We'd like to encourage you to help score the WPE, an essay exam required of all upper division students. Scoring is open to all faculty, and all new readers are trained before they begin scoring. The reading takes most of the day, but includes snacks, convivial chatter with colleagues from other departments, and a paycheck of $210 for the day. We are always appreciative of new readers, and seek readers from departments across the disciplines.

To sign up to become a WPE reader, contact Jon Price at price@csus.edu or 278-6347.

Jon Price
WPE Coordinator

1st Annual
READING AND WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM CONFERENCE

The Writing Across the Curriculum Program invites all full-time and part-time instructors to attend a half-day conference featuring a variety of panel presentations focusing on successful approaches to reading and writing across disciplines.

WHEN: Friday, February 18, 2005, 12:30-5:00
WHERE: University Union Orchard and Forest Suites

12:30 Welcome and Introduction (Hinde Auditorium)

1:00-1:55 Concurrent Session 1
Preventing Plagiarism (Foothill Suite, Oak)
From Mountain to Molehill – Scaling Down Library Anxiety for Student Success (Foothill Suite, Walnut)
Evolution of the Pediatric Nursing Term Paper Over Twenty Years (Orchard Suite I)
Writing Beyond Sac State: Alumni in the Workplace (Orchard Suite II)

2:00-2:55 Concurrent Session 2
Writing Prompts and Assignments that Work (Foothill Suite, Oak)
From Grammar to Group Work: Learning Methods that Improve Reading and Writing (Foothill Suite, Walnut)
A Book Report is Not an Essay: Dispelling Freshmen Myths (Orchard Suite I)
Using Peer Response to Improve Student Writing (Orchard Suite II)

3:00-3:55 Concurrent Session 3
Successful Reading and Writing Assignments (Foothill Suite, Oak)
Accelerated Learning Methods (Foothill Suite, Walnut)
Creativity across the Curriculum (Orchard Suite I)
Understanding the Role of Discourse Communities in the University (Orchard Suite II)

4:00-4:55 Concurrent Session 4
Writing and Problem-Solving in Math (Foothill Suite, Oak)
Designing a Graduate Thesis Writing Course (Foothill Suite, Walnut)
Integrating Writing across Disciplines and across Campuses (Orchard Suite I)
Writing Across the Curriculum in Freshman Composition (Orchard Suite II)

More information about the conference is available at http://www.csus.edu/wac/conference.

If you are planning to attend the conference, please RSVP to Dan Melzer, University Reading and Writing Coordinator, at melzer@csus.edu or (916) 278-6925.
Preventing Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a rising concern for Sac State teachers, and recently both administrators and faculty have taken steps to discourage plagiarism: for example, the formation of a university plagiarism committee that created a preventing plagiarism website at http://library.csus.edu/plagiarism and presented a plagiarism workshop in Fall 2004. As concerns about plagiarism rise, it’s important that instructors don’t put all of their energy and time into the punishment aspect of the problem. The best way to decrease incidences of plagiarism is through prevention: classroom instruction and thoughtful writing assignment design.

Dr. Rebecca Moore Howard, associate professor of writing and rhetoric at Syracuse University, says that by concentrating on catching and punishing student plagiarists teachers “risk becoming the enemies rather than the mentors of our students … [and] replacing the student-teacher relationship with the criminal-police relationship.” Of course, it’s important that there are serious consequences for downloading a paper from the Internet, but the focus of this newsletter is practical ways to create a classroom environment that discourages plagiarism. There are a variety of techniques instructors can deploy to discourage plagiarism and at the same time improve instruction and student engagement in writing:

■ Define and discuss plagiarism early in the semester.

Often students don’t understand what plagiarism is, or how serious the consequences are when you download an essay from an Internet term paper mill. You can use the preventing plagiarism resource site at http://library.csus.edu/plagiarism to help define plagiarism and review the Sac State honor code policies on plagiarism.

■ Differentiate between intentional and unintentional forms of plagiarism.

There’s a big difference between the student who downloads an entire essay from the Internet and the student who doesn’t understand how to cite sources. It’s important that both students and instructors are aware of these differences.

■ Devote class time to instruction on integrating and citing sources in your discipline.

Integrating and citing sources is second nature for faculty members who have been researching and writing in their field for many years, but students who are still apprentices at academic discourse conventions need practice and instruction. Plagiarism and citation exercises available through the plagiarism website mentioned above can be used in or out of class to help students learn the conventions of integrating sources in your discipline.

■ Break assignments into stages and require more than a single draft

Dr. Moore Howard says, “We beg our students to cheat if we assign a major paper and then have no further involvement with the project until the students turn in their work.” Asking students to submit annotated bibliographies, to keep reading and response journals on their topic, to present research proposals, and to submit a rough draft of the paper for response from the instructor or peer response not only discourages plagiarism, but also makes for a more successful research and writing process and final product.

■ Don’t give “generic” assignments: vary the role of the writer, the target audience, and the genre of the text to create unique rhetorical situations.

Page three of this newsletter provides advice for using the rhetorical triangle of writer, reader, and text to create assignments that not only discourage plagiarism, but are more interesting for the student and the instructor.
Designing Assignments that Discourage Plagiarism

Sometimes instructors unwittingly create assignments that students can easily plagiarize. Take, for example, generic term paper topics such as this one:

Write a 10 page research paper arguing for or against the death penalty and submit it on the last day of class.

This is the kind of generic topic that term paper mills thrive on: there is little about the topic that hasn’t already been said, it does little to connect to most students’ interests or experiences, and students can easily find examples of this kind of paper on the Internet. There are some simple techniques instructors can use when designing assignments that will not only discourage plagiarism, but also create a more authentic and interesting rhetorical situation for students.

One key to creating more interesting and original writing prompts is varying the three points of the rhetorical triangle of writer, text, and reader.

In the generic death penalty term paper, the rhetorical situation is limited: students play the role of student, the text is the familiar term paper, and the reader is the teacher, who already has expertise on the topic. By varying the role students play as writers, the genre of the paper, or the target audience, we could revise the generic death penalty paper to create a more authentic and interesting assignment. Here are some examples of revised versions of the term paper:

- Pretend that you are a paid consultant for the California Department of Criminal Justice. Write a 10 page report to the head of the department arguing for a course of action on the fate of the death penalty in California, using specific examples from California death penalty cases.

- You are a reporter for the Sacramento Bee, and your editor has asked you to write a well-researched 10 page article on the death penalty that is also emotional: your editor would like you to interview people who have been affected by the death penalty as well as provide information from outside sources and statistics.

- In one month we will have a “mock trial” in class over a recent death penalty case that occurred in California. Each of you will research the case and the arguments for and against the death penalty, present the results of the research in a court briefing, and then argue as lawyers for the witness or the defense in a classroom trial.

None of these prompts could be easily downloaded from a term paper mill: they ask students to play a very specific “real-world” role, the genres of the prompts are not run of the mill school assignments like the traditional term paper, and the target audience is not the instructor. As these examples show, creative assignments that discourage plagiarism have the added bonus of being more interesting for students to write and instructors to read than generic assignments.
An Interview with Dr. Cherryl Smith, Coordinator of the Writing Center

The Sacramento State Writing Center held more than 4,000 individual sessions for more than 1,100 students representing seventy-four different major fields of study during the 2003-2004 academic year. According to Dr. Cherryl Smith, Professor of English and Writing Center Coordinator since 1998, the Center, which is located in 128 Calaveras, provides writing help and is open to any student, from any department, free of charge. In addition to directing the Writing Center, Dr. Smith, a Ph.D. in composition as well as a composition textbook author, teaches writing and graduate courses in composition theory and pedagogy.

Professor Smith says that students can come in at any point during the process of writing the paper, from just receiving the assignment to the final draft. Dr. Smith also explains that it is a myth that only remedial or “bad” writers need the Writing Center; most professional writers get feedback.

Similar to other campuses, the Sacramento State Writing Center’s tutor training, administration, and tutorial services are designed based on principles from writing center and composition scholarship, which include an emphasis on collaborative learning. Dr. Smith stresses that this collaboration is not “cheating” since “unlike test takers, writers usually get feedback from other writers, editors, colleagues, and so on. In school, the Writing Center provides a place where students can have a reader besides the teacher to give a response while the paper is in progress.” She also says with writing “the point is you have to communicate to another person, so if you can get a reader before the final version to say, ‘this is what happens when I read this draft’ then you are a jump ahead” in communicating effectively.

The Writing Center is usually always running at capacity. Because the schedule fills up quickly, most students begin signing up for tutoring appointments the second week of the semester. Students can make a semester-long appointment for up to one hour per week (half-hour appointments and drop-in appointments are also available). Last year the Center served more than four hundred students on a drop-in basis.

The Writing Center grew out of an English department course developed by Professor Charles Moore. In the past six years, Writing Center services have been expanding with funding from Undergraduate and Graduate Programs. Dr. Smith says, “In the past, individual departments that want to insure their students get tutoring have helped us fund more tutoring hours.”

The tutoring course English 195A/410A is open to all majors. After taking the course, a student can become a paid Writing Center Tutor. Students going into teaching or technical writing, as well as English majors, can benefit from being tutors.