

CompDog

The Newsletter for the Fresno State Writing Program

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Letter From the Director

Hey all, just want to take a minute here in our last issue of the school year to thank all of you --part timers, teaching associates, and new compositionists-- for a strong and productive year.

This year has offered many challenges, changes in workload agreements with Teaching Associates, discussions about program policies and procedures, and the constant pressure of assessing our work. And I want to say that, to the person, I am very proud of our program and the teaching we provide for our beginning students.

I would like to offer a special thanks to the Teaching Associate Union for its leading role in reducing class size in our FYW classes.

As the year winds down, Ginny, Bo, Asao, and I have had occasion to attend several University and College committee meetings. As I have mentioned in emails this past few weeks, discussion about writing instruction and the quality of writing in classes here on campus has been rather intense. At meeting after meeting, we were often questioned about the poor quality of student writing. And one constant refrain in these discussions seemed to surface again and again: Why aren't you teaching more grammar?

After giving this some thought, I invited members in our Department and our College to weigh in on this issue. And once the call got out there, Dennis Nef, Dean of Undergraduate Studies posted it to all department chairs. Here is the gist of my invitation:

I would like the next issue [of *CompDog*] to focus on a specific topic: What do we mean when we say we teach writing?

I have been giving some thought to this idea lately, mainly as a result of work on University subcommittees. At those committee meetings, there is much cross talk, talking over and under and around the subject of writing.

On the Subcommittee for Writing Competency, for example, we often had to discuss what we meant by the term "writing," as many members had different conceptions of what it is and how to go about assessing, requiring, teaching, and responding to what they thought of as writing.

And mail from University faculty constantly calls into question what we are doing in our program, asking questions about why students can't write. I often wonder what they have in mind when they use the word "write."



Good CompDogs read *They Say// Say* (Meredith's dog, Marley)

Of course, there is no easy answer to this, and what we --as university teachers-- consider writing to be is contingent on a myriad of contexts and disciplinary assumptions.

So, I thought it would be fun to invite all kinds of responses to the question. What do we think writing is when we ask students to be better writers?

What follows in this issue of *CompDog* are responses to these questions. Unfortunately, no one outside of our program offered a response. There were private emails, and some talk in the halls, and we have heard, second hand, of talk at some committee meetings. But no one stepped forward to participate in what I believe is an essential conversation for student success.

With that said, perhaps this issue will spark enough interest to prompt discussion when we all return in August.

Again, thanks for your hard work, your commitment to learning, and your ceaseless interest in being better teachers. Teaching is learning, and I would say that lots of good learning has taken place this year.

Blessings, Rick

Dysconsciousness: A View of Our Staff Meeting

Jocelyn Stott (MFA)

In their analysis of Stony Brook's Portfolio-Based Evaluation Program, Elbow and Belanoff told us in 1991 how portfolios provide teachers with a "powerful incentive to collaborate and negotiate about what and how they will teach" (24). I am excited, as a new and fumbling first year writing teacher by the meeting at Rick's house last Friday regarding the changes we are moving toward in our own portfolio-based evaluation program. For one of the first times (outside of my discussion-driven Composition classes or 290), I felt like those present at the meeting that day— with the breeze and the beer and Rick's lily-padded Koi fish pond all contributing their parts— were truly there to collaborate about the program, about the portfolio changes, and ultimately about the future of our students who will function under such changes. I felt like that "powerful incentive" was active and working; our senior faculty, part-timers, new and experienced TAs were all gathered to negotiate our teaching next semester. And I felt lucky to take part.

Since the meeting, however, I have been thinking over what took place in the midst of that "negotiation." I guess I was reminded most immediately of James Berlin when he writes "The dismay students display about writing, I am convinced, at least occasionally, is the result of teachers unconsciously offering contradictory advice about composing." But, perhaps it is not necessarily an "unconsciousness" that permeates our program here, but a dysconsciousness (coined by Joyce E. King in *Dysconscious Racism*), or a purposeful and conscious avoidance of particular issues, often privilege, all in the name of "fairness." The dialogue among teachers was dominated by debates over very separate issues. Each voice seemed to have very different assumptions, definitions, and applications about writing in their classrooms. This dysconsciousness made it difficult for me to deduce many of the concerns raised because so many of the teachers present seemed to be, perhaps "[dys]consciously offering contradictory" assumptions about writing, about teaching, about portfolios, etc. That is, our program is very much alive and conscious and ever

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developing in its pedagogical goals; from classroom to classroom, though, it seems that individual ideas and epistemologies (i.e., what constitutes "good writing" or, more specifically, what comprises a "passing portfolio") are in disagreement.

How can we avoid this disjunction inherent to writing programs so that students, in turn, are not left dismayed about writing due to dysconscious, contradictory advice? In passing, I heard one participant say, "so, what I am hearing from this shift is to go back to my class and do what I want." I am frustrated by this response. I'll admit that it feels like a fitting response if we do not, programmatically, and consciously, pursue and commit to a portfolio system that is indeed driven by the negotiation and collaboration that portfolio programs are meant to embrace. Is there a way, then, for collaboration to more successfully have a way of permeating a whole program so that teachers can be more unified and collaborative in their pedagogical choices, yet still maintain "academic freedom"?

The backyard discussions that afternoon have stuck with me because I couldn't understand my own "dismay" when leaving the meeting (albeit, I had to leave early to go to work that night). But, I think some of it might surface in my confusion about teachers' attempts to form a "consensus" when a disensus (or dysconscious reasoning) seemed to permeate the group. I remember one teacher saying, after an explanation about the need for us to distinguish between students' final written *product* and students' mastery of writing *practices*, that "Ok, practices are just the new process." For me, this mirrored the same kind of dysconscious thinking that King delineates in her description of students who operate under assumptions of racism that are built upon previous, historical foundations that do not necessarily address the current systemic racism that privileges Whites. Now, I'm not saying that the comment at the meeting was racist, only suggesting a comparison in logic. Instead of reducing this meaningful shift in our portfolio assessment process to the commonplace *process not product* mantra of programs past, though, we need to recognize the change as its own new and complicated and necessarily collaborative development. If not, I think our students suffer the brunt of this dismissal and leave our classrooms with the same kind of dismissive, disengaged, and dysconscious ideas about learning to write. Adding students to the process of defining "good writing" and judging "passing" portfolios forces teachers to continually confront their own established conceptions of "good writing." Thus, when we add students to portfolio assessment, as we're attempting here, we force students and teachers alike to consciously (re)consider what "good" writing *practices* are.



Jaclyn Hardy staring down a questioner in New Orleans (Cs 2008) with R-Hanzle and G-Crizzle with the backup – where's A-Ozzle?

I have one student, taking 5B for the second time this semester, who yesterday said that his English 10 roommate brags about how easy the course is because they work on completing only one essay for the whole semester. I wasn't sure how to reply to this student or to the dismay the rest of my students seem to express when they hear about the differences among sections of 5A/5B and 10. How do we respond to students who feel frustrated and/or confused about the different truths about writing that are taught to them? Regardless of the methods used, I think this change asks teachers to consciously challenge their own truths about student writing. For, instead of relying solely on a portfolio reader's score to define that "truth" for students about their writing, students can now take part in defining that truth. This step in our program's portfolio assessment responds to this problem and to our students' resistance to portfolios in general, I think, by asking them to take part in this collaborative establishment of what successful writing—or a successful portfolio—looks like.

It is important that we programmatically acknowledge that there are different ways to define “good” writing; we need to be wary of adopting conceptions of good writing that are fixed or non-negotiable. But, there is also a need for students to be able to fix themselves in a coherent epistemology of good writing so that they can feel confident in their own writing’s proficiency. I think that the portfolio shift that invites students to be a part of the assessment process is integral to the success of our program as it requires students to “corporately,” mutually determine a rubric that both validates and confirms their confidence as a writer. It doesn’t mean students can’t challenge and work against the consensus set by a determined rubric. For, I think this is what good student assessment does: not allow students to blindly follow a rubric, but to construct the grounds of validity for that rubric in dialogue with each other and their teacher, to figure out why it is representative and not rigid, why it is reliable, and why it is also unreliable. Focusing, then, on student assessment and changing our portfolio structure and encouraging these kinds of challenging questions could begin to drive our classrooms in positive ways, and I think our students (and teachers) can, in turn, learn to chronically question the many constructions (racial, cultural, historical and otherwise) that contribute to our personal dysconsciousness about writing and writing instruction.

Conversations on Teaching Grammar

The following excerpts come from several emails discussing a common question about how we teach writing in the FYW program. They all come after a General Education Committee meeting, held on April 11, 2008. The first email comes from a Professor in another department on campus; the second is a reply from Rick Hansen; and the third offers a follow-up reply by Asao B. Inoue.

Hello Professor Hansen,

I just read an e-mail that you sent to some of your colleagues regarding grammar. I have to say that I can’t agree with you. Grammar is important. It helps us all get on the same communication page. If we follow your logic then 4 plus 4 can equal 5 or maybe 6 or even 7. We probably know that you mean 4 but we’re not sure.

Proper grammar still identifies a person as educated. We note it when people make errors in grammar. Look how much grief President Bush gets when he makes a gross error in grammar. I teach a large GE class. A great many of my students cannot write an English sentence that is clear and meaningful. It is obvious that in some cases these students might have cultural or language problems but it is also obvious that these problems must be corrected before they leave the university or they will be less respected in the business world. A student of mine is a Liberal Studies major. She wants to teach elementary school age children. She hasn’t a clue how to speak with any rules that we would associate as good grammar. Would you really hire this person to teach your children . . . ?

I found your e-mail very interesting. I hope you have colleagues in your department who will take issue with it.

Respectfully,

[University Professor]

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Jaclyn Hardy and Andrea Osteen with Andrea Lunsford in New Orleans, LA (CCCC 2008).

too many professors over focus on grammar or surface structure issues as the single most important element of academic literacy. When they do so, they restrict student opportunities to enter into academic conversations

To [University Professor]:

Thanks for the mail, and frankly, this is the kind of dialogue that I would like to generate across campus.

I agree that grammatical competence and sounding like a professional are goals we should pursue. No one in our program disputes that, nor do we promote undisciplined approaches to language. Your assumption that I am somehow in support of academic writing "without the rules of grammar" reveals a typical misconception about writing instruction that takes place in the English Department. [First-Year Writing] is not a creative writing program, and fostering creative or imaginative writing is not our purpose, though we believe that powerful analytical writing draws heavily on creative and imaginative thinking.

Our job is all about moving students into academic discourse, and here I am using discourse as a term that moves beyond register or style. In our program discourse is taught as a knowledge framing "ways of seeing the world," as knowledge, practices, and assumptions that inform a particular interpretive community. Our classes work to move students into academic discourse communities.

With that said, it is self evident to us that our job is to move students toward standard English usage so that they can successfully move into post education professional/work life.

So, I would suggest that your assumption that we think our work is not about Standard Edited English is off the mark. It comes from a typical conflation of the word "English" into "writing instruction." Many people just don't know that composition is a scholarly field of study, so when they think "kids can't write," they automatically think, "those people in English are not doing their job." We are in the English Department, but we do different work; we teach composition, not literature, not creative writing. So your sense, often repeated by other faculty, that we focus on aesthetics is misguided.

Scholarship in Composition Studies encourages teaching sentence competence; however, scholarship, and there is lots of it, says don't teach grammar in the manner it has been taught for centuries. Traditional approaches to grammar began in the late 19th century and then evolved into full-blown scientific/behavioral approaches in the early 20th. [Ed. note: Please see Asao Inoue's summary of scholarship in this issue].

Students have to be able to write about ideas, they have to be able to enter an academic argument, identify its significance, sort out its issues, and then contribute to that argument. That is what we do as scholars; that is what we try to teach our students as they enter academic discourse communities (plural because different disciplines have different conventions, different expectations etc).

The problem, as I see it, is that too many professors over focus on grammar or surface structure issues as the single most important element of academic literacy. When they do so, they restrict student opportunities to enter into academic conversations out of fear that students are not ready for that kind of thinking. One of the ways that professors figure this out is by looking at surface structure features, like grammar, and concluding that the student doesn't belong in the class, or the university. Thus, it seems to me, that a too narrow focus on grammar as "the problem" with student writing actually diminishes a student's progress towards sentence competence.

We believe that students take on sentence competence by studying sentence issues within the context of writing about issues, during the process of transitioning to university life. Giving students rules, drilling them on sentence error recognition is not the answer. That is what they have been doing for years. As I said yesterday, people are teaching grammar in public schools, but it is done in an uncontextualized, memorize the rules fashion. Students are not writing enough in any school situation, and they certainly are not learning about sentences in the context of making meaning.

And that seems to me to be the rub. In our program we teach sentence competence within the context of writing, not independent of the context of writing, and that process is slower.

Finally, it should be clear by now that we think of writing as a process of contextualized, or situated, decision-making. People think their way to understanding by using writing, even in ungrammatical forms, to discover the significance of their ideas. That process allows a writer to write to herself first, and then, later in the process, when issues of reader and product prevail, then surface issues and editing for meaning take precedence. Writing, as we see it, is both process and product, and grammar is simply one knowledge in a constellation of knowledges activated when a student sits before a keyboard.

Rick

To [University Professor and other GE Committee Members]:

I can appreciate those who wish our students, generally speaking, to write more conventional Standard Edited American English. I have no doubt that it will help them in their future writing tasks; however, recent research conducted by Andrea Lunsford and Karen Lunsford (2006) shows that not only do first year writing students, who are much like ours and in very similar classes as ours, write more, but do not "commit" more errors than other students in the past 20 years. This was empirical research gathering student writing from across the nation, which replicated a similar study published in 1988 by Robert Connors and Andrea Lunsford. This new study, like the old one, looked at errors in student writing, attempting to understand what errors occur in student writing today, if they are any different than those made by students two decades ago, and what conclusions we can draw about student error-making.

So what did the new study find? Essentially, it found three interesting things that relate to our current discussion on student error-making and the teaching of grammar:

- Today's students write about things that "require inquiry and investigation as well as reflection," and so write MORE (more pages, more words).
- Issues of technology, such as spellcheckers and grammar checkers, actually create new problems for students in their writing.
- "Students today are not making more errors; they are making different errors." In fact, the errors found per 100 words in student compositions are almost identical in four studies from 1917 to 2006 (the present one), meaning students actually are doing more complicated stuff in their writing and not making more errors than any other students in last 100 years. Here are those results:



Rick Hansen and Andrea Osteen deciding who will present first at their session in New Orleans, LA (CCCC 2008).

recent research . . . shows that not only do first year writing students . . . write more, but do not "commit" more errors than other students in the past 20 years

Study	Year	Errors per 100 Words
Johnson	1917	2.11
Witty & Green	1930	2.24
Connors & Lunsford	1986	2.26
Lunsford & Lunsford	2006	2.45



Ginny Crisco doin' her thang in New Orleans (Cs 2008).

By the way, my graduate class on composition theory (Engl 281) this semester replicated this study in our writing program for different purposes, and found very similar results! Thus these findings DO APPEAR transferable to our institution and students.

Bottom line, we could be worrying about grammar and error for no good reason, when we should be concerned about providing more help for technology-related issues in writing and issues related to the hard, critical work of analyzing and making meaningful writing practices (reflection on writing). Peace.

Asao

But I'm Not an English Teacher

What Our First Year Writing Program Cannot Do

Meredith Bulinski (MA in Rhet/Comp)

What is our responsibility as teachers of writing in our comp program? H. Bunker Wright, over half a century ago said, "At the very beginning, it should be demonstrated that one course in English administered during the freshman year can do little beyond preparing a student for the training the rest of his college career should offer, that its accomplishments must be supported and enhanced by further practice and discipline in the other courses that he takes" (99).

In his 1945 *College English* essay, "What Freshman Composition Cannot Do," Wright speaks to all those educators in disciplines outside of English, who believe that the only teachers who are responsible for students learning and demonstrating solid writing skills are the composition and English teachers. Why are we, as comp teachers, to take the blame in not teaching a student *everything and every tool* that a student will need to be successful in other college classes? Wright argues something most of us know intuitively: all teachers have a responsibility to understand how to teach writing and to do so.

Though Wright's essay may be dated, his thoughts on the limitations of a first year writing program are still very pertinent today. He does not propose major changes in programs and curricula but instead he calls for a minor change in attitude and responsibility. Comp teachers must be able to admit that we simply cannot teach a student how to be an excellent writer/reader/researcher in one course. Teachers in other discourses must also take the responsibility of picking up where we leave off. Some of the key elements that first year writing students are expected to learn, such as grammar and "critical thinking," are life long competencies that take years to be proficient in. The learning process does have a beginning but it does not have an end.

So, the key question is: Can there be interdisciplinary consensus concerning student writing? Last year a position calling for expertise in a Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) program was tabled primarily due to monetary issues. It was proposed that the department hire in-house, while no offense intended, this would not be the best route. We need a true faculty-admin-scholar who can support and

Comp teachers must be able to admit that we simply cannot teach a student how to be an excellent writer/reader/researcher in one course. Teachers in other discourses must also take the responsibility

educate our first year writing program and the university about what it means to teach writing across the curriculum or within the disciplines. Leading scholars in the WAC field at Robert Morris College state why such a program is beneficial:

1. writing is a mode of learning,
2. each academic discipline that shapes the writing of its practitioners is driven by its own specialized procedures, conventions, and terminology in an interactive process between writing and learning,
3. writers can develop and apply defined sets of heuristics or writing strategies to help them think more effectively about the subject matter of their disciplines. (Janet Emig, Elaine Maimon, Richard Young)

To answer my own question, yes, there can be interdisciplinary consensus. If we as teachers must admit that we cannot teach students everything, then we as a department must also admit that we need help to find this consensus with other departments. After all, we are not simply teaching individual subjects, we are educating students as a whole.

Where Are They Now?

Jeremy Mumford (MA in Rhet/Comp, 2002, and MFA, 2002)

Six years later, I often think about my time in grad school with fondness for what was and relief that it is now over! I am only an hour away in Merced, but it feels like a lot further. I am tenured at Merced College and get to teach a wide range of courses from basic writing to critical thinking and philosophy and literature courses to creative writing. I decided to get involved in the political and administrative side of campus and spent two years as president of the academic senate and, currently, coordinator of district-wide student learning outcomes assessment. I have participated in writing and have received three grants on strengthening pre-collegiate instruction, establishing a student and teacher learning center, and investigating the effectiveness of learning communities at pre-collegiate levels.

I am also editing the campus journal, *Apostrophe*, which will come out in May the first time since 2001. I have taught at UC Merced in their writing program for a couple of years now, too. I have taught their freshman and basic composition courses and currently am teaching a senior level writing in the sciences course. As far as publishing or further educational goals, I have been content to teach, raise my family (my kids are ten and seven now), and grow one hell of a vegetable garden every summer!

Theses In Progress

Current Rhetoric and Composition MA theses **in progress**:

Nicholas “Spud” **Blank-Spadoni**: Invitation For Change: An Examination of Approaches to Text Production and Consumption in First-Year Composition.

Nathan **Franklin**: Critical Ethnography and the Other Compositionist: A Pedagogy For Electronic Otherness.

Jaclyn **Hardy**: Coming to Agency: Argumentation and Negotiation in Workshop Practices.



CompDogs Juan Guzman and Jocelyn Stott reading student portfolios in the bed of a truck in an university parking lot.

Nigel Medhurst: Hybridized and Student-Centered Pedagogies: How Creative Writing and English Studies Can Kiss and Make-Up.

Tyson Motto: Writing is Thinking: A New Concept for College Freshman.

Andrea Osteen: Disconnects, Fissures, and Fractures: Vertical Articulation in High School and College Composition.

Catherine Steel Smith: The Visual Rhetoric of Warner Brothers Cartoons: The Whetowic of a Wabbit as Radical Discourse.

Rafael Silva: Critical Pedagogy and Classroom Practices: How Critical Should We Be?

Linda Vang: The Rhetoric of the Hmong: History, Women, and Identity Formation. Awarded a Graduate Research Merit Award!

Graduates

Rhetoric and Composition Graduate Students who are **graduating** (**Congratulations!**):

Cathy Focarazzo: Visual Rhetoric and Its Representations in Mass Media: The Complex Web of Desire in Mass Consumerism

Karla Hess: “Making Sense” in the Center: In Support of Writing Center Based Collaborative Groups

Susan McLenithan: Racist Pedagogy: Building Bridges and Crossing Borders within Literacy Practices.

Assessing, Reflecting, and Learning: Getting Students to Think like Writers

Andy Dominguez (MA in Rhet/Comp, and Clovis East High School)

Due to a perceived deficiency in undergraduates’ writing skills, university composition programs are facing significant institutional pressure to “teach grammar.” The prevailing notion is that grammar instruction will magically help students to develop fluency and coherence in their writing. This is due in large part

to essays like Maxine Hairston’s “Not All Errors are Created Equal: Nonacademic Readers in the Profession Respond to Lapses in Usage” (1981). In this article, Hairston argues that students should be taught prescriptive grammar if they plan on entering the business field (since “errors” are annoying to professionals) [Editor’s note: Prescriptive grammar is an approach that focuses on rule acquisition and usage drills performed and tested independent of writing]. At first glance this seems to make a great deal of sense. After all, we want students to be prepared with skills that are relevant to their chose job market.



5B CompDogs reading final portfolios at the Spring final portfolio reading session.

However, in “Coming to Know Criteria: The Value of an Evaluating Writing Course for Undergraduates” (2006), Deb Martin and Diane Penrod reveal the limited scope of Hairston’s idea. They argue that students should be prepared to perform in a number of writing contexts, since we can never be sure of what field students may

choose to enter. As a result, Martin and Penrod's approach seems to situate writing performances and processes in contexts that Hairston ignores. Because we cannot predict where students' education will lead them, it makes the most sense to prepare them with the strategies for adapting to multifarious rhetorical situations.

In order to accomplish this goal, Martin and Penrod advocate offering students a class in writing *assessment*. According to the authors, this will give students the kinds of tools that most academic and professional writers possess—tools that students entering a discipline can then apply toward understanding the way writing is valued in their chosen career fields. The authors contend that students too often leave their undergraduate writing programs with little sense of what makes a “good” piece of writing. As a result, they lack the ability to adapt their writing to the varied and specific contexts that they encounter in the world.

Assessment pedagogy could be used to counteract this state of affairs by helping students understand that the criteria for “good” writing are dynamic and dependent on the audiences, purposes, genres, and markets that shape a text. Martin and Penrod provide testimony from a number of students who claim they have actually learned to write best by evaluating the writing of others. Through the process of becoming assessors, the students claim that they have gained the tools to identify how writing – including elements of style and grammar-- will be judged in whatever context they find themselves.

Therefore, the authors propose a class where students begin by studying the diverse criteria that have been used to judge fiction and poetry, and then move into analyzing what makes for successful writing in the non-fiction and academic arenas. Through this process, they will come to understand “writing skill” as socially-constructed and contextually-dependant. For this reason—regardless of the field they choose to enter—Martin and Penrod's students have the ability to identify writing quality in various contexts, giving them the discursive strategies to perform under a range of conditions.

For these reasons, teaching *assessment* seems to be a far more valuable approach than isolating writing instruction on prescriptive grammar rules that change with time and may not apply to every writing situation. To develop as writers, students must develop a repertoire of strategies for dealing effectively with various writing tasks, and begin taking a reflective and critical stance toward the choices they make.

Prescriptive grammar instruction obscures this notion. It encourages simpleminded, mechanical procedures for teaching and learning highly complex skills and processes, causing students to believe that as long as they follow a set of pre-ordained rules, they are free from having to do all the difficult thinking that “good” writing requires. Instruction in assessment, on the other hand, would provide a more solid framework for identifying context-specific indicators of writing “quality,” which students could then work to approximate in their own texts. Thus, I believe that assessment pedagogy—in presenting a theoretically sound alternative to formulaic writing instruction—should be explored as a means for satisfying the institutional pressure to simply “teach grammar.”

teaching assessment seems to be a far more valuable approach than isolating writing instruction on prescriptive grammar rules that change with time and may not apply to every writing situation.



Marcus Chinn, Jaclyn Hardy, Chuck Bazerman, and Andrea Osteen chillin' in New Orleans (Cs 2008). Also known as “the crew”: Wild G, J-Hard, C-Bizzle, and Lil' Oz.

Findings from the Teacher Commenting Project

General findings:

During the Midterm portfolio readings the graduate students from Asao's Engl 281 collected 120 random student papers that were commented on by roughly 30 teachers. Asao and his class read, coded, and analyzed the comments on these drafts after reading some of the literature and previous research on teacher commenting practices and error in student writing. In the present study, the median teaching experience was 2 semesters, with the least experienced teacher in her first semester, and the most experienced in his 35 semester. Most papers, 62 of them, were commented on by White female teachers (see the table the left). Some of our raw data are offered below for future analysis and discussion by all. We thank everyone for participating in this important research and invite all to consider our findings, analyze them, and submit analyses in future CompDog issues.

One interesting way we cut our data is by **race of the commenter/teacher and students**. Since most our teachers are White, we thought it would be interesting to see how White teachers respond to various racialized students. Here's what we found out about White teachers commenting practices:

Participating Teachers	
race / gender	# of papers
white females	62
white males	25
hispanic females	8
hispanic males	4
other females	7
other males	0

comments to (from White teachers)	average per paper							
	positive	negative	ambiguous	directive	open Qs	closed Qs	directive	ideas/rev
Asian Pacific Am. Writers	3.58	1.75	7.21	4.93	2.50	2.25	4.93	2.73
Hispanic Writers	2.90	2.90	7.06	3.41	1.91	2.08	3.41	2.63
Black Writers	2.50	0.50	3.33	2.00	3.00	1.00	2.00	1.67
White Writers	2.43	2.55	8.20	6.00	3.47	2.77	6.00	3.69

We coded papers by the **quality of the comments** made, that is, comments that were positive in nature, negative, or ambiguous. Additionally, we coded for frequency of comments that were phrased as questions, fragments, and full statements.

comments to (from all teachers)	average per paper							
	Annotat.	Endnote	Positive	Negative	ambig.	Quest.	Statement	Fragments
White Females	8.37	87.40	2.94	2.33	9.07	5.06	10.50	3.21
White Males	4.94	100.18	2.10	1.80	5.29	3.67	7.30	2.14
Hispanic Females	11.21	68.95	2.07	2.40	4.94	5.00	7.11	3.86
Hispanic Males	4.86	63.85	4.00	5.50	9.00	5.00	6.92	4.33
Asian Pacific Am. Females	7.63	91.91	2.44	2.00	7.71	3.60	8.80	3.75
Asian Pacific Am. Males	4.76	43.57	2.29	2.50	10.00	3.00	6.38	5.50
Black Females	3.80	13.00	3.50	3.50	3.50	2.50	7.00	1.50
Black Males	9.10	37.33	3.00	10.00	12.00	3.67	5.33	8.00
ALL	7.13	76.65	2.75	2.93	7.87	4.79	7.80	3.79

We also coded for **kinds of markings and their general orientation** in student drafts. What were the frequency of comments that related to grammar, typos, or open-ended comments? How many comments referenced the textbook or discussed specific ideas?

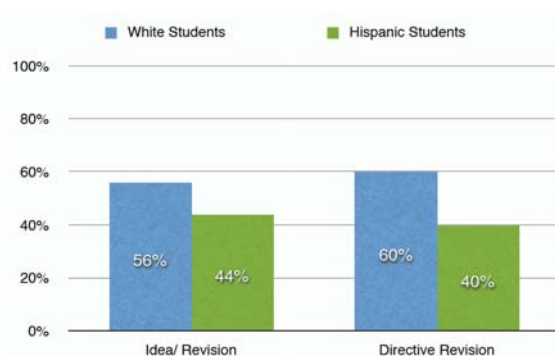
comments to (from all teachers)	average per paper													
	Grammar	typo/error	Mystery	Format	Style	Topic/Prompt	Idea/Rev.	Directive	Open	Ref to Text	Rhetorical	Open ?s	Closed ?s	Specific Ideas
White Females	6.71	3.00	2.60	2.40	3.71	1.25	3.18	5.25	4.71	2.23	3.20	3.08	2.77	5.67
White Males	5.50	3.50	3.33	1.20	1.60	1.00	3.13	3.78	2.00	1.00	4.50	1.20	2.86	1.00
Hispanic Females	20.33	2.25	2.33	4.86	8.14	2.33	2.00	5.29	1.79	1.70	2.00	3.55	2.17	2.75
Hispanic Males	12.27	4.17	2.67	4.14	5.33	1.33	4.33	6.60	2.00	3.25	2.57	3.14	3.10	2.00
Asian Pacific Am. Females	11.44	1.80	3.75	2.00	2.20	3.50	3.00	4.22	3.25	2.25	3.00	2.00	2.17	2.33
Asian Pacific Am. Males	4.00	4.33	1.67	4.40	2.80	2.33	4.00	3.71	2.00	1.50	2.00	1.80	2.33	5.50
Black Females	3.00	na	1.00	na	na	na	na	2.50	2.00	na	5.00	1.00	2.50	1.00
Black Males	21.50	3.00	10.00	na	4.00	1.50	1.67	4.67	1.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	1.00	5.00
ALL	9.37	3.09	2.97	2.94	3.68	1.81	3.07	4.66	2.47	1.91	3.05	3.00	2.77	3.75

Here is a selection of findings from those who worked on this project.

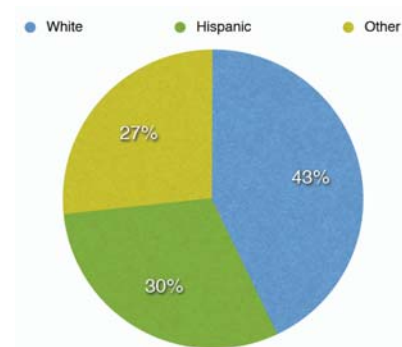
Megan McKnight's findings:

Of the 125 comments concerning **ideas for revision** (usually explorative and open-ended comments) directed to White and Hispanic students, 56% of the total were directed toward White students and 44% were directed toward Hispanic students (see bar chart to the right).

Of the 290 **directive comments** (commands to change things in drafts) given to White and Hispanic students, 60.3% were directed to White students and 39.7% were directed to Hispanic students.



Of all the comments coded, White students' papers received more comments concerning **revision** (format, style, topic/prompt, idea/revision, directive, open, reference to text, rhetorical, specific ideas) than Hispanic students, or any other student group (see pie chart to the right).



Meredith Bulinski's findings:

Teachers used **directive comments** (657 times) almost twice as frequently as facilitative comments (340 times).

Andy Dominguez's findings:

Almost one-fourth (24.6%) of all the comments noted in our study entailed **grammar** mistakes.

Our study replicated closely the results of Connors and Lunsford's (1986) national study of error, which found that comments of ten words or fewer were most common in papers. The present study revealed that only comments from White female instructors to Hispanic female students contained more than ten words per comment on average (11.34).

Experience does not impact the frequency of comments or makings of grammatical errors by teachers.

Sharla Seidel's findings:

While some instructors used their comments to ask very insightful questions of the writer, clearly hoping to move (instruct) the student toward further exploration of a point, a disproportionate number of marks were made by instructors that focused more specifically on **copy-editing types of comments** – style, grammar, punctuation, word choice, or spelling. What is most interesting about these findings is the apparent focus by instructors (whether knowingly or not) on sentence level issues that replicates the environment and writing styles that students have learned up through high school. Might a student's "failure" to revise beyond the sentence level be due to their inexperience with writing in the academic genre coupled with teacher commentary that focus on sentence level issues that do not address critical thinking or meaning making?

Holly Riding's findings:

Teachers wrote on average 9.37 **grammar** notations and 3.09 **typo/error** notations per paper.

Students who come to the writing center typically ask for help with grammar, and this possibly reflects the 29% of the notations on their papers that focused on

grammar. Some characteristic comments written on student papers were ones like: “I see lots of run-ons here” (paper 108); “I don’t see evidence of a W.C. visit here, so make that a priority this week” (paper 110).

Much like Connors and Lunsford posit in their 1988 study on error marking in student texts, perhaps it is **commenting fatigue** that teachers find themselves experiencing. They are required to comment on paper after paper, seeing the same errors over and over, which cause terseness, harshness, and a tendency toward marking grammar errors.



5A CompDogs reading final portfolios during the Spring final portfolio reading session.

It is difficult to determine the **intentions** of many markings on papers. What is a student supposed to understand from things being crossed out, or check marked? Would it be helpful for students to know their teachers’ motivations for making particular notations? Is the teacher product based or processed based, and how do they explain this distinction (and their commenting practices) to the students?

There is a shocking increase in the amount of grammar errors marked on papers by **students of color**: White females had a total of 79 grammar notations, Hispanic females had 146 grammar notations, and Asian Pacific American females had 116 grammar notations.

Parting Shots (from the CompDog Board)

Enjoy your summer! See you all next August! And for those who are graduating, we’ll miss you, but we wish you well! ~ **Ginny Crisco**

Hey all, just want to thank you again for your essential work with students and your abundant caring. If you have time this summer, pick up John Bean’s Engaging Ideas. This is the kind of book that speaks to everyone across disciplines about the value of reading and writing in the classroom. Good read for anyone at all levels of experience. I am fading out this summer, but will surface again in August, ready to see you all again and take up the good fight. Go see a ballgame. ~ **Rick Hansen**

After one year, I already feel at home. A synopsis: drama, letters, conflict, Sequoia, comments of teachers, research, Cs proposal, Gramsci-New Rhetoric-Williams, got-to-go-cause-it’s-already-ten, politics in the classroom, another meeting at my house, good times and lots more. Maryam, Jocelyn, Meredith, Holly, Marcus, Pat, Adena, Megan, Sharla, Anna, Brian, Rafael, Juan, Susan, and Andy: Thank you, colleagues. Peace. ~ **Asao B. Inoue**

After the portfolio readings ended, you should have heard the Comp-evangelizing Meredith and I were doing! We were literally telling people how Comp (specifically our 270 class last semester) has changed our lives. I think I can speak for her when I say that we are so thankful for the direction and support we have received from fellow teachers and senior staff. In a job as overwhelming and demanding as teaching writing, an encouraging staff is invaluable. Thank you Rick, Ginny, and Bo, for encouraging me every chance you had. Thank you, Asao, for pushing me. Thank you, my teaching comrades (you know who you are) for commiserating with me in the TA office, in the parking lot, in the middle of the night, over beers, the list continues. Blessings! ~ **Jocelyn Stott**

Thank you for your hard work and have a refreshing and productive summer! ~ **Bo Wang**

Upcoming Events

8/18-21/08 August Orientation (for those teaching Engl 5A, 5B, and 10)

10/13-17/08 Midterm Portfolios collected

12/08-10/08 Final Portfolios collected

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If you wish to contribute something or add information to the newsletter, email the Editor. We always welcome all personal and program related information that teachers feel are relevant to their professional work, lives, and well-being.