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Turning Students on to Learning

The Challenge for All of Us!

Kim McDonald, Assistant Director Academic & Student Support Services

What does it take to get students motivated? Why are some students satisfied with a "C" grade when, with a bit more effort, they could earn an "A"? Are students even bothering to do their homework? Why do they seem so "detached" from the learning process? One list-serve debates these questions daily, and clearly there are no easy answers. A subject that is fascinating to one student is downright boring to another, and yet both students may need the same course to graduate. So, how do we make our subject matter pertinent to all of the students in our courses?

In attempting to answer these questions, I think that each of us as educators must think back to a time when we were "first-time learners." I fell in love with English Literature and Composition when I was a tenth grader in Mrs. Harbin's World Literature course and again as a senior in her Advanced Composition course. I found that I loved to analyze a story and then write about my findings. I'll never forget the rush of excitement I experienced after receiving an "A" on my first paper. It gave me the courage and confidence to plunge into the next assignment. I had always enjoyed writing, but it was Mrs. Harbin's prodding and belief in me that urged me to improve my skills. Even though I didn't always earn that elusive "A," it was her belief in me that ultimately gave me confidence in my own writing ability.

These early positive experiences no doubt played into my decision to major in English Education in college, where I experienced the same types of successes. One success led to another and with each success came confidence. As a student, I hadn't really considered the implications of all of this until the instructor of my introductory education course asked, "Should learning be fun?" FUN? I thought. Is this why I had enjoyed my literature classes so much? Could it be due to a concept as frivolous as "fun?" I pondered that question for a long time before concluding that it actually *was* fun! Fortunately, I learned the "tools" of academic success early on. I knew how to study for an essay test vs. a multiple choice test, how to take good notes, how to be assertive in class, and how to attempt to personalize every course that I took. But are today's college students equipped with the same type of ammunition that we had when we were undergraduates? Unfortunately, many of them are not. So, what can we do to assist our students in reaching their potential?

In working individually with students who come into the Academic Achievement Center, I have found that usually, when they seek help in a specific content area (especially in lecture-oriented courses: psychology, sociology, history, etc.), it is not the content area that they need help with. Rather, it is study skills—or perhaps even more specifically—it is reading speed and comprehension. For this reason, we have

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"You Mean You Actually *Write* Your Papers?"

Diane Boehm, Director University Writing Program

Students often have a way of shocking us into a reality we wish we could ignore.

Last winter in an article for *Literacy Link* I described how much more challenging it has become to teach and verify academic integrity in the age of electronic media. My subsequent research into online sites for purchasing papers has led me ever more deeply into questions and issues concerning how to address this situation with students and colleagues.

My initial reaction was to write an online piece about it: "About Plagiarism, Pixels and Platitudes" (available at *www.svsu.edu/~dboehm/pixels.htm*) has links to many sites which offer papers for sale. (Should you wish to see for yourself what kind of paper $50 or less can buy, many sites will offer "sales" near the end of a semester. Have your Visa, Mastercard or Discover card ready.)

I decided I also wanted to test student attitudes toward this issue. I asked my current students in English 300, Writing in the Professions, to do two things. First, I asked them to read "About Plagiarism" and respond with an e-mail message to me. I had several reasons for doing this. I wanted them to *know that I know* about *SchoolSucks* and *A1Termpapers* and *Evil House of Cheat* and many other sites which offer papers for sale. More importantly, I wanted to know how they felt about the ease with which students can purchase papers online.

I followed that response with a brief e-mail survey. Based on the responses of my students, several things have become clear. In response to the question, "What would you like faculty members to know about this issue?" students felt strongly that "[faculty members] should be aware and . . . become familiar with where students find these papers"; "I would hope that faculty members know who is doing it and how they are doing it."

Though some students had not known about these sites prior to this class, others knew SVSU students who have used their services. One student described her "awakening" thus:

I had overheard a conversation one day

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Our Toughest Sessions

■ **Eric Gardner**
Assistant Professor of English
Coordinator, Writing Center

The SVSU Writing Center has now been open for just over a year; in that time, we've conducted over 2,000 individual tutorials with students from all ages, backgrounds, and majors on a wide range of documents. When the editors of *Literacy Link* asked me to reflect upon the work we do, I realized two things pretty quickly. First, I needed to demonstrate what we mean when we say that we work one-on-one with writers, that we teach rather than proofread, and that we focus on improving the writer rather than just the writer's document. To do that, I needed to share something of the complexity of a writing center tutorial and to explain that tutorials were neither fix-it sessions nor "regular" instructor-student conferences. Second, I certainly couldn't do that in isolation. And so I asked two of the Writing Center's most experienced mentors to contribute pieces on the topic "the toughest tutorial I've done."

For my own "toughest tutorial," I reflected on my decade of involvement with writing centers and reached back to a session I held as a graduate student tutor at the University of Illinois. That session, in which I tutored a student using English as a Second Language who was failing her Freshman Composition course, forever changed the ways I tutor — and teach.

Nick Kloka, an anchor of both the University Writing Program and the Writing Center since their inception (and recognized as the 1996-1997 Non-traditional Student of the Year), contributed his thoughts on dealing with students writing discipline-specific texts who lack a clear conception of what writing looks like in their discipline.

Meg Larson, a long-time Writing Center mentor and the current editor of SVSU's *Valley Vanguard,* considered her work with a student who was dealing with a learning disability — amid the complexities of discipline-specific writing. Because it was a situation she "took home with her," it taught her a great deal about what we can and can't do in the Writing Center. We hope these anecdotes stimulate the kind of campus-wide dialogue that they've stimulated in the Writing Center as we've written, shared, and revised them. We invite questions and comments.

Eric's Toughest Session

"It was a dark and stormy night. . . ."

Well . . . it was.

I'd been a grad student tutor in the University of Illinois Writers' Workshop for three years and was working in one of our satellite locations. This night had been fairly quiet except for the storm outside.

Midway through my shift, a young woman came in, quickly sped through our paperwork, and sat down across the table from me. She silently pushed a paper across the table. The paper had been written for freshman comp and had been returned earlier that day. The instructor had ordered the student to re-write the paper. It was awash in red ink — marginal comments, crossed-out sections, editing marks, and a brief end-comment beside a large, circled "F."

Given the amount of comments, the assignment guidelines were surprisingly brief: pick a current issue and argue about it. The student had done just that. She had written a paper condemning homosexuality from a fairly fundamentalist viewpoint. She'd used several biblical references to explain and, in her mind, support her position, and had something like a thesis and a basic organization. There were significant problems with structure, development, and language, and the student didn't fully understand what an academic argument or audience looked like.

But these issues were compounded by the fact that the student had been in the US for only a little over two years. Her first language was Mandarin, and, though she'd taken several years of English, she was clearly still adapting both to general, spoken American English and especially to the conventions of academic English. The instructor had marked nearly every error in grammar and usage — though it was apparent that the errors were pattern problems associated with language use (articles, for example, were a big problem; not surprising, given that her language really has no equivalent).

The student was clearly upset; this was both her first college writing course and her first "F." She was also clearly diligent; in addition to a briefcase containing a dictionary, a thesaurus, and a grammar handbook, she had brought several pages of rough drafts — the first draft composed partially in English and partially in her first language and subsequent drafts demonstrating a great deal of sentence-level re-working. When I suggested that she take her paper in to talk with her instructor, she responded with a mixture of fear, sadness, and anger. She finally agreed that she would do so if I would be willing to talk with her about the kinds of questions she could ask of him. So we began to work through the comments with the end goal of having a list of focused questions that she could work from. We agreed that the questions would have to be non-confrontational and focused on ways she could improve her future work.

As we talked, she continually went back to a single marginal comment — even though I was attempting to talk about higher-order concerns (like clarity and audience) and to examine patterns of error. Every time we went back to that comment, she became more upset.

The marginal comment we kept returning to was beside a paragraph that set out New Testament-based arguments that Christians should "hate the sin" but "love the sinner." It read, "This is the only tolerant moment in the paper." I assumed the student's distress was based on the counterargument implicit in the comment, and so we talked about audience, about considering how different readers might react to generalizations, about competing world-views — all the things you're supposed to discuss when asking students to consider diverse audiences.

She was baffled.

Five long minutes and a few tears later, I suddenly realized why this comment was so powerful in her reading of the graded paper: she was reading "tolerant" as "tolerable" — i.e., this single, brief paragraph was the only marginally-acceptable piece of writing in the entire paper. No wonder she'd received an "F" — three semi-acceptable sentences in a four-page essay!

I'd like to say that this moment of realization was equally powerful for her. It wasn't. Given the flood of red ink, she remained convinced that she'd done completely unacceptable work. We fumbled through the session for another ten minutes or so. I'd like to say she went to see her instructor and was able to turn this into a useful learning experience for both. I don't know if she did; I never saw her after the tutorial. She did walk away with a list of questions. I'd like to say she learned something about how to read a graded paper; I'm not convinced she did. I'd also like to say that she went away knowing a bit more about dealing with complex and controversial issues in papers — about audience and academic writing. I'm not sure she did that either. She may have left convinced that her English was so bad that her collegiate career was in jeopardy. She may have been certain that her instructor had graded her purely on her viewpoint and not on how she expressed that viewpoint (he'd actually — though I, of course, never said this to the student — done both). I'm not sure. She may have walked away with a slightly better understanding of ways to draft and self-edit, but even in talking with her about these issues, I knew that, because English is a complex and often inconsistent language, learning to deal with it is often a long, frustrating process even for native speakers.

The lessons I learned?

As tutors, we can't fix everything. Although we can help students recognize instructors' expectations and general approaches, we are not advocates for either students or instructors. We can aid students in developing the critical reading and think-

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Toughest Sessions (Continued from Page 2)

ing skills necessary for reading graded papers, but we're limited in how we can interpret instructors' comments: that work is for the instructor and the student to do together. We can't do the work for students; we can only talk with them about strategies for understanding and undertaking the work.

The session also profoundly shaped my teaching. As a teacher, I need think hard about what I say in paper comments. This doesn't mean I need to "pull punches"; rather, it means I always need to be constructive and clear. And I need to aid students in reading my comments — just as I'd aid them in understanding any new kind of text. Thus, I take class time to explain how to read and use my comments, and I clearly prioritize my comments. I try to avoid simply editing, and I consistently limit my comments to focus on two or three main issues. I also often require conferences during students' drafting and revising processes. Do I avoid asking students to write about tough, controversial issues? And/or do I pretend to be unbiased? No. I argue with everything and focus my comments on the rhetorical choices students make and the potential consequences of those choices. Do I grade easier? No. If anything, I'm tougher. But that toughness is always tied to invitations — even sometimes requirements — that students communicate with me in a variety of ways so that grades and comments become moments of dialogue, so that evaluation might actually teach something.

Difference — cultural, ideological, philosophical — is tough, and writing is a central location of difference. True revision — re-seeing a text — is a difficult thing to learn and teach, especially when evaluation is involved and communication isn't clear. As Elaine Lees says in her wonderful essay on "Evaluating Student Writing" — a concept so central to SVSU's Writing Center that it appears on our brochure — "A sentence may be simple; no writer is."

Nick's Toughest Session

A science student arrives at the Writing Center asking for help with APA in formatting a paper. The conversation begins:

Mentor: "Can I help you today?"

Student: "I have a paper due and the instructor is requiring us to use APA format."

The mentor scans the assignment sheet while the student gets out a draft of the paper. The assignment sheet contains one line about format: "use APA."

Mentor: "I see you have a draft. What exactly were your instructions regarding the use of APA?"

Student: "Just to format in APA style. The instructor didn't expand on that."

Mentor, after looking briefly at the draft which contains no title page, abstract, headings, or other APA formatting other than a References page: "Are you required to provide a title page, abstract, page headers and numbering for this paper? Did you use APA for your parenthetical citations?"

Student: "I think I have the References page right. The instructor didn't mention anything about that other stuff."

This situation creates a dilemma for me as a Writing Center mentor. As a rule, APA papers contain a title page and abstract to introduce the paper. If, in fact, the instructor for this class expects these items in this paper, then this student has some work to do to complete this assignment. Writing a good abstract takes time and practice. On the other hand, some instructors don't want their students to get bogged down on this phase of an APA paper. They prefer that their students spend more time on the content. In either case, the three-word instruction provided in the assignment provides no guidelines.

Is my job to break out the APA manual and discuss a title page and abstract? If I do so, this student may spend time creating items not required and lose time that could be spent revising the content. Or do I ignore these items and assume the instructor only referred to referencing materials when directing students to use APA? In that case, the student may submit a paper that receives an "incomplete" and/or a lower grade because a title page and abstract weren't provided.

I have found myself in this situation more than once. My solution has always been to make the most of the situation. I briefly explain to the student how title pages and abstracts are designed, and show that student where this information is accessed in the manual. I then inform the student that he or she must contact the instructor before the paper is due to determine if these items are required. We then proceed with a session that focuses on the draft the way it is written.

From my experience, this is not the best solution. Many SVSU students are commuter students, married and working; trips to the Writing Center may be a luxury for them. Second, many students don't ever receive formal training in APA format at SVSU; it is not difficult to imagine wildly different levels of experience with APA among different students. I treat every session as though that student has only this session; when the above scenario occurs, the student leaves the session with doubts, and I am forced to share those doubts. I don't feel that the session was as good as it could have been.

These doubts can be eliminated before students come to the Writing Center. The students can be given writing assignments that talk about disciplinary conventions and explain format expectations so that they are fully aware of the requirements. When a student enters with full, clear and concise instructions, I am able to provide that student with a clear, complete session.

My goal as a Writing Center mentor is to help students find ways to improve their writing. Most students who enter the Writing Center for help have made the decision to seek self-improvement. Well-defined, clear assignments will help students and mentors alike in reaching that goal.

Meg's Toughest Session

He came into the writing center about a month into the semester. I asked him if he wanted assistance, but he said he had an appointment with another tutor. His tutor arrived, and they started to talk. I, of course, eavesdropped.

This was around noon; when I finished my shift at four, he was still there.

My curiosity piqued, I asked the tutor the next day what her marathon session was all about. I was surprised when she told me that this student was a senior, in his last semester before graduation. He'd been referred to the writing center by one of his instructors, who said this student was in danger of failing not only the course but flunking out of his program because of his writing skills. Or, to be more accurate, his astounding lack of writing skills.

Imagine taking a paper written by a student, and with scissors, cutting every single sentence into a single strip of paper. Throw them up in the air, and then randomly reconstruct the paper, with no thought of organization, or clarity, or how your reader will see your work. That's how this student's papers looked. He was by no means stupid; in fact, he was pretty darn smart. And he wasn't lazy either; he was incredibly committed to doing whatever was necessary to graduate on time. He was dyslexic.

The other tutor started, that first, long day, by talking to the student about his writing problems, goals, and the particular assignments he was working on. She took him over to the computer, and while he talked, she typed, exactly as randomly as he threw out his thoughts. When they were done, she helped him create a coherent structure, in part by teaching him how to cut and paste his thoughts together and to organize sentence by sentence into a cohesive working draft. She explained to him that the dyslexia was not his fault and alerted him to some of the resources our University provides for students dealing with disabilities. And she urged him to return; showing him how to organize his essays gave him a strategy for beginning to create drafts we could work with.

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Toughest Sessions (Continued from Page 3)

He returned to the Writing Center the next week with a completed draft of his current assignment. This time, the other tutor noticed that his sentences were incomplete, with words, sometimes whole phrases left out. He read his draft to her, aloud, which allowed him to hear what a reader is seeing and hearing. He was stunned when he realized that the words he was so sure he'd written down were not on the page. So reading the draft aloud became another strategy for writing.

The next time he came in, it was time for another tutor to get involved. I was filled in on the particulars of his assignment (a multi-part paper), what he'd worked on so far, what he had to tackle next. I began my session with him by reading his draft aloud to him, so he could hear his paper in someone else's voice; as I explained to him, when a writer works on a draft for a length of time, the writer often reads it knowing what is supposed to be there and inserts missing words. I read sentence by sentence, stopping to allow him to think about each individual thought. When I came upon a sentence with missing words, I'd wait while he repeated that sentence and supplied the missing word. When a sentence wasn't clear, I'd ask him what he really meant to say. It was a long process, but afterwards, he thanked me enthusiastically, saying how much it helped to hear the text in another voice.

I spent about two hours with him that day, and I was fairly wiped out when we finished. But again he'd made progress. He was gaining new confidence not only in his writing ability, but in his ability to communicate, something he'd never had before.

Then what I half-feared would happen did: he had a major setback. He came into the writing center on the day he'd received his graded paper. He was furious. The professor had given him a C, commenting only on where the paper had failed. Not only was he furious, he was crestfallen. What had now taken him a couple of hard months to achieve had been undone in one big red letter on his paper. I was crestfallen, as well. I was also angry, because this professor knew the extent of his problems, knew that he was working incredibly hard to turn his writing around, and had commented on none of that. I wasn't expecting him to be coddled, but there was no notice, or at least there was no acknowledgment, of this student's amazing progress in just a short time. I took his failure personally. We suggested to him that he go home, cool down a bit, and then get started on the next step of the assignment because he wouldn't be able to revise that first part. I was half-afraid that he simply wouldn't come back to the Writing Center.

He did return. He continued to work diligently, albeit with a bit of disillusionment, and he continued to develop strategies to cope with his dyslexia. When he had first started coming in, there was almost too much to do, but we started applying strategies to address the very basic elements of composition: organization, clarity, critical thinking. He had significant problems in all of these areas, on top of the run-of-the-mill lower-order concerns such as spelling, grammar, and document formatting. By the time he paid his last visit to the Writing Center, we actually had time to work on comma splices and sentence errors. Best of all, he ended up passing his course with a B, and he graduated on time. He stopped in after his last final exam, and he thanked us for helping him work through this very major obstacle in his life-path.

I have to admit that I really didn't contribute all that much to his success. The other tutor did most of the "heavy work"; I just reinforced it when I worked with him. Given that, I still consider that student to be my toughest tutoring session, and my shining moment as a tutor in the Writing Center. Working with him was exacting; it was tedious, involved, and, at times, downright exhausting. But we accomplished what we set out to do, that which we set out to do every time a student walks into the Writing Center: we helped improve the writer, not just the document. And that is an extremely gratifying experience — not just for the students we serve, but for us.

— Nick Kloka and Meg Larson also contributed to this article.

Short Writings: Windows to Interpretation

■ **Jim Geistman**
Department of English

In my English 200 (Literary Interpretation) course this term, I've been trying out an idea that I think colleagues in other disciplines might find beneficial. I call these weekly assignments Short Writings, and I use them to get students to focus on major ideas in the works they will be reading.

It works like this. I will assign several stories to be read by the next class period. I then give them a list of topics or questions to write on — usually one per story — and they choose the topic with which they feel most comfortable. A topic I suggested to them for Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh" was this: Do Leroy's and Norma Jean's activities suggest why they have grown apart?

The assignment is to write one paragraph on one page on the assigned topic, using quotation from the text for support. To do this effectively, they must do three things: (1) write a clear, focused topic sentence to engage the reader's attention, (2) support that topic sentence with both quotation from the text and their interpretation, and (3) drive home their point with their own words in a sentence or two to sum up the paragraph.

While I am exercising quite a bit of authority by assigning these topics, I do so because I've found that most students in English 200 have never really read much literature before, and those who have don't seem to have thought very closely about it. I can tell from the occasional lack of discussion — especially on those difficult texts! — that most students are waiting for me to tell them what they should be thinking. When I prompt them with topics, however, I turn the tables and make them encounter the text on their own, albeit with my guidance. In this way, they get some sense of the context in which the story is usually read, but they still have to interpret it on their own.

I see the assignment, too, as an exercise in composition. It invites students to order their thoughts and present them in a clear, concise fashion. Also, since we use MLA format (one-inch margins, double-spaced text), and I tell them that they're to fill up all of the space that they have, they must often edit and revise to be sure that their text will fit on the page, since paragraphs that are more than a page in length are graded down.

An advantage for me is that the Short Writings don't take long to read. If the student has done her job, I can quickly follow her thinking and support; if she hasn't, it's easy to see where things aren't working, and, because I'm only dealing with one paragraph, I can jot down comments in short order. Hence, I can see how well students are learning what I've been teaching them about reading literature, and I can also give them some more feedback on their writing.

So far, the assignment has worked pretty well. Short Writings get the students involved with major ideas within the chosen text, and this helps stimulate discussion; I can monitor their progress on a weekly basis and give them appropriate feedback; and they get a little more writing practice and instruction, something most of them need. And, I think Short Writings may be useful in helping students understand concepts in most disciplines.

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learned to take a two-tiered approach to assessing a student's strengths and weaknesses. The first is to administer the LASSI (Learning and Study Strategies Inventory) and then to follow-up with the Speed Reader computer program.

The LASSI is a computerized inventory made up of 77 questions. The inventory measures ten scales: attitude, motivation, time management, anxiety, concentration, information processing, selecting main ideas, use of support techniques, self-testing, and test-taking strategies. The Speed Reader program is one of drill and practice that prescribes an individual training program. Interestingly, the LASSI and the Speed Reader program go hand-in-hand in predicting student success.

For example, one student with whom I worked last spring had an initial reading speed of 147 words per minute. (As you may know, the average reading speed for college students is approximately 325 to 400 words per minute.) Additionally, when he took the LASSI, he scored at the lowest percentile on both the attitude and motivation portions—a common thread among "at risk" students. The student complained that he would read his course material over and over without understanding. Because of this, he dreaded his reading assignments. It is no wonder he didn't feel motivated. By the time he had finished reading a paragraph, he'd already lost its meaning. He barely had a chance to succeed! After making the commitment to work on the Speed Reader program for the next four months, his speed increased to over 680 words per minute, with 90 to 100 percent comprehension! Interestingly, his LASSI attitude score soared to the 80th percentile; the motivation, concentration, and information-processing scales also showed a marked improvement. Each time he worked on the Speed Reader program, he could see an improvement in his scores which then motivated him to go on. Learning had become FUN.

In a similar case, another student whose reading speed also dramatically increased stated, "It's weird. The faster I read, the better my comprehension is." What a revelation for that student! I could have *told* him that very thing, but he had to experience it in order for it to have an impact on him. Students must experience success—even "small successes"— for them to continue to want to learn; and if we make learning fun for them, they are more apt to apply the information and thus retain it.

In conclusion, I believe that students must *want* to succeed. More importantly, they need to know that they *can* succeed. Without this driving force, it's a moot point. Also, I believe that we have to be "cheerleaders" for our students from time to time. We have to believe in them even when they don't believe in themselves, and we need to make sure that they have the "tools" to succeed. Finally, I think that it is essential that we keep learning "fresh" and new, not only for ourselves as presenters of the information, but more importantly, for our students who may not easily see its relevance. We have to remember how much fun it is to learn and to pass that enthusiasm for our subject matter on to our students.

I welcome your comments on this piece. If you are interested in learning more about the Speed Reader and/or LASSI program(s), please feel free to contact me by phone at ext. 4005 or by e-mail at mcdonald @svsu.edu.

". . .you actually *write* your papers?"

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in class last winter talking about purchasing papers. I, being old and naive, asked the question "How can you buy papers off the Internet?" Of course, after they quit laughing hysterically, they turned to me and said, "You mean you actually write your papers?" I was appalled and . . . realized how "out of it" I was.

Most of all, these students felt angry that their peers who cheated stand a good chance of never being found out. Nearly every student in the class described the issue in terms of fairness:

"I don't think that it would be fair that I do my assignment and others would cop out!" "It is not fair for those students who do their [own] work."

The students likewise understood that the ethics of their fellow students will become the ethics that accompany our graduates into the workplace. Dishonesty is more than an academic "game":

> You pointed to what this problem is going to mean to us as soon-to-be graduates. How do future employers know which of us earned our GPAs, and who bought them? This troubles me, because someone could conceivably buy a better GPA than I earn, and thus beat me out of a job that I am truly more qualified for. Who would even know? . . . This gives me, all future employees and future employers something to really think about.

> If [students] don't get caught they will continue to use this method throughout their college career[s].

Students recognized also how difficult it is to instill ethics in a student who lacks integrity:

> The problem with [instruction] in ethics is that truly unethical students would treat it the same as all their other classes.

> I think plagiarism goes beyond just copying a paper for a [class]. It demonstrates a person's values. It reflects how he/she feels about many aspects of life. It shows his/her ethical standards. . . It is much more than just who gets an A on one paper. It is how the student[s] got to where they end up and what they are going to contribute to society in the long run.

What are the reasons students give for purchasing papers? Most weak writers I work with know they are weak writers. Unfortunately, their survival strategy often is to search out those instructors who have no writing assignments and register for their sections. The consequence is that these students lag farther and farther behind in their development as writers. Then, when they *must* submit a paper for which they feel unprepared or did not budget sufficient time, they panic and may, due to "lack of ambition, or maybe just desperation," download a paper. As one student observed in response to a question about what percentage of SVSU students she estimates have purchased papers online, "I think we would probably be surprised about how high it would be."

The situation is ours to deal with. Boston University recently filed a lawsuit alleging wire fraud, mail fraud and racketeering against eight such companies in seven states. According to the *New York Times CyberTimes*, "Term papers sold to BU in its 'sting' were neatly printed and ready to be turned in. . . . In at least one instance . . . a seller . . . offered to put the student's name, professor's name and course number on the cover sheet, just as it would on an original paper handed in for credit." Meanwhile, termpaper sites are already preparing their First Amendment defense and the most recent version of *SchoolSucks* is "new and improved." Its founder, Kenny Sahr, even goes so far as to thank professors for "spreading the word" about the site. In fact, in a letter to instructors, he takes credit for "having forced teachers to re-evaluate their role as educators." He believes sites like *SchoolSucks* are "forcing mediocre professors [who are] assigning mediocre assignments to wake up."

All of this dialogue has led me to the ultimate question: how do I structure assignments to assure that my students do indeed learn the concepts for which the assignments were designed? How can I be sure I am reading *their* papers, not some-

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thing purchased from *Collegiate Care Custom Order Page*? Here are some strategies I use:

1. Link writing assignments to specific learning goals for the course and *explain* the relationship to students. A clear, specific writing task linked to the core concepts of the course is not likely to be available for purchase.

2. Require both *primary* and *secondary* research sources in a researched paper. (Students may choose from a variety of primary sources: interviews, surveys, questionnaires, attendance at a workshop or meeting, e-mail interchanges with experts, and the like. Secondary sources may be prescribed: specific journals, articles published after a certain date or of a certain type, etc.) Papers with bibliographies to meet specific requirements will not be for sale.

3. Become involved in students' writing processes. Request a working bibliography shortly after assigning a paper. Respond to an outline during the time when students are putting papers together. Conference with students, even if only briefly, to ask for a brief summary of what they are finding in their research. Require and monitor revisions of drafts with exercises, peer feedback, writing of abstracts, and the like.

4. Add a reflection piece to the final paper, in which you ask students to reflect on the most useful sources, or the questions left unanswered by their research, or the ways their papers evolved from first to final draft. (This reflection piece has in fact become one of my favorite parts of a writing assignment, for it gives me insights into my students' thinking and, since it is not graded or evaluated, creates a wonderful opportunity for dialogue about their development as writers.)

Strategies such as these offer an additional reward: not only will you be reading the papers your own students actually wrote, but you are also likely to get better developed, more engaging papers, papers that demonstrate your students *have* indeed learned the concepts for which the assignments were designed.

the SVSU *Literacy* Link

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