Writing Assistants Present Research at CERCA

This year, 15 writing assistants from the Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) presented their research at the annual Celebration of Excellence in Research and Creativity (CERCA). Five of these presenters—Melanie Daas, David Kocik, Mark Priebe, Katelyn Sabelko and Kiah Sexton—showcased research done for English 397.

Melanie Daas presented “This AND That: Disabling Binary Gender in the Writing Center.” Melanie’s project grew out of her desire to start a dialogue on the stigmatization of non-binary students in academia. She illustrated the non-binary experience in writing centers by sharing some situations in which non-binary students are marginalized and proposed solutions on how to better serve these students in the CWE.

David Kocik showcased “Personalizing the Classroom: An Inquiry into Students’ Needs in Tutor Training for the Center for Writing Excellence,” a look into the effectiveness of writing pedagogy. He collected student responses regarding the effectiveness of UW-Eau Claire’s CWE training course, English 397, focusing on whether theory or concrete strategies were more useful for incoming writing assistants.

Mark Priebe talked about “Supporting ESL Students in the Writing Center: Concerns and Solutions.” His research primarily focused on how to best serve ESL...
The end of this semester marks new beginnings for two supporters and key contributors to the Center for Writing Excellence (CWE): UWEC Director of Composition Dr. Shevaun Watson and Assistant Director of the CWE Dr. Christa Tiernan.

Dr. Watson is currently transitioning to her new position at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s English Department, set to begin next year. In response to her upcoming exit from UWEC, it is only appropriate that we commemorate all of the work that she has done for not only the CWE, but the English Department as well.

Dr. Watson came to our campus with wisdom gained from working with and observing writing centers at other universities she has attended. Her vision and hard work helped the CWE grow from a small organization to an established and ever-growing UWEC institution.

Dr. Watson headed the reconceptualization of the first year composition course, the Blugold Seminar. Her work helped make the class more applicable and beneficial for students as well as more manageable for instructors. She says that her ideas would have gained no success if it were not for the hard work and support of her colleagues.

Dr. Tiernan is currently preparing to direct the Writing and Media Center at Iowa State University. It goes without saying that we at the CWE are sad to see her go, but we are also excited for the new opportunities that this position holds for Dr. Tiernan.

Dr. Tiernan says that writing centers have been her “academic home” since 2004, during her time at the University of Virginia. After that, she served as the Coordinator of the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She arrived at Eau Claire in 2013 when, she jokes, CWE director Alan Benson “decided to take a chance on a Victorianist.”

Dr. Tiernan says that teaching English 397 was one of the most rewarding teaching experiences of her career. “To watch novice writing assistants practice the art of phatic communication, poke and prod writing center scholarship, and transform into a close-knit team of skilled, practiced, and confident writing assistants was a joy beyond measure,” she says.

Please join the CWE as we thank both Dr. Watson and Dr. Tiernan for their hard work here at UWEC and the CWE and wish them all the best next fall in their new institutions.
Welcome Back, Josh Bauer
by Hannah Brandel

The Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) is happy to welcome back one of our past writing assistants, Josh Bauer. Josh worked at the CWE for two years and graduated with a B.A. in English – Creative Writing in May 2014. He returned in the fall to pursue his M.A. in English – Writing and this semester became the CWE’s newest Graduate Assistant Director.

Because of his love of writing (and to fulfill his service learning requirement), Josh became a writing assistant as an undergrad. But after learning about writing center theory and working one-on-one with UWEC writers, he soon recognized the value of writing center work. Josh also realized that by working with students, he was gaining skills to use in his own writing. As a Graduate Assistant Director, Josh hopes to extend the CWE’s outreach to creative writers.

Josh first studied Computer Programming before switching to Creative Writing. He studied abroad twice through the Semester at Sea program and has visited over 20 different countries. When Josh isn’t studying, writing, or working in the CWE, he enjoys reading fantasy novels, playing Nintendo games, and wearing a cap backwards.

We are glad to have you back, Josh!

CWE Says Farewell to Andrew Suralski, Rory Noble
by Nathaniel Taylor

The Center for Writing Excellence (CWE) would like to give fond farewells and gracious thanks to Graduate Assistant Director Andrew Suralski, who will be graduating this summer with an M.A. in English – Writing. Upon finishing his thesis—a project investigating what factors might contribute to under-performance in college writing and composition courses—Andrew intends to either teach college composition or further his study at the doctoral level.

Serving the center for two years, Andrew has most enjoyed reflecting on his own writing style by learning from and working with the students who visit the center—a notable indication of Andrew’s deep thoughtfulness and passion for the writing process. Anyone who has spoken to Andrew for more than half-a-minute could no doubt speak to his kindness and bright disposition, and those who have worked closely with him would speak to his interminable and ardent drive to excel in his work by helping students develop as writers and thinkers.

Andrew leaves the CWE hoping writing assistants remain curious about writing outside of their discipline and that they will continue to foster a love of writing and intellectual exchange.

Rory Noble estimates that he has been a writing assistant for nine semesters at the Center for Writing Excellence (CWE), most likely setting a record for longevity. Rory completed his undergraduate work at UWEC, receiving a degree in English – Literature. He is now finishing up his master’s degree in English – Writing with an emphasis in fiction.

Rory believes that when it comes to English, there is always room for improvement. “Writing is an ever-evolving process,” he says. He also believes that every piece of writing has plenty of room for revision, and that there is no real model for a perfect piece. He enjoys all forms of writing, whether it’s academic writing in the CWE, creative writing for his thesis, or the business writing he has done in the past for Milwaukee Burger, where he works as the bar manager.

Some of Rory’s favorite things include finishing a great short story and learning as much as he can about craft beer. Rory also appreciates a nice round of golf when he has time away from graduate school, CWE appointments, and the buzz of the restaurant.

Rory is not certain what the future holds and whether teaching or further study is in the cards. For now he is taking it one day at a time and focusing on preparing to defend his thesis next semester.

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The Center for Writing Excellence’s 2015 Spring Writing Contest was a success! Writers were asked to submit their best fiction and non-fiction prose pieces, written to the theme of “Conspiracy Theories.” Entries ranged from Paul McCartney to exciting childhoods.

The grand prize went to “Aliem” by Jon Pumper. Second place was given to Mary Jo Kozol for “The Power of [AND] Will Unleash Atomic Nuclear Destruction or: How I Learned to Start Worrying and Love Coal Energy.” Third place went to Abby Williamson for “All Falls Down.”

Thanks to the generosity of the UWEC bookstore, all writers received a prize for their unique takes on a variety of conspiracy theories.

On Thursday, April 9th, the center held an open read at The Cabin, where all participants had the opportunity to read their pieces aloud.

We sincerely thank all the writers for their hard work on their entries, the faculty judges for volunteering their time and energy, and the campus bookstore for providing us with fabulous prizes.

Be on the lookout for the Writing Contest to return next year with an exciting new theme.