

TYCA Midwest Messenger

Two-Year College English Association (TYCA Midwest)

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Message from the Chair

Paul Resnick • Illinois Central College

Our lives are filled with deadlines. The beginning of the semester brings with it so many deadlines that it is tricky to keep them all separated. Please add to your deadline list our TYCA-Midwest Conference in Des Moines. I know sometimes this event can creep up on us, but seeing friends and keeping up to date on recent pedagogy is so worth it. I hope to see you in Des Moines!

Our conference is at the Renaissance Savery Hotel September 30 through October 2. At the Savery, our session rooms and banquet area provide a cozy yet professional atmosphere where we can mingle easily with our colleagues. At the same time, the Savery is in the heart of downtown Des Moines, where many cultural areas are within easy walking distance from our hotel. For example, while TYCA Board Members were there in the spring, we found a great blues bar nearby and explored the John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park, lit up at night and showing off a side of Des Moines worth seeing.

Local Arrangements Chair Alan Hutchison and Assistant Chair Eden Pearson have worked hard to ensure a successful conference. This year's theme, shown beautifully on a poster as an homage to famed Iowa artist Grant Wood, is titled "Harvesting Talent." The theme raises intriguing questions, such as how do we plant the seeds of growth in our students? How do we nurture and fertilize that growth? What are ways we can see the harvest? I like the metaphor and the possibilities this theme explores.

In addition, our keynote speaker will be writer Brent Spencer. Brent earned his MFA in creative writing at the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop. He has written novels, stories, poetry, screenplays and nonfiction. His keynote address is not to be missed.

If you are new to a TYCA-Midwest Conference, then welcome. You will learn quickly that you are among kindred spirits, whether we discuss pedagogy, faculty-administrative concerns, or our many student issues. As a bonus, you will learn how similar we are in relation to our interest in ideas, the arts, politics, and wanting to rejuvenate our classrooms. If you are not new to our conference, then welcome back.

Lastly, we need energetic, committed colleagues to run for our Board. We offer as much work as you can handle, with no pay, but the other rewards like service to our profession and becoming life-long friends with other committed Board members, is worth much, much, more.

I hope you have an enriching, worthwhile time in Des Moines.



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Get to Know Your New Board Members

Debrah Bertsch

Deborah Bertsch, the new information coordinator/web manager for TYCA Midwest, is an Assistant Professor of English at Columbus State Community College in Columbus, OH. She teaches courses in first-year composition and developmental writing and also coordinates the college's writing center. A member of TYCA since 2005, Deborah will serve as local arrangements chair for the 2011 TYCA Midwest Conference, to be held in Columbus.



Sybil Priebe

Sybil Priebe, in her fifth year as an Assistant Professor of English & Humanities at the North Dakota State College of Science in Wahpeton, ND (45 miles south of the famous Fargo), thoroughly enjoys teaching argument, the use of blogs, and using any funky Web 2.0 tool. She is serving as the North Dakota Representative on the TYCA Advisory Board. When she's not on campus, she loves to shop, read, and attempt recipes. This May, she added "home improvement" to that list of activities.

Sybil says, "I wanted to be a part of TYCA to extend the amount of cool people I know and can network with. As an added bonus, I can share ideas (and borrow them) with other campuses as to what lil' ol' NDSCS is up too, and we are "up to" a lot of stuff." :)



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TYCA '09 Conference Session Presentation

SUMMARIES

Student Self-Assessment and the Concept of the Completed Argument

Dr. John Pruitt • University of Wisconsin—Rock County

To be honest, it isn't finished. I don't like it.

I'm not sure when I knew that I was really done with my paper.

I knew that this paper was done when I felt like there was nothing else I could write.

These statements, drawn directly from my students' reflections on their own research and writing processes, encourage us to ponder over the meaning of the polished argument. I confess to feeling profoundly frustrated as I condense a forty-page article for a journal that monitors garrulous authors when I cherish each word and cringe as I delete. But in our writing classrooms, as we teach the obligatory rhetorical devices, we strive to help our students understand the concept of completion, the knowledge that they've fulfilled both their purpose and the needs of their audiences.

As my audience at the recent TYCA-Midwest conference revealed during a rather fascinating debate, a number of questions emerge from such an inquiry about assignment length; I propose that when we assign a set range of pages for students to fill, we imply not that they must develop a cohesive argument within those parameters, but that their arguments will be sufficiently developed if they reach the final assigned page. In one respect, we wonder if requiring a specified number of pages or words helps students understand how long it takes to develop a good argument. In another, we wonder how page number requirements affect student perceptions of argument completion.

Since reflecting on the discussion, I've determined that we must communicate with our students about our decisions to assign word or page limits. I, like others, tell my students to write until they've felt that

sense of completion. Other instructors shared interesting assignments that correlate length parameters with completion. For example, ask students to write a two-page argument. Then double it while preserving the purpose and audience. Then double it again. Such an exercise allows students to practice developing their ideas. Or ask students to write a ten-page argument. Then half it while preserving the purpose and audience. Then again. Then again. Such a project teaches students to write concisely. As we know, rarely are we allowed unrestricted freedom when we write for publication. The same applies to students writing for their classes and especially in the workplace, which demands brevity.

While I drove home from Madison the afternoon following my presentation, I thought about better responses to "How long does this paper have to be?" than "Write until you're finished." I'm still thinking about it.

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FORWARD: WRITING OUR FUTURE
TYCA MIDWEST 2009

MADISON, WI

TYCA '09 Conference Session Presentation

SUMMARIES

Future Success and Being Present: Instructors and College Students Confronting College Together

Sandie Crawford • Summit College, University of Akron

Michelle Byrne • Summit College, University of Akron

Sandie Crawford and Michelle Byrne presented a session at the Madison Conference during which they focused on working with underprepared students. The National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS: 88, 2000) defines "minimally qualified" for college if a student meets one of five of the following criteria:

- Rank at or above 54th percentile in their class.
- Have a GPA of 2.7 or higher in academic courses.
- Have a combined SAT score of 820 or above (approximately 35th percentile).
- Have an ACT composite score of 19 or higher (approximately 40th percentile).
- Score at the 56th percentile or above on the NELS math and reading composite aptitude test.

Students who fall short only have a 14% chance of completing college. Currently, only 46% of high school graduates meet even the minimal level of academic preparation ("Reclaiming the American Dream" Research Analysis by the Bridgespan Group, c2006). As instructors at open admissions schools, we know most of our students are underprepared, and we often feel frustrated, sometimes falling into language and attitudes that do more to blame the victim than address the problem. Students easily pick up on our frustrations, which frequently interrupt, if not stop, their academic achievement.

Practical solutions? First, be honest with yourself about how you see your students. Do you find yourself thinking they are lazy, unmotivated, uninterested, or even rude? Take these as signs that they student is struggling, sometimes greatly, not just with workload, but also with the

identity shift they are making by joining the ranks of academia. Then, look for the skills they currently do have that will help them to succeed and point those out frequently to the students so their confidence increases. Third, be very clear about your expectations for them: give them your grading rubric for each assignment, spell out expectations for reading and writing, and give them many small assignments to practice their skills. Small assignments are also opportunities to demonstrate your limits (for example, I don't take late work, handwritten work, emailed work) with smaller consequences. Finally, seek support from colleagues. If your department or school does not have a formal organization for professional development, consider starting a Faculty Learning Community where you can share ideas and resources that will help all students succeed.

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Students Speak Service Learning: Motivation for Millennial Students

Kelly Webb • Summit College, University of Akron

Service learning is a great way to motivate students to want to succeed for reasons far beyond earning grades because it allows students to fully engage in “real world” experiences. Students walk away with much more than grades. They walk away with a sense of purpose through working for a greater good beyond themselves by using the skills and concepts they are learning in the classroom and sharing them with organizations within communities. I witnessed this firsthand over the past year, as I managed and participated with students during two large service learning projects with the Strongsville Police Department in Strongsville, Ohio.

Through these projects, students created two highly visible documents to be used by the police department. One was “A Parent’s Guide to Safety Town” brochure and the other was the booklet for the D.A.R.E. graduation ceremony. Early on within the projects, students could see the high level of commitment and work involved and without hesitation took on the challenge. Believe it or not, students were dedicating their time and efforts and in some cases doing extra work on the projects that was not required, even asking for additional pages or information to be added to the documents. They were “on the job” and working for far more than a grade in the class. They were working for others to benefit from their efforts.

Once final projects were turned in, I asked them to respond to the following question: Do you believe that your involvement with a service learning project motivated you to work harder on a project in comparison to a classroom project not involving an outside organization? Students made the following comments:

“...the knowledge that this project would ultimately move beyond the classroom created an added incentive to produce quality.”

“Yes. It gave me a sense of purpose and presented another level of thinking. It also helped us to be motivated by more than just a grade. Although I work hard on all projects, I think I put a little more into this project than others in the past.”

“I feel that it made a huge difference in my work ethic . . . Thank you for the wonderful opportunity.”

As I reflect back on the projects, I think not only did my students benefit by the project because they learned many facets of technical writing, but they also learned that their skills, knowledge, and talents can make a difference in the lives of others. What a simple yet high impact lesson to teach students to prepare them for the world beyond the classroom.

NOTE: The TYCA-Midwest newsletter invites you to poll your students for a new section called “Students Speak”. Any survey you give your class that would be of interest to other instructors would fit nicely here. You might ask what kind of comments they prefer, how they use your comments, or which assignments they like best and why. Your question might be a question others would like to ask their students and your students’ answers might inspire other instructors to try something new. Compile your answers and send them to Michelle Byrne (mwb@uakron.edu) or Jen Richrath (jrichrath@icc.edu).

Office Hours Student, Grade Thyself

Michelle Byrne • Summit College, University of Akron

He meant it as a joke. A student, I’ll call him Edward, turned in his paper and asked if he could grade it himself. “You know, Ed,” I said, “that’s a good idea.”

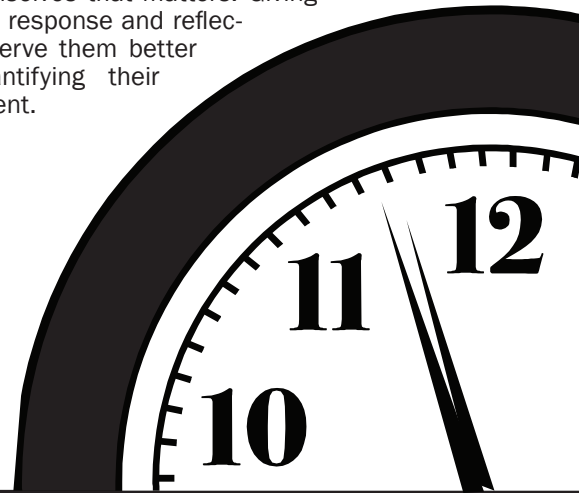
The next semester, I had students score themselves, starting with their first paper, a 50 point assignment. I then graded their papers and when I returned them, I took an anonymous survey to compare their scores with mine. I asked if they were surprised by their grade. They could answer yes, they thought it would be much higher; yes, they thought it would be much lower; or no, they thought it was accurate. Out 56 returned surveys, a large majority, almost 70%, said they thought my grade was accurate. Of those students, most had calculated their grade within 4 points of mine. Twenty percent said they thought their grade would have been much higher and missed their grade by 5-12 points. Students who expected their grade to be much lower made up only 10%, and most did calculate their grade within a few points.

I did this for each paper and noticed that as the papers and the rubrics grew more complex, they had a harder time accurately predicting their grades. By their final paper, a 6-8 page researched argument, they were struggling to judge all the layers of the assignment as assessed in the rubric.

As part of their final project, however, they wrote a letter explaining the rhetorical choices in their essay as well as a discussion of their strengths and weaknesses. The vast majority clearly articulated all three of these. Though the rubric may have seemed like a tangled mess, when given the chance to sit back and reflect, they were able to accurately judge their own writing.

Rubrics have value because, especially when handed out before the papers are graded, they remind students what I will evaluate in the paper. And when it comes to revision, they use the rubric as a guide. For example, if the scored low on supporting evidence, they will focus on that. But it has made me realize that perhaps my ability to grade according to a rubric has come from 15 years of teaching.

Some colleagues and I have been talking about the difference between grading and assessing, and I admit I’m not sure what that difference is exactly. At the end of the semester, my school requires grades so I put a letter down. Perhaps, though, for my students, it’s not the ability to grade but assess themselves that matters. Giving an honest response and reflection will serve them better than quantifying their achievement.



NCTE/TYCA National Midwest Representative Report

Karla Brown • Hawkeye College

The TYCA Executive Committee has met twice since my last report in October: at NCTE in Philadelphia, which I attended, and at CCCC in Louisville, Kentucky in March 2010. Some of the highlights you need to know are the following:

The NCTE visiting officer to the Midwest fall conference in Des Moines will be current TYCA Secretary Clint Gardner from Salt Lake Community College in Salt Lake City, UT. The region provides registration, meals, and a hotel room for him. The program chair discusses when and what kind of address and/or workshop he might present. Clint and I will staff the TYCA booth at the fall conference but would welcome volunteers to help.

A revision of the Research and Scholarship in the Two-Year College document is being drafted by a committee co-chaired by Frank Madden and Howard Tinberg, with the final draft to be submitted Oct. 2010.

A revision of the Guidelines for the Academic Preparation of English Faculty in Two-Year Colleges is also underway, chaired by Carolyn Calhoun-Dillahunt, with the first draft expected in June 2010.

I am serving on a new committee on dual/concurrent credit. There’s also a promising new book out by NCTE entitled College Credit for Writing in High School: The “Taking Care of” Business, which you may want to read if this trend is affecting your institution.

Sarah Johnson chaired the TYCA breakfast at CCCC, representing TYCA Midwest well once again.

Jeff Sommers is continuing as editor of that the TETYC journal. Please consider submitting manuscripts and encourage colleagues at your institutions and within your states to do so as well.

The Regional Officers’ Retreat was cancelled this year shortly before the conference.

Next year’s CCCC is in Atlanta, Georgia, April 6-11. Please consider submitting a proposal (due May 1) and encourage others in your institution/state to do so as well. We want to continue to have a two-year presence at that national conference. (The November NCTE conference is in Orlando.)

