Director’s Note

Kristen Neuschel, Director of the Thompson Writing Program and Associate Professor of History

**Teaching with Evidence**

**Assessment is a fact of life in the academy now.** In the Thompson Writing Program (TWP), we are committed to robust assessment of student learning (quite apart from the required standards for accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) because Writing 101 is the single course required of every Duke undergraduate. The resources we devote to assessment enable us to study student learning in a nuanced way; each year we scrutinize only selected aspects of students’ writing. But assessment comes naturally in the TWP because we are committed, too, to the broader goal of being *reflective* teachers. In order to teach well, we ask questions. The content of any single course is ephemeral, but the habits of mind the students practice in any course—above all, their use of writing to advance their thinking—are not. To properly focus on “higher order” learning, we have to know both what students bring to the class—their skills, their analytical experience, their writing practices—but also what we do. What are the most important critical thinking skills in the discipline of (fill in the blank)? If this were the only course in your discipline students ever took, what would you want them to take away from it? What are some of the best ways to deploy writing as a way of learning in your discipline? (Hint: the answer is not always “assignments which mimic professional writing in the field.”) In short, assessment does not feel alien to us in the TWP because we are always formulating questions not just about our students but also about ourselves. We are always looking for answers to those questions, because good teaching is a kind of research. Our directors model this inquiry-based teaching for the graduate students and post-doctoral lecturing fellows we train, and for other faculty across Arts and Sciences. This spring, we concluded a three-year study, supported by the Spencer Foundation, on the use of assessment findings to improve general education courses. We partnered with two other research universities; at Duke, we studied writing-in-the-disciplines courses (WIDs). (Students in Trinity must take two WIDs in any department in addition to Writing 101). One of the most important findings of that study was the value of encouraging faculty to regard their teaching as a site for inquiry. That disposition produces the willingness to both gather data about their students’ learning as well as actually use it.

**BRANCHES OF THE TWP**

- **Writing 101: Academic Writing**
- **Writing in the Disciplines**
- **The Writing Studio**

The TWP also conducts outreach with Duke faculty and students through workshops and conference experiences. Another TWP initiative supports international students with resources for *non-native English speakers.*
Duke Kunshan University’s (DKU’s) inaugural semester features a TWP-designed upper level writing course taught by our very own Director of the Writing Studio, Vicki Russell. Here, she shares some thoughts on what she’ll pass on to students in China:

The theme in the fall is “Visual Rhetoric and the Language of Photographic Texts,” which includes a cross-cultural component. To honor the diversity within the DKU classroom, students will start by first sharing their personal and culturally-constructed writing backgrounds. By completing a series of projects that specifically analyze photographic texts from different cultural perspectives, students will develop strategies for critical, thoughtful, and reasoned arguments. Stay tuned for their end-of-semester exhibit on WordPress!

Some questions students will be considering include: How does the language of visual rhetoric and literacy operate in a multicultural social media world of iPads and cell phones, celebrity paparazzi photos, Google Images, and Weibo/Facebook? In what ways do visual images have languages and textual lives of their own, separate from cultural norms? What are the possible ethical implications of making certain images public, and does this change according to geographical location and venue? To what degree does appropriating images involve individual and social responsibility for how those images are used?

These photos are all from Vicki Russell’s blog about DKU, Writing Across Cultures, where she posts frequent updates about her experiences in China.
What is digital pedagogy?

To teach academic writing thoughtfully, we need to consider the contexts in which students lead their daily lives, including how they search for, read, and share information. Many of our students, for example, cannot imagine writing or researching without the Internet, mobile devices, or asking Siri or Google for help. As of January 2014, Pew Research Internet Project results indicate 97% of American 18-29-year-olds use the Internet (general use), 89% use social media sites, 98% use cell phones, and 83% use smartphones. Although this research may not represent all of our students, it certainly suggests students are living in a digital world. Digital Pedagogy is an approach that responds to that reality, in part, by using technology to improve how students learn and how instructors teach in a 21st century context.

To teach thoughtfully with technology, we need to be intentional about how we use it so we add value to the educational experience. Just including technology in the writing classroom—asking students to write a blog post, live tweet a class discussion, search a digital archive, or watch video recordings of a peer giving feedback on their writing—is not enough. A digital pedagogy approach requires that we also reflect on what difference this approach can make for students’ learning about and through writing.

In the writing classroom, digital pedagogy can take a variety of forms. Here are a few:

1. **GoogleDocs** to crowsource notes. Emphasizes research as collaboration and makes generative writing visible.

2. **Online peer discussion forum.** Extends class conversations beyond face-to-face meetings. At its best, teaches writers that learning is not contingent on the professor, and students can experiment and gain expertise with different writing feedback styles.

3. **Class blog.** Prompts critical thinking about audience and class community. This approach positions peers as co-creators in the course. This can enhance students’ engagement with each other and help them, as writers, understand the role that research can play in public dialogue. Digital pedagogue Mark Sample offers a critical reflection on the class blog in his ProfHacker article "A better blogging assignment."

4. **Multimedia composing** for disseminating knowledge. Allows writers to consider choices related to audience and purpose (and the implications of those choices) when their research moves from print to audio, video, public presentation, even Wikipedia, and their ideas circulate beyond the classroom. Composing in formats that are new to students can spark creativity and new ways of seeing their work.

For any of these interventions to be meaningful, faculty need to pay deliberate, careful attention to the strengths and limitations of any one approach and how it forwards specific learning goals in the classroom. The LAMP@TWP blog, the Duke Center for Instructional Technology, the ProfHacker blog, and Hybrid Pedagogy include examples of faculty using or reflecting on the potential use of digital pedagogy in their courses.

Ultimately, why does digital pedagogy matter? When we pay close attention to our students’ lives as they live them; when we seek to create learning contexts that build on what they know and how they know it, we help build the foundation for their work as critical thinkers in the university and beyond.
In February, a group of Writing Studio tutors attended a three-day regional writing center conference at East Carolina University. Attendees were treated to a thought-provoking keynote address by Dr. Vershawn Young, who challenged them to think carefully and critically about conventional views of code-switching between standard and vernacular English in academic discourse. Acting Writing Studio Director Jim Berkey participated in a roundtable discussion on group writing conferences as collaborations between the classroom and the writing center. Writing Studio tutor Heidi Giusto led a workshop on how writing center staff can conceptualize and articulate their experience to an outside audience, especially when on the job market. Writing Studio tutors Elizabeth Long, Cynthia Greenlee, Jamie Browne, and Chris Ramos presented a roundtable discussion on power and difference in tutoring sessions. Below, three Duke undergraduate writing tutors who presented at the conference share some of their impressions.

Clara Colombatto’s project explored how personal pronouns are used to shape and define tutoring relationships in writing centers. She used findings from social psychology studies and examples from tutoring conference summaries to show that personal pronouns are crucial markers of social space and accurate indicators of authority roles. She says: “My experience at the SWCA conference was a wonderful immersion in the world of writing centers. I grew as a tutor, student, and researcher—not just by attending individual, panel, and workshop sessions, but also by getting to know other tutors and writing center staff. Building a community of professionals from all over the country is a wonderful contribution to our professional development, and hearing about different centers and their work was great ‘food for thought’ for my own tutoring.”

Jenny Li’s project, “Musical Notes on Tutoring Writing,” compared student-centered music lessons to writing tutoring sessions and argued that tutors can learn valuable techniques from music teachers, such as creativity, preparation, and openness. She explains: “Although the sessions I went to were all incredibly informative and engaging, probably the most unforgettable was ‘Academic Environments and Racial Boundaries: Framing the Black/White Rapport in Writing Centers.’ Initially, I was interested in this panel because, as a student of sociology at Duke, I have grown extremely passionate about racial/ethnic issues in our society and the need for social change to counter the harsh injustices faced by minority groups. However, I never considered the implications of racial, cultural, and linguistic differences in the writing center. The presentations and discussion turned out to be absolutely fascinating.”

Yemi Adewuyi’s project explained nonverbal cues—such as posture, hand gestures, or eye contact—that tutors can use to put writers at ease, to maintain focus, and ultimately to help them bridge the gap between what writers can accomplish with or without help. Reflecting later on the impact conference attendance had on his tutoring, he said: “When I started meeting with Writing 101 students, many of the discussions I had heard during the conference came flooding back into my memory. In particular, I met with a student who had written a paper on Southern Black churches. The paper had a number of Black colloquialisms, and I instinctively wanted to be directive and “correct” these informal expressions. But as I worked with the student and discussed linguistic conventions with her, I also thought about the importance of retaining her voice and allowing her to portray her narrative authentically.”

If students in Writing 101 wish to schedule an appointment with the Undergraduate Writing Tutor assigned to their class, they can do so at the Writing Studio website.
Spring 2014:

In early February, the TWP participated in Sustainable Duke’s annual Green Smackdown. The Going Greener Team made recycled art, shared a potluck lunch, and attended the Duke Sustainability Awards.

On April 16 and 17, the TWP’s Digital Writing + Pedagogy Lab brought Pete Rorabaugh and Jesse Stommel to campus to speak on “Composing Knowledge in the Digital Age.” These two critical pedagogues led multiple campus-wide conversations on digital storytelling, student activism, and library collaborations.

From May 20—22, Jennifer Ahern-Dodson, TWP Director of the Language, Arts + Media Program (LAMP) and Outreach, led a Duke Faculty Write “Roving Retreat.” Writers moved between Durham’s Morehead Manor, local bars and coffee shops, and one faculty member’s home. Participants made summer writing schedules and workshopped drafts-in-progress. Learn how to get involved at the Faculty Write Program website.

Fall 2014:

October 20, the National Day on Writing (NDOW), is a day to celebrate writing in all its diverse forms. The Writing Studio will host activities around campus with the theme “The Future of Writing.” Beginning October 6, the TWP will also have an exhibit in the Perkins Library first-floor gallery. This exhibit will share answers to last year’s NDOW prompt: “Complete the sentence: Writing is like…”

The images shown at right hint at some responses from the Duke Community!

All Three TWP Staff Members Have Earned the Title “Blue Devil of the Week”

It’s official: the Thompson Writing Program has an exceptional staff! As of May 2014, all three staff members have been named Blue Devils of the Week by Duke Today in recognition of their outstanding service. Click their names above to read the full interviews.
The TWP has developed a new resource: an online suite of videos and quiz tutorials for international, multilingual, and multicultural undergraduates. Students can explore the learning modules to strengthen their knowledge about U.S. classroom participation strategies and academic writing practices in U.S. English. Topics include: academic integrity, essay structure, citation practices, sentence structure, and more. The site also includes forums for engaging in cross-cultural exchanges about writing and learning. We encourage all Duke undergraduates to join in these conversations and enrich their thinking about writing.

This project is being co-led by Denise Comer, TWP Director of First-Year Writing, and Rene Caputo, TWP Instructor, Tutor, and ESL Specialist. Caputo developed the ESIS content with help from Margaret Swezey, TWP Writing Studio Assistant Director, and Elizabeth Long, TWP Writing Studio Tutor. Kelly Mullendore Goyette, also a Writing Studio Tutor, designed the project website and edited video content. ESIS is funded by a Center for Instructional Technology (CIT) JumpStart Grant. Ongoing technical support is provided by Randy Riddle, CIT Academic Technological Consultant, and Mich Donovan, Office of Information Technology Analyst.

Access ESIS by following these easy steps:

1. Go to sakai.duke.edu
2. Click “Workspace,” then “Membership”
3. Click the “Joinable Sites” tab
4. Search for “DukeWrites Enrichment” in the search box
5. Follow the instructions to join the site
6. Once you’ve joined, ESIS will appear under “Projects” on your main Sakai page

Critical Ink is a conference that showcases the writing of Duke’s first-year students. The conference offers students an opportunity to publicize and discuss the academic writing and scholarly inquiry they have undertaken early in their college careers.

Critical Ink 2014 took place on April 16. The format of the event was revised from previous years to reflect the changing nature of 21st century knowledge production and communication. In addition to traditional panel presentations, the conference featured multimedia projects, including student-designed WordPress sites and digital posters.

Critical Ink also had an exciting new venue this year: the Franklin Humanities Institute at Smith Warehouse. This space highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of the student work presented. It also brought the conference to East Campus, allowing more first-year students to drop in on a panel, view a digital poster, or ask questions directly of a presenter.

Progressive educators Pete Rorabaugh and Jesse Stommel offered the conference’s opening talk, entitled “Critical Pedagogy, Organic Writing, and the Changing Nature of Scholarship.” Using critical pedagogy as the foundation for their work in hybrid and fully-digital environments, Rorabaugh and Stommel considered how academic writing and scholarship are changing from within and without.

In addition to having an in-person audience, the Critical Ink opening talk was livestreamed across the globe and live-tweeted under the hashtag #digpedmakers.

The full conference schedule and a compilation of student abstracts are available at the Critical Ink website. The topics explored this year span the sciences and humanities: Students led discussions on subjects from gender and feminism to chimpanzee parenting styles to food culture in Durham.

ESL Enrichment Suite for International Students (ESIS)

Aria Chernik, TWP Lecturing Fellow, Language, Arts + Media Program (LAMP) Fellow, and Conference Chair

The TWP has developed a new resource: an online suite of videos and quiz tutorials for international, multilingual, and multicultural undergraduates. Students can explore the learning modules to strengthen their knowledge about U.S. classroom participation strategies and academic writing practices in U.S. English. Topics include: academic integrity, essay structure, citation practices, sentence structure, and more. The site also includes forums for engaging in cross-cultural exchanges about writing and learning. We encourage all Duke undergraduates to join in these conversations and enrich their thinking about writing.
Last semester, a community writing partnership was born. Named the Duke-Durham Writes Studio, it paired Duke’s Thompson Writing Program with Durham Public Schools (DPS). The collaboration was funded by Duke’s Office of Civic Engagement (DOCE).

Jennifer Ahern-Dodson, Director of the Language, Arts + Media Program (LAMP) and Outreach for the TWP, co-led the Studio with Nicolas Elbaum, a TWP Lecturing Fellow, and Denise Comer, TWP Director of First-Year Writing. Ahern-Dodson described the Studio’s work in an article published by Durham’s Herald-Sun:

“In this partnership, DPS teachers, principals, media center directors, and parents collaborated with TWP faculty and others to develop school-based writing experiences. This process included a focus on self-discovery through narrative writing, school-wide writing workshops, and documentaries of English as a Second Language (ESL) students’ experiences with education.”

On May 6, Studio participants, proud families of DPS students, and Duke faculty and undergraduates met to celebrate the participants’ final writing projects in a public forum co-sponsored by DOCE and the Forum for Scholars and Publics. The schools represented were Forest View Elementary, Lakewood Montessori Middle School, and Hillside High School.

Presentations began with Lo DeWalt’s fifth-grade class from Forest View. DeWalt’s students spent six weeks engaging in narrative writing workshops. Their writing process, which involved brainstorming, peer review, editing, and translation, culminated in digital stories and a print publication. After the presentation, class representatives passed around copies of their anthology of student stories, titled Us! (¡Nosotros y Nosotras!).

A quarter of the students in DeWalt’s class were native Spanish speakers. The group chose to publish the anthology in both English and Spanish to explore the idea of voice as it relates to language. Joan Munné and Melissa Simmermeyer, who teach Spanish 310 at Duke, invited undergraduates to pair up with Forest View students and translate their stories. The translation process required Duke students to get to know their partners; they had to ask questions to be sure they captured the true meaning of the authors’ words. This emphasized that translation isn’t just about words, but voice.

The second presentation came from Lakewood Montessori, where teachers and administrators facilitated a school-wide Writing Mash-Up. For one day, the entire school’s educational focus centered on writing. Students composed poetry, created works of digital storytelling, and penned autobiographies.

Tori Gredvig is the Lakewood Montessori Media Center Director. When asked why students should care about developing as writers, she replied, “Students are in constant communication with the world around them. Most of that communication is written. I think students need to care about being thoughtful, meaningful writers because their words follow them around very closely. They need to consider the story they are telling and how it is perceived by others.”

Two students from Hillside High delivered the final presentation of the evening. At their school, ESL students partnered with Duke undergraduates to compose a documentary based on the high school students’ stories about their educational experiences. The process led one student presenter to decide that she wants to be a journalist. She said the Duke students helped her build confidence as a writer and showed her that she has something unique to say in the world.

At the end of the night, Sneha Shah-Coltrane offered final comments on the Duke-Durham Writes Studio. Shah-Coltrane is the Director of Gifted Education and Advanced Programs for the NC Department of Public Instruction. She explained, “This project speaks to developing the whole child. It addresses each young person as a student, as a writer, and most importantly, as him or herself. When we create authentic experiences like these, we enrich educational standards and cultivate people who are both college and career-ready and are also prepared to be citizens of the world.”
Daniel Ahlquist earned his Ph.D. in Development Sociology from Cornell University. His dissertation research explored the intersection of forest conservation, state and market integration, and agrarian change in upland northern Thailand. Daniel is currently teaching “Food, Agriculture, and Society” and is tentatively planning to teach a course titled “Controlling Nature” in the spring.

Adam Howell Boyette (Ph.D., Washington State University) is an anthropologist who studies childhood, learning, and egalitarianism from a biocultural perspective. His class this fall is on representations of hunting and gathering societies in academic and popular texts.

Sachelle Ford earned degrees in English from Brown and Emory. She works in the fields of African American and African Diasporic literature. This fall, she is teaching “Black Eros,” a course on the role of love in black literary studies.

Peter Pihos is a candidate for a Ph.D. in History from the University of Pennsylvania and holds a J.D. from New York University School of Law. His scholarship addresses the relationship between race, law, and politics in urban America during the post-WWII period. His course this semester is called “The Problem of the Color Line: Making Race in Urban America.”

Amanda Pullum holds degrees in sociology, biology, and interdisciplinary studies from Virginia Tech and the University of California, Irvine. Her research and teaching focus primarily on social movements. She is currently teaching “Gender, Sexuality, and Activism,” in which students conduct research in the archives at the Sallie Bingham Center for Women’s History and Culture.

stef shuster has a Ph.D. in Sociology as well as a graduate certificate in Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies from the University of Iowa. stef's primary research and teaching interests are in (trans)gender studies and medicine. This fall, they are teaching “Gender Diversities,” which emphasizes gender variance in U.S. society and includes conducting observations of gendered practices at a field site.