the ongoing saga of designing, starting up, maintaining, and improving a Writing Center. Chaffey College’s Writing Center, first a dream and then a reality, continues to go through adjustments and growing pains. However, despite differences, both pedagogical and personal, and despite problems, both real and perceived, the Writing Center at Chaffey College successfully serves student interdisciplinary writing needs, at the foundation through the advanced levels. With the support of dedicated professionals and the Chaffey College Community, it will continue to do so.

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