

The Sounding Board

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 2

MARCH 22, 2006

The Writing Colleagues Program Newsletter for Hobart & William Smith Colleges. Writing Colleagues and faculty members are encouraged to contribute to the next issue!

Embrace the Silence

Don't Forget!

- *Your Writing Colleague Journals are due to the Coordinator and your professor 48 hours after your last meeting!*
- *Writing Colleagues are the best recruiters of new Writing Colleagues! Pass names along and help keep the Program alive!*

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In Westerns, gun slinging men wearing cowboy hats and leather vests meet in silent, deserted towns. They stare at one another without a word exchanged between them. But it's obvious they both know why they are there on that dusty street.

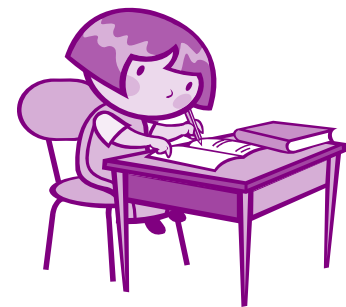
I am sure that long silence is painful. I am sure they much rather go back to their dorm rooms and take a nap than wait in silence for someone to act.

Silence is most often considered the Writing Colleague's enemy. Meetings are based on conversation. When we're talking, we know we're acting, we're helping, we're leading. When the Student

Colleague is talking, we know he is thinking, engaging, involving himself in the process. When the student isn't talking, we automatically assume he's being resistant or shy or that he doesn't even know we asked him a question. So we're quick to fill in the space because if we're not talking, we automatically assume we're not functioning properly as a Writing Colleague.

But maybe that's not true. Maybe silence is more than just awkward blank stares, awkward fidgeting, and nothingness. Maybe silence functions. Maybe silence is a device we as Writing Colleagues can use to propel the writing and revision process.

Maybe gun slinging men



Instead of assuming the student is resisting your question, assume the student is using the silence to think about your question.

wearing cowboy hats are using silence to their advantage, too. Maybe they are using it, pressing their enemy to make the first move. Maybe they are using it to think about their first move. (cont. pg 2)

Common Myths about Writing Colleagues

It's safe to say most people on campus know about the Writing Colleagues Program. It's also safe to say that many people on campus often misunderstand the role of Writing Colleagues. It's time address these myths. The following are Writing Colleague **TRUTHS:**

- Writing Colleagues are NOT editors. While clarity, organization, and development are priorities, grammar is not a top concern for Writing Colleagues, so don't be surprised if your Writing Colleague mentions nothing about misplaced commas.
- Writing Colleagues ARE peers. More often than not, your Writing Colleague is taking the class for the first time, just like the other students. They are new to this material, and they might be struggling with it (cont. pg 2)

Silence is the Way (continued)

What?

As Writing Colleagues, have we ever stopped to think that in these awkward silences, these quiet students are thinking about what they want to say, what they want to do with their essays? Have we ever stopped to think that in these

Not all students are used to talking about Writing as Colleagues are, so be patient! Pretend you're in their shoes.



awkward silences we are not NOT doing our job, but instead doing our job by pushing the shy student to speak instead of relieving them by speaking for them?

Resist the urge to fill an awkward silence. When you ask a student, “how can you revise this passage to smooth the transition into your source better?” wait. Just wait. Instead of jumping in and saying, “well, you can introduce the author’s name and the essay’s title,” wait. Look closely at the student and see the wheels turning. Don’t tap your fingers or look out the window

with boredom. Wait. Trust.

If the student is just thinking, they will eventually respond to you with an answer, whether it’s the answer you were looking for or not. They’ll give you something to work with.

If the student was being resistant, surely they hate awkward silence just as much as you, and they’ll desperately search for an answer, think of something relevant to say to squash the silence. They’ll give you something to work with, and the silence will deserve your thanks.

Myths (continued)

Just as other students are. So Professors should not assume Writing Colleagues will always take a leading role in class discussion, nor should students assume their Writing Colleague will give them all the answers.

- Writing Colleagues are peers to the students, but students, don’t expect your Writing Colleague to pull strings. If you miss a meeting, your Writing Colleague might reschedule, or she might not. Writing Colleagues are required to

tell Professors who missed meetings.

- Writing Colleagues ARE NOT teachers. They will not tell students how to write their papers. They are facilitators. They will ask questions to lead students to find their own way to revision. Writing Colleague meetings should be discussions, not lectures.
- Your Writing Colleague IS NOT responsible for that C you got on

your last paper. Don’t blame your grade on your Writing Colleague. If you’re unhappy with your grade, discuss it with your professor to see what you could have done better, then work on those things with your Writing Colleague at your next meeting.

- Writing Colleagues ARE students, and they have lives just like you do! They are busy people, and cannot be expected to reschedule if you forget your meeting.

A Message to the Faculty

FACULTY!

As you may know, the Writing Colleagues Program is a hot commodity on campus! Demand is high, but there are only so many Writing Colleagues to go around. The program already has several requests from faculty members, and we address the faculty on a first-come, first-serve basis. It’s not too early for you to

place a request for your class next fall.

The Writing Colleagues eager for a placement are all experienced. Some have already worked in a placement, while the newer Writing Colleagues (now in the Writing Colleagues Seminar) are busy gaining experience in small scale practicum situations. We are confident in all of them!

To make a request, contact the



Writing Colleagues are going like hot cakes! Make a request NOW!

Writing Colleagues Coordinator, Kristen Kehoe. She can be reached via email at Kkehoe@hws.edu or at x3807

Writing Colleague Profile: Stephanie Eggens



NAME: Stephanie Eggens

CLASS: Sophomore

HOMETOWN: Sherrill, NY

1. Was there someone who encouraged you to be a Writing Colleague?

My first-year seminar professor, Jasper Bernes, recommended that I look into the program. I got the impression from the Writing Colleague in our class that this was a really special and unique program and was excited that my professor thought I was capable of handling such responsibility. I then contacted Aimee Levesque (former Coordinator), and the rest is history!

2. For which class(es) have you been a Colleague?

I was a Colleague for the FSEM Africa: Myths & Realities in Fall '05.

3. Do you think students and faculty members misunderstand anything about the Writing Colleagues Program? If so, are there any myths you would like to dispel?

I find students that have never had a Writing Colleague are misguided about what we do, and it's hard to fully explain all that there is to being one because it is an experience that cannot be encompassed into just a couple cohesive sentences. It is so much *more* to me than that, and I think many others would agree as well. Students expect me to edit their papers or make them sound more intelligent, and I have to subtly let them know that *their* responsibility is doing all that. I gladly help with overriding themes (perhaps too often), but sometimes I just feel like a resource that is being used! All that being said, I find that most students and faculty members have at least a rudimentary understanding of what it is the Program is all about, which is refreshing.

4. What's one message you would give to those studying in the Writing Colleagues Seminar right now?

You're going to be challenged — tested. You're going to question your ability to help others with their writing when sometimes you feel like you need *professional* help with yours. You're undoubtedly not going to "reach" all of your student colleagues, and you might even feel like you could have put even more work into being a Writing Colleague. As silly as this may sound, I find that all of these reasons are *exactly* why I love being a Colleague. We live under the assumption that even we aren't perfect, but that we want to take what knowledge we have to help others. There will be good and bad days, but that's just life. In the end, the Seminar and the Program are invaluable experiences that will shape your college careers - enjoy them.

5. What's the most difficult part of being a Writing Colleague?

The extra stress and work load, easily. You have to become very good at masking being affected by these things and extremely good at time management. However, if you can do that, you're all set.

6. What's the best part of being a Writing Colleague?

Seeing the growth in students and forming friendships with them that last beyond the class you have together. There is a certain student in my placement last semester who had an incredibly tough time in his personal life (death of a parent, etc.), and who, amazingly, worked extremely hard on all of his papers and really appreciated all of my help. This semester he actually Instant Messaged me and asked why I never came over to visit him. Even something just as simple as this makes being a Writing Colleague

worth it - knowing that you weren't just a "writing tutor" to students, but a friend.

7. What are your major(s) and minor(s), and does the Writing Colleagues Program fit into your experience with them in any way?

I'm an English major, Writing Colleague minor. Being a Writing Colleague *definitely* helps with my major, as writing papers is a huge part of it. But more than anything, I feel that they are two separate, unique, amazing experiences and I wouldn't change the direction of my college career for anything.

The Writing Colleague Says

“**H**aving a good basis in writing is, I believe, one of the best skills a person can possess.”

— Christina Yancey, '06

“**A**fter starting the Writing Colleagues Seminar, I was a little intimidated; I'm not gonna lie (“Three drafts? Weekly journals? Yes!”). But in the end, I like to think my writing improved exponentially. — Keith Datz, '08

“**I** like doing small talk at the beginning of my meetings. I like to joke around with the students.”

— Caitlin Caron, '08



Scaffolding Writing Strategy: Implosion Exercise

From the Compendium of Practices, an exercise by Professor Mary Salibrici

Problem: A student has produced a very rough first draft, one that has still not produced a clear focus or one that might have several foci going at once. When we read the draft, however, it's possible to detect an idea that has great merit, one that might help the student to expand a buried idea or clarify a cloudy focus for the paper. Or, a student has produced a solid draft, but still has a section or two that seems underdeveloped.

Goal: To help the student work with a possible idea, to stay with it for a while and write about it in order to clarify and extend a paper's direction or to expand a particular section of the paper.

Strategy: After reading a rough draft through a couple of times, use a highlighter on one or two particular sentences that seem to suggest an unexplored or somewhat hidden direction for writing. Then ask the student to write at least one full paragraph on the highlighted sentence in order to write more intently for that single idea. Once the writing is done, figure out how it might help trigger the paper's focus or how it might be inserted to assist development.

(note on the origin of implosion = the way an atomic bomb works = rather than exploding outward from the center like a stick of dynamite or a regular bomb, an atomic bomb explodes inward and then outward, thus creating greater magnitude. In the same way, writing inward onto a sentence to create more detail is the way implosion works for writing.)