

A Model for Multi-Disciplinary Writing Assignments for Criminal Justice Courses

Clifford Dorne,
Criminal Justice

While the academic field of Criminal Justice tends to emphasize the importance of student writing in the day to day implementation of undergraduate course curricula, not enough has been written by faculty on the types of writing assignments that they require of students in their courses. We should observe that our national annual academic conferences, such as the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and American Society of Criminology do set aside special faculty panels to address issues in college and/or university criminal justice curricula and pedagogies. Many of these panel discussions gravitate towards variations in student writing assignments and the degree to which these assignments serve as adequate preparations for careers in law

enforcement, criminal justice administration, and even law.

Indeed, a few important research methods books, such as Frank Hagan's Research Methods in Criminal Justice and Criminology (MacMillan), include sections on "writing the research report" and there are some books and pamphlets on "report writing" for police and correctional officers. It is herein submitted, however, that criminal justice faculty should share as much student writing assignment information as possible with one another and with professors outside the discipline.

Criminal Justice is so thoroughly multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary that professors with a large assortment of credentials and professional backgrounds teach in this field. For example, full time professors teaching in criminal justice curricula include former police officers,

correctional officers, probation and parole officers, case workers and social workers, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and judges. They may have academic credentials in criminal justice, sociology, psychology, law, public administration, or social work. This extensive professional and academic diversity tends to result in enormous variations in pedagogies and in the types of writing assignments given to criminal justice students.

It is arguable that there is no single best style or configuration of writing project to assign criminal justice students. All assignments embrace the improvement of students' written communication as a main goal; we also want to enhance student library and on-line research capabilities. Moreover, the assignment may well reflect the professor's particular professional background and/or academic

See Model, on Page 4

Service Learning: Help is on the Way!

Katy Golden and Mary Doyle,
SVSU Students

Academic service learning is a process in which students learn through meaningful community service that is linked to an academic curriculum. While specific definitions vary, what all have in common is the valuing of service to others.

Some examples of service-learning activities in college settings include

1. Math students tutoring third graders in arithmetic;
2. English students assisting in an adult literacy program;
3. Sociology students educating their peers on HIV/AIDS prevention;
4. Criminal justice students walking downtown streets in a community policing program;
5. Accounting students helping senior citizens with their tax returns;

See Service, on Page 7



Picture of the English 490 class: (Top row:) Mary Stec, Colleen Warwick, Jeri Koper, Mary Doyle, Sarah Wright, Rachel Hurd (Bottom row:) Sarah Sommer, Katy Golden, Renaye Fewless, Tom Dean, Phyllis Hastings

About Skateboards and Keyboards

Diane Boehm, Director,
University Writing Program

Eleven years ago, prompted by peer pressure, I made a decision; I began teaching in a computer lab. At Purdue University Calumet, the expectation was clear: the "best" teachers taught in the lab. And so began my transition from traditional classroom activities to re-thinking my courses and my teaching objectives in this new context. I've come a long way since that first time.

The technology available to me then seems primitive by today's standards. But I have had to learn more than just current technology, for I was determined not to give up the kind of interactive classroom I believed was essential for real learning to take place. I wanted to be Gordon Besch in a computer lab.

Often we educators trace our image of "good teaching" to a person who was for us the embodiment of excellence in the classroom. Gordon Besch, my college physics teacher, was one of those people. When we studied speed and velocity, Gordon Besch careened into the classroom on a skateboard. With Gordon Besch's trombone we learned how sound volume and pitch were created. Gordon Besch's teaching created an environment for active learning, the kind of learning that enters long-term memory and permanently changes thinking.

Gordon Besch's classroom practices began my reflection on the principles of good teaching. Later I would learn four essential elements of effective instruction in Madeleine Hunter's model:

1. Select an objective to teach that is appropriate for the students to learn.
2. Teach to the objective.
3. Monitor whether learning has occurred as expected.
4. If necessary, make appropriate adjustments and re-teach.

Teachers today have a dazzling array of technology to choose from when preparing to teach to their course objectives. However, the

latest in technology is no guarantee of good teaching. For me to teach effectively with technology, I have found I need to add a fifth element to Hunter's list, perhaps a 1A: Select the mode(s) of instruction best suited for teaching to this objective. This means that when I prepare to teach, I must first have knowledge of various modes so I can make informed choices and weigh the benefits and disadvantages of each. Then I must ask myself two questions:

What is my objective for this lesson/class period?

What strategies will best accomplish this objective?

Certainly the recent research on brain functions and learning have taught us a lot about teaching strategies that don't work. Given the diversity of students' backgrounds and preferred modes of learning, we know that few groups learn effectively from a single mode of instruction. Many students have learning styles, personality types and personal histories far different from our own. In his article "What the Learning Paradigm Means for Faculty," George Boggs puts it this way:

Traditionally, college teachers have assumed that students learn through lectures, assigned readings, problem sets, laboratory work, and fieldwork. However, these assumptions have been challenged by new research about how people learn. Evidence from a number of disciplines suggests that oral presentations to large groups of passive students contribute very little to real learning. Faculty members who promote interaction among students in and out of class are rewarded with improved student persistence and success.

Learning means change, and passive students change little if at all. Though a dazzling techno-presentation may delight the eyes and ears, there will be no learning unless it also engages the student's mind. Unless students assimilate, apply, talk about or write about or in some way

process course information in their own language to make it their own, they "delete file" automatically at the end of a semester.

Teaching must create "cognitive dissonance," asserts John Bean, in Engaging Ideas: The College Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom. Until students are led to critically examine their "settled beliefs and assumptions," to "become personally engaged with questions addressed by the course," there is little likelihood of change. Without the opportunity to make connections, the brain does not retain.

Technology offers many possibilities for promoting active learning and interaction among students, between student and instructor, and between student and course content. Many of the teaching strategies that help my students learn rely heavily on technology. But merely putting lectures on Power Point, or using the newest CD-ROM, or posting course materials to the Internet, does not assure that students are truly learning.

Students may be equally as passive in a high-tech electronic presentation as they are in a droning lecture. The presentation mode itself offers no assurance of enhanced learning; in fact, it may even seduce us into thinking we have engaged in effective teaching, when all we have really done is pour our old instructional wine into new technological bottles.

In Deciding to Lead, their 1997 book on school reform and "schooling for self-efficacy," Wolfe and Antinarella challenge teachers to engage in reflective practice as they move through four stages of professional growth:

Stage 1. Emulation/Control. Beginning teachers tend to teach as they were taught, operating in a self-conscious, survival-oriented mode.

Stage 2. Experimentation/Discovery. As teachers learn from colleagues and expand their repertoire of teaching

See Skateboard on Page 7

Writing Associates Reflect

Pam VanHaitsma and Nick Kloka,
SVSU Writing Center Tutors

As Writing Center mentors and Writing Associates, we had the opportunity to present at the Midwest Writing Centers Association (MWCA) Conference at Marquette University in October of 1998. Our presentation, titled "Extending the Writing Center with Course Interfacing Across Disciplines," was based on a unique Writing Associate experience in the Fall of '97, in which Nick worked with two professors to interface a sociology course and a science course with writing assignments. We described the particulars of the interface, as well as our insights on what did and did not work. Most significantly, we offered a written model for how others could use writing assignments to interface courses. Because of strong audience interest, most of our presentation time was used to discuss the adaptability of our model and to answer questions.

Since the conference, we have both done a lot of thinking and reflecting. What follows is each of our perspectives on the conference and our presentation.

Nick: Our conference presentation generated a high amount of interest. Both writing center tutors and administrators deluged us with questions about the Writing Associate's involvement in the project and with more questions about the interfacing itself.

My post-conference thoughts about these responses suggest several things. First, the interfacing of classes at the university level appears to be a fairly unique experience, and second, a high level of interest exists in "how to" make such an experience come about. Our presentation addressed both of these issues. When I revisit the conference and think of the number of tutors and administrators present, and the number of university writing centers they represented, I cannot help feeling that we offered them a valuable presentation about across-the-curriculum learning, shared curriculum experience, class interfacing, call it what you will. This fact alone made the work in preparing the presentation a worthwhile effort.

Even more important, however, is the fact that the interest was there, and that the SVSU Writing Center may well be responsible for encouraging future experiments with class interfacing at other colleges and universities.

We did more than just generate interest among writing center people in class interfacing. We offered a workable model, a sort of bare bones approach that suggested how a Writing Associate can assist those professors who decide to interface their classes. This part of the presentation received as many questions as the part about the interface itself. Those attending the session asked pertinent questions about

"I think we demonstrated that the idea of a Writing Associate-assisted class interface is a workable project for writing centers to undertake."

how much time I committed, how familiar I was with the material, how much time I spent "teaching," etc.

What they learned about this aspect of the experience is that the model allows for a good deal of preplanning, and that the careful preplanning of the professors at SVSU prevented me from being put in a difficult situation. The model created from the experience assured those people interested that careful planning could help avoid long hours of preparation or a heavy burden of papers to work with to the detriment of my own class work. Based on the responses we received at the conference, what we offered was of interest to the writing center people who attended. However, I would like to think that we went beyond that.

I think we demonstrated that the idea of a Writing Associate-assisted class interface is a workable project for writing centers to undertake. I also think we demonstrated to those professors present that, with careful planning, such projects are not only manageable, but in many ways desirable. Students teaching peers, students involved in information

exchange across disciplines, and students mentoring each other are all worthwhile goals in the field of education. The SVSU Writing Center has a model and has gained some experience with interfaced class studies. We are glad to share that experience.

Pam: Certainly, as Nick has described, we presented an experience and knowledge about that experience which people who attended our conference presentation could take away with them and use in their schools. But we were not simply conference presenters who shared knowledge with others. We were conference participants, and others shared their knowledge with us in multiple ways.

In "Engaged Pedagogy," bell hooks argues for liberatory education, where students do not simply consume, memorize, and store information their professors feed to them. Instead, both students and professors engage in an interchange of experience and knowledge, and both students and professors are empowered by the experience.

While hooks focuses on engaged pedagogy in the classroom, conferences like MWCA are prime examples of the practice of engaged pedagogy.

What struck me most about this conference was that all ideas were acknowledged and respected. It did not seem to matter whether the presenter or a participant was speaking, nor did it seem to matter whether a published, well-known college professor or an undergraduate student was speaking. People listened.

Attending a professional conference as an undergraduate student was quite an opportunity. We were able to see the profession of teaching writing in a much larger context, and we were able to see what participating in that profession might be like. Also, we heard papers presented by people whom we had read in journals and professional publications. To read someone's ideas in a text is certainly a valuable learning experience. But to be able to hear the person present those ideas takes the learning experience to a whole new

See *Writing* on Page 8

Model,

Continued from Page 1

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credentials.

My own two masters degrees and doctorate are all in criminal justice. The first masters is in Professional Studies and was vocational in orientation; I was studying to be a probation officer. The second masters and the doctorate were strictly academic, focusing on theory, scholarly research, and the multi-disciplinary nature of criminal justice. Specifically, I was educated in what is known in our field as the "Albany Model." The School of Criminal Justice in the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy at the State University of New York at Albany divides Criminal Justice into four major areas: Administration, Nature of Crime (Criminology), Law and Social Control, and Planned Change and Innovation (includes leadership-oriented topics). We had to attend lectures in all four areas and then choose two as specializations.

Then the doctoral student takes a series of seminars and two large comprehensives in the area. As in most behavioral science Ph.D. programs, there are also research methods and statistics course requirements. As doctoral students, we had curriculum choices in a field that is widely multi-disciplinary. We also had many topical options within the courses with respect to writing assignments. I have embraced this "topical option" feature in student writing assignments throughout my 16 year university teaching career. I believe that this truly reflects the multi-disciplinary nature of the field and best suits the wide variety of future career plans of our students.

I teach a large assortment of courses. At the undergraduate level, I teach Criminal Justice Systems, Human Relations in Criminal Justice, Criminology, Correctional Policy, Juvenile Justice, Public Policy and Child Maltreatment, Restorative Justice/Mediation, Organized Crime, Mental Health Issues in Criminal Justice, and I am preparing a new graduate course on Conflict Management in Bureaucracies. Over the years, I have developed some relatively standardized methods within my student writing assignments. At both undergraduate and graduate levels, I place the writing assignment in the course syllabus so student are

immediately informed of the assignment. I provide a class presentation on research strategies (library and on-line) early in the semester. In addition, the students are given a style sheet indicating that they may choose from the styles of the Modern Language Association, American Psychological Association, and if the paper deals solely with legal materials, the Uniform System of Citation is recommended.

I require my students to write in what I refer to as "formal bureaucratic style." I contend that this will serve them well in their future careers in public sector organizations. Indeed, Professor Eric Gardner of the SVSU English Department and Writing Center provided me with a superb idea in my never-ending quest to motivate students to write in a style that initially seems so unnatural to them. Dr. Gardner advised me to pass out copies of the most formally-written document that I can find and then have each student "translate it" (paraphrase?) in their own words.

I tried this using excerpts from federal government documents and experienced much success. The students emerged from this exercise more comfortable with formal style, I had to do less lecturing on what formal style is all about, and I was able to better convey that formal written communication, especially in a middle or upper management contexts, increases the chances that the writer is taken seriously by the readers. These readers may be subordinates or supervisors in the organization, the press, the public, other organizations, or outside research consultants. In keeping with a multi-disciplinary orientation, I also discuss "legalese" with my students as law is central to criminal justice. I owe a debt of gratitude to Professor Gardner for this helpful suggestion.

Concerning undergraduates, I give them somewhat of a "safety net" for my writing assignments, allowing them to hand me an outline of their planned paper, a synopsis, a statement of research strategies that they plan to utilize to find sources, and a glimpse of some of the sources that they initially located. This is strictly voluntary and they must complete it by an early deadline if they want written feedback from me. In any given semester, about 20% of the class hands in this outline. I make this option available so that students are able to proceed with

confidence that they are on the right track and not missing any critical substance relevant to their chosen topic. This outline also gives me a chance to examine their writing abilities in a preliminary manner.

Some of my colleagues have urged me to make the outline a requirement, but I want to teach personal responsibility here. The outline is due early, so it forces students who desire "safe," non-graded written feedback to begin the project early and carefully manage their time. The outline also covers me in an administrative sense. No student can later complain that "they didn't know what the professor wanted from merely reading the assignment in the syllabus." I would put on my moralist hat and counter with, "You should have handed me an outline early in the semester by the deadline and you would have had extensive written feedback and clear guidelines on how to proceed."

In this essay, I am including examples of these multi-disciplinary, "choice-oriented" criminal justice writing assignments from the three classes that I am currently teaching. I should also mention that I also use more advanced versions of the same model for my graduate courses.
CJ 340 Correctional Policy:

(I am only listing the safety net, style sheet, and grading criteria for this course. In the interest of brevity I shall exclude these items from the second and third course assignment examples.)

Each student must write and submit a relatively brief research paper.

A. Paper Assignment:

It is imperative that criminal justice professionals learn to write well and to conduct research.

Your assignment is to research (using the library and the Internet) one of the policy topics on the list below. Then write a concise but well-documented history of the topic coming to a conclusion about where the policy or practice stands today. In your introduction, be sure to clearly state the goals of the policy or practice. Also, point out significant problems in the implementation of the policy or practice. Use as much documentation as possible. That is, be sure that you support your positions and arguments with citations to published sources. Such sources can include books, journal articles, government documents, Internet web sites, articles in anthologies, and (if applicable) legal/appellate cases.

The more sources, the better. While the citations in the class textbooks are useful finding tools, you are not permitted to cite directly from them. The main purpose of this assignment is to require library and Internet research and to teach formal, bureaucratic writing style.

Topic List:

- mandatory minimum sentencing
- three-strikes legislation abolition of parole (as occurred in at least ten states and the federal system)
- victim impact statements for sentencing guideline sentencing (as practiced in some states and in the federal system)
- institutional work release programs halfway houses (community residential centers)
- probation intensive caseloads
- parole intensive caseloads
- probation electronic monitoring/home confinement
- sex offender registration and public notification laws
- correctional boot camps
- adult diversion programs
- drug treatment in a prison setting
- new end-of-the-line "super-max" prisons
- conjugal visitation
- prison good time credit laws
- prison mental health laws
- medical care (and dental care) in prisons
- prison AIDS policies and issues
- modern prison chain gangs

"ASSIGNMENT SAFETY NET":

Please feel free to submit a one page outline of the paper to me in class on Monday, January 27, 1999. This is the only day I will accept such outlines. After this date, I will not respond to any written materials having to do with the paper until the official submission that will count for a grade; to do so would relegate me to the role of proofreader throughout the semester. This outline must consist of student's name, chosen topic, paper synopsis, research strategies, table of contents, and at least five sources that will actually be used and cited in the paper. I will respond to these and return them in the following week. This outline is not mandatory but encouraged; it will not factor into the official grade. I strongly urge you to take advantage of this opportunity.

Topics that are not listed here may be chosen for the paper, but must be approved for course relevance beforehand by the Professor. Such requests must be made on this outline.

B. Assignment Regulations (Style Sheet):

Work from an outline and be sure the paper has a clear introduction, body, and conclusion. The paper must be between 8 and 12 pages long, double space word processed, with standard margins (about 1"); be sure to number pages. Do not string verbatim quotations together and use quotations sparingly. You must paraphrase with citations throughout most of the paper.

There is a ten source bibliographic minimum. This is a mere minimum. Do not mistake this for an instruction to only use ten sources! No paper shall receive an "A" or a "B" for minimums. Only papers with extensive and diversified bibliographies will receive good grades. The more sources, the better. No padded bibliographies; all listed sources must be cited in the paper. Write in formal style and use APA or MLA citation and bibliographic methods. This will be clarified in class. Moreover, the paper must be prepared exclusively for this course and be your own work. Do not plagiarize and do not cite from class texts. Please print two copies of your paper; submit one to the Professor and keep the second one for your own files. The paper is due on Monday, March 22, 1999 in class. The paper will be demoted one full letter grade for each weekday that it is submitted late. The paper is worth 25% towards the final course grade.

C. Grading Criteria for Paper:

A = follows assignment and regulations, excellent command of material, coherent and well-documented history (political and/or legal details addressed, management styles of major leaders, and/or elaboration on important policy decisions, and/or relevant studies), extensive research (very large and diversified bibliography), and exemplary writing that is formal in style.

B = follows assignment and regulations, minor flaws in command, good research, fairly good history, and/or minor writing problems.

C = flaws in following assignment and/or regulations, minor flaws in command, and/or mediocre research, and/or passable history, and/or significant writing problems.

D = significant flaws in following assignment (e.g., no documented discussion of public policy and practice) and/or regulations, and/or major flaws in

command, and/or barely coherent history, (or obvious "eleventh hour") research, and/or very poor writing.

F = assignment and/or regulations not followed, and/or inconsequential or unintelligible argument, and/or negligible history, minimal research, and/or very poor writing.

0 = no paper submitted, handing in irrelevant work, plagiarized work, or work that appears to have been prepared for another course.

Numerical Grading Scale for Paper:

A+	=	100
A	=	95
A-	=	90
B+	=	87
B	=	85
B-	=	80
C+	=	77
C	=	75
C-	=	70
D+	=	67
D	=	65
D-	=	60
F	=	55
0	=	no credit

CJ 381 Human Relations in Criminal Justice

In this course, we make ample use of vignettes which place employees of the criminal justice system in a wide variety of decision making capacities in both police and correctional contexts. I require the students to analyze each vignette, and in many cases, I have them write out their interpretations and decisions in class (consistent with Writing Across the Curriculum). I do this using the following "intellectual template:" In class, students will be asked to respond to the situational scenarios in two of the texts respectively dealing with police and corrections. Analyses of these scenarios shall generally correspond to the following outline:

- a..factual description of case
- b. critical issues moral/ethical legal liability and/or constitutional dilemmas public relations and outside agencies
- c. commentary and possible solutions to the case

I have found this pedagogy extremely effective in this course, given the "human relations" approach to the material.

The regular research paper in CJ 381 Human Relations in Criminal Justice is as

Continued on next page

Stage 3. Facilitation/Resource. As he or she comes to realize that "school should not be a place where young people come to watch old people work," a teacher clarifies the philosophy and theory that drive classroom practice, building on his or her own talents and gifts. No longer the purveyor of all knowledge, the teacher designs instruction so as to facilitate collaboration between all members of the class, teachers and students alike, assigning to students the responsibility for their learning.

Stage 4. Research/Innovation. At this stage, the master teacher's philosophy and "seductive" classroom practices are integrated. The teacher now takes a further step to critically assess the dynamics of the classroom, engaging in "deep reflection and inquiry" upon the processes that generate student success. The teacher recognizes that his or her greatest impact comes in providing help, resources and instruction to students as they learn, rather than merely evaluating the end products of student work.

Would I want to return to teaching without technology? Hardly! Each semester I discover new ways to use technology to enhance student learning. And I am excited to see a change on the horizon, as many new kinds of interactive software are becoming available. Perhaps technology and passivity will soon become mutually exclusive.

Until that happens, however, the effective teacher will need to continue reflecting and assessing and innovating. He/she will need to continue to ask those critical questions:

What is my goal for student learning?

What strategy will be most effective to promote that learning?

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Service,

Continued from Page 1

6. Nursing students providing home health care to the elderly or disabled. (From the Johnson Foundation, 1989)

Rebecca Purol, a third-semester nursing student at SVSU, enthusiastically describes her experience in the Pregnant Mom activity in which she has participated.

Each nursing student is paired with a woman—usually someone from a low income family experiencing her first pregnancy—who has agreed to interact with a student throughout her pregnancy. The nursing student must first contact the woman and set up a date for a personal meeting to assess her physical and nutritional health. The student answers any questions and helps the woman make contact with community resources, sometimes helping her obtain such essentials as a crib or car seat at low cost.

Students have regular meetings with their Pregnant Moms and often accompany them on visits to the doctor. They help them understand the birthing process and teach them simple techniques like how to bathe a baby and what to do if a baby becomes ill. Some students are even lucky enough to attend the birth!

In the classroom, the students create hypothetical letters for the primary caregivers, relaying the status of their Pregnant Moms and also giving recommendations. By their work in the program, students gain valuable knowledge about nursing techniques and practical experience working in the community.

Dr. Phyllis Hastings, Professor of English at SVSU, is developing a service-learning course, Writing in Community Organizations, in which students help non-profit organizations accomplish writing tasks. The members of the class were asked why they had enrolled, and the majority replied that they wanted to "gain practical experience." While practical experience is an important benefit, the class offers much more—it involves them in the community.

The class has assigned teams of students to four organizations: Habitat for Humanity, Boys and Girls Club of Saginaw, St. Mary's Medical Center, and United for Kids (a new children's assessment center in Saginaw). Students come from various disciplines and are

working on a variety of projects, including newsletter articles, brochures, thank-you letters, meeting minutes and grant applications. Documents are reviewed by the entire class, which enables all students to gain insight into the goals of the organizations and the kinds of writing used.

Through their involvement, students learn first hand how a community's needs are met. And as they think critically about the organization and its work, they begin to see some of the underlying reasons for these needs. Experience in the course provides students with personal, career, social, and academic growth.

Values in the class extend beyond the students. The organizations benefit from the aid and the creativity that the students bring to their programs. The larger community benefits when students become more aware of the needs of society. University faculty benefit from a more process-oriented curriculum and tangible assessment opportunities. The university benefits as it creates links with community organizations and fulfills important aspects of its stated mission.

Other universities are building service-learning courses into their programs. Their adaptations take many forms because of the differences in the strengths of the universities and the needs of their communities. Columbia University, with its urban New York location, offers many social programs. Purdue University provides service-learning opportunities for their engineering students because nearby organizations need persons with strong technical backgrounds. University of Michigan's dental school offers dental care for indigent citizens in a project oriented around research. University of Seattle includes service learning in its Masters in Teaching program.

Some Michigan programs (including SVSU's new writing class) benefit from grants through Michigan Campus Compact, a ten-year-old organization promoting service learning in colleges and universities in the state. Affiliated with Michigan Nonprofit Association, MCC seeks to educate and support service learning through financial awards to faculty, student organizations, individual students, and administrators.

Continued on next page

Help,

Continued from Page 7

To qualify for grants from MCC, projects must cultivate service learning through direct student activity, research into service learning, or development of service-learning curriculum. Funded projects must use campus resources to meet community needs. MCC also provides its members (now numbering 30 Michigan colleges and universities) with consultant service, a resource library, and networking opportunities.

With its many values for students and community agencies and clients, service learning creates a win-win situation for colleges and universities, investing the resources it draws from the community into short-term and long-term benefits for all. ■

Writing,

Continued from Page 3

level: we were able to ask questions, to offer our own ideas and, in a sense, to help create a new set of ideas.

Certainly conferences like MWCA – which allow for and encourage exchange between college professors, high school teachers, graduate students, and undergraduate students – are models for how all conferences should ideally function. And perhaps these conferences are also models for how classrooms should operate. ■

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