the SVSU Literacy LINK
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Academic Integrity

by Francis C. Dane Ph D., James V. Finkbeiner Endowed Chair in Ethics and Public Policy, College of Arts & Behavioral Sciences

Webster defines integrity as "firm adherence to a code or standard of values" (634), which naturally leads to a discussion of what code or values apply to academia. One could write for pages about what values should and should not be in an "academic code," but I have only 1500 or so words, so I shall favor efficiency and borrow from SVSU's Board of Control, who adopted a set of purposes in 1993. These purposes were established for the institution of SVSU, but I believe every member of the institution is equally obligated to accept these purposes as individual goals. What follows, in hopes of stimulating discussion, are thoughts about what only the first part of this "code"—striving for excellence—means for faculty as we make our way through the day-to-day activities of academia. Other articles may address additional parts of the "code."

There is no doubt that striving for excellence is a heavy burden, particularly when the Board includes "teaching, learning, research, service, and creative endeavors" (5) as the primary areas for excellence. These cover everything within the academy, and we are challenged to attempt always to do better in every academic endeavor.
We, as instructors, are obligated, then, to try to make each lecture better than the last time we used it, to make each attempt at scholarship, including creative projects, better than the previous attempt, and to do a better job on the next committee or community project than on the previous one. While we should relish a job well done, we are obligated to avoid settling into a comfortable, good-enough effort, whether the effort is directed toward a favorite course, our life's work as a scholar, or even a dreaded committee assignment that we did our best to avoid.

In order to strive continually for excellence, we also must make choices about which activities we will attempt and which we will leave for others to do. Every first-year faculty member learns the valuable lesson that there is not enough time to do everything, and so establishing and implementing priorities becomes the "great lesson" of year one (for students, too). Those of us who survive do learn, but we also need to remind ourselves regularly that there are some opportunities to which we must reply "no," and many other opportunities to which the reply must be "not now, perhaps later." Admittedly, most of the "later" decisions become "no" decisions because the opportunity has passed, but the logic holds; we cannot do

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From the Editors' Desk(tops):

Lynn Graft   Helen Raica-klotz

Welcome to the Fall issue of *Literacy Link*. This year, the journal is focused on the topic of "academic literacy." Specifically, we were interested in two basic questions: what is our definition of academic literacy, and what does academic literacy look like in practice at our university? While this issue of *Literacy Link* does not provide definitive answers to either one of these questions (nor do we anticipate ever being able to do so), we are pleased to say that the articles included begin to discuss these two questions in very interesting and provocative ways.

Our cover article features Frank Dane's discussion of the concept of academic literacy and what that concept might mean for faculty at SVSU. We have Ruth Sawyer's thoughtful article about students' reading abilities, in which she asks us to consider the ways we might improve reading literacy on campus. In addition, we have two articles, one on math literacy by Tom McCann and the other on writing literacy by Sandy Claypool, which explore definitions of these terms from their respective positions at the Math Center and the Writing Center.

Taken collectively, these pieces are wonderful points to begin our discussions. We hope you consider this issue as an invitation to think further about these ideas: perhaps you will write an article in response for our winter issue! In the meantime, enjoy this issue of *Literacy Link*.

Lynne Graft
Helen Raica-Klotz
co-editors of *Literacy Link*

The topic for the 2004-2005 issues of *Literacy Link* is "academic literacy." Specifically, we are interested in articles that explore the meaning of academic literacy, discuss its purpose inside and outside of our university, and examine ways to teach this literacy to our students. Submissions for the fall issue are due September 31, 2004; submissions for the winter issue are due February 28, 2005. Queries and/or submissions can be emailed to Lynne Graft (lrgraft@svsu.edu) or Helen Raica-Klotz (klotz@svsu.edu). Complete submission guidelines can be found on the *Literacy Link* website at http://www.svsu.edu/newsletters/literacylink. We look forward to hearing your ideas for our upcoming issues.

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The SVSU Literacy Link is published two times per academic year. Those interested in submitting articles may contact either Lynne Graft at x4030 or lrgraft@svsu.edu, or Helen Raica-Klotz at x6062 or klotz@svsu.edu. Articles may also be mailed to SVSU Dept. of English, 7400 Bay Road, Brown 326, University Center, MI 48710.

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everything and cannot strive for excellence by trying to do everything. Quality is clearly more important than quantity.

In addition to learning when to refuse or delay opportunities, I believe we must also learn to view "teaching, learning, research, service, and creative endeavors" not as separate activities but as part of an academic "whole." This requires a change in the perspective imposed by tradition, e.g., teaching versus research universities. I propose, instead, that the activities of Research I, II, and Comprehensive faculty should be the same; only the priorities assigned to the activities should vary. Indeed, teaching is the most important part of an academic position at SVSU, but learning, research, service, and creative production are inherent parts of the academic whole and, more importantly, are primary mechanisms for striving toward excellence in teaching. If we do not learn, our teaching becomes stale. If we do not contribute to the knowledge base of our discipline, we become less effective at communicating the development of that knowledge to our students. If we do not apply our disciplinary knowledge through service, we have a poorer platform from which to teach and model what our discipline has to offer to society. The influence is recursive; teaching also informs our scholarship and service.

So allow me to propose some strategies that may seem a bit heretical. If you wish to improve your teaching, do some research or creative production. Strive for excellence in teaching by seeking out opportunities for service that enable you to employ your disciplinary knowledge as well as learn from others in different disciplines. You can spend two hours fine-tuning a particular lecture, or you can spend two hours in scholarship or service that will enable you to improve all of your lectures. You will spend less time directly on your teaching, but it will not be time away from your teaching if you view teaching, scholarship, and service as integral parts of the academic life.

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For students, striving for excellence means doing a better job on the next course assignment, never settling for minimal quality in any course, even if that course is a required course in which they have little or no initial interest. Faculty, then, are obligated to structure our interactions with students in such a way as to encourage them to strive for excellence.
We cannot force them to do better, but we should motivate them to do better by ensuring that every assignment has a clear relationship to the course goals. We must, obviously, have course goals, but mere existence is not sufficient. The entirety of our courses, indeed all of our interactions with students, should reflect those goals. If we want students to maintain a certain level of knowledge or ability after completing the course, we are obligated to provide a comprehensive assessment in which the students are required to integrate the

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beginning of the term with the end of the term. This does not have to be a comprehensive final exam or a term paper.

" We cannot guarantee that each student will achieve excellence, but we must set standards such that 'excellent' does not become a meaningless adjective."

One could instead structure the course hierarchically so that later material and exercises regularly force students to apply lessons learned from earlier material and exercises. If we want students to learn from an assignment, we are obligated to structure the assignment in ways that make it difficult for students to cheat, plagiarize, or otherwise complete the assignment dishonestly.

We cannot guarantee that each student will achieve excellence, but we must set standards such that "excellent" does not become a meaningless adjective. All of us have a tendency to give good students the benefit of the doubt, to make assumptions about what was probably meant on an examination response or in a paper. If we are to facilitate students' striving for excellence, we are obligated to resist this temptation. We are obligated to assign grades on the basis of production, not intention or effort. We are obligated, for example, to "make grammar count," for poorly communicated ideas do not enable one to recognize the excellence of the idea (infer excellence, perhaps, but not recognize it). We are obligated similarly to challenge students to reach a standard that we have determined represents excellent performance. A student may improve a great deal starting from a far-from-excellent position, but improvement, per se, does not merit the label "excellent." Setting and implementing standards, of course, applies to the entire continuum; the standards for a C or D should be as well established and as faithfully implemented as the standards for an A.

We cannot guarantee that no student will attempt to "get by," but we are obligated through our feedback mechanisms to ensure that coasting through an assignment is recognized and reported back to students as no better than minimum performance. Again, honestly completing assignments is a minimum requirement for anything better than failing performance, which obligates us to establish assignments that are difficult to complete in dishonest ways. We also are obligated to routinely check for dishonesty. It is unpleasant to assume that any of our students are engaging in dishonest behavior, but we already have sufficient information to conclude that at least some students are doing so. We need not make the assumption; it is a demonstrated fact. Thus, striving for excellence and ensuring that our students strive for excellence involves an effort to avoid rewarding students for dishonest behavior. Routinely using Turnitin.com® on student papers, for example, takes little time and puts students on notice that dishonest behavior will not be tolerated. Establishing in our syllabi and then implementing clear sanctions for academic dishonesty, the most egregious form of failing to strive for excellence, is an important part of ensuring that students strive for excellence.

Thus, we must strive for excellence for ourselves as well as encourage, even

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Reading: Becoming a Lost Art?

by Ruth Sawyers
Instructor, Department of English

Each semester, I pose this rhetorical question to students in my basic skills reading and study strategies classes: "Which is worse, to not be able to read, or to be able to read and never engage in the practice?" This question seems even more critical for me as a reading instructor to consider after reading the results of the National Endowment for the Arts survey, "Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literacy Reading in America."

According to the survey, "literary reading is in dramatic decline with fewer than half of American adults reading literature" (1). Alarmingly, the sharpest decline in literary reading involves the very students I work with each semester, "the youngest adults, those aged 18 to 24, [with a drop] 55 percent greater than that of the total adult population" (1). This study challenged me to examine the goals of our English Department's basic skills offerings, explore these literary issues with my students, and raise the consciousness of the University community as it relates to our reading practices in **both** upper and lower division courses.

Our basic skills offerings in reading include English 082, 103, and 104. Each course addresses developing a student's reading level by improving vocabulary, literal and inferential comprehension, study strategies, test taking techniques, reading efficiency, and critical reading strategies. Another major course goal is promoting pleasure reading from a selection of novels in our extensive paperback collection. Some classes allow for complete choice in novel titles, while others provide a more guided experience through the same novel. The "Reading at Risk" survey made this last component of our course even more crucial this year.

Our discussions with our students confirm the lack of reading among 18 to 24 year-olds. Rare are the students who read extensively or even occasionally. Many students, especially males, admit they've never read a book for pleasure. How, then, did they survive high school literature classes? Beyond Spark Notes, Cliff Notes, and novels made into movies, today's students find numerous web sites that allow them to bypass reading literature altogether. Our challenge is to provide such a positive reading experience that students will choose to read for pleasure again.

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Some of my dialogue with students raised some even more troubling questions about our role at the university level and how we, their instructors, are culpable for allowing our college students to become a part of this growing nonreader population. Reading/study strategies courses do not possess content in

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themselves, but, rather, operate as adjuncts to the heavy reading content courses in which students enroll. We require learners to "adopt" one of their content courses for application of the effective text reading strategies, highlighting, annotating, taking notes, and

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mapping. Increasingly, students approach their reading instructors after class explaining that a text is not required for their courses in both upper and lower division courses or that their professor says not to read the text since it will confuse them. Frankly, I've been aghast at such admissions. In What The Best College Teachers Do, Ken Bain concludes his section on intellectual development with "the best educators often teach students how to read the materials" (89). He goes on to list multiple strategies for developing critical literacy in college classrooms. SVSU has invested incredible resources in giving our at-risk population every opportunity to bolster their reading competence through the English Department's Basic Skills offerings and tutoring services on campus. Reading provides the foundation for learning, but increasingly students say they do not need to read in their courses. It is one thing for a student to choose not to do the course reading, but quite another for them to have no reading to do!

Repeatedly, students share that they are passing their classes with better than average grades ***without*** reading the text. They claim that they simply need to take notes on the lecture in order to pass. In some classes, they contend that taking notes isn't even necessary since lecture notes are actually available on Blackboard. A disturbing trend in the past few years involves students not feeling the need to purchase texts for courses. This fall, Pearson/ Longman publishers asked me to pledge that I'd actually ***use*** the text I had ordered. Are we condensing our text, our experiences, and our research into such neat packages with the technology available to us that our students think acquiring academic knowledge can be reduced to a neat and tidy process?

Isn't the pursuit of knowledge often a messy affair replete with hypotheses tweaked, adopted, or sometimes rejected? Our students need to experience this pursuit of knowledge first hand. They must feel the push and pull of thinking, the challenge of making sense of disparate, contradictory information, and the essence of argument. Students often fail to realize that there is so much to explore about issues besides the class lecture. So many resources are available to them: insightful, challenging textbooks, library databases, critical, supplemental readings on reserve, the New York Times. In "Teaching Reading and Writing as Modes of Learning in College," Quinn emphasizes moving "students toward a view of reading and writing as nonlinear, multilayered, dynamic processes, integral to learning" (345). Why are we giving our

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Mathematical Literacy

by Tom McCann
Director, Mathematics Resource Center

Mathematical literacy is an elusive and ever changing concept. A hundred years ago, a math literate person knew how many pecks were in a bushel, how many square rods were in an acre, and how many men it took to harvest a 40 acre plot of wheat in a day. Seventy five years ago, a math literate person could add, subtract, multiply and divide numbers flawlessly, and perhaps knew how to check his work by "casting out nines." Fifty years ago, math literacy included wielding a slide rule to get answers good to at least three decimal places, and using long tables of trigonometric functions and logarithms with interpolation as needed.

Not many people do any of those things today, or even remember them. Of course we must still do computations, but we all reach for a calculator when it is time to balance the check book or calculate a discount. As for pecks and bushels or rods and acres, they are vestiges of a distant time. Today, we speak of Megabytes, Gigabytes, and MegaHertz (Do you really know what they are?), and computers and calculators do most of our calculating for us. We blindly accept credit card and bank statements, knowing that while mistakes do happen, they don't happen in the omputations. Few of us are brave enough to do our income tax forms, opting instead for a professional's help or for a computer program.

Today, mathematical or quantitative literacy means something far different than it did a hundred or even fifty years ago. It will mean something different still in years to come. Will it be enough, then, to know just algebra, or will we even need algebra? What about statistics or calculus? Will calculators, computers, PDAs, wireless phones, and who knows what else make almost any level of math skill superfluous?

In today's world, some people quite proudly profess that they never use math, have never needed it, and expect they never will. Others assert that they use complex mathematics in their lives and careers every day. Still others, many others, will admit that they have limited their lives and limited their careers because they lacked math skills. Surely, any definition of true math literacy must include never limiting our lives or our careers for this reason.

The Math Resource Center has been helping students with math since 1995. We have supported students at nearly every level of mathematics offered at the University, and we have helped with questions found on job applications, in other disciplines and from life experiences. Yes, we have even worked with the proverbial two trains leaving Chicago at different times, in different directions, and traveling at different speeds problem. The most common question we hear isn't a math question at all. It is, rather, "When am I ever going to use this stuff?" Implicit in this question, or at least in the answer to it, is the

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concept of mathematical literacy. We often don't know when a student will use math, only that they need some mathematical skill to be successful in life. It is that needed level of skill which can loosely be called mathematical literacy.

There is no shortage of carefully crafted and descriptive narratives about mathematical literacy. Many people have created pages of specific skills and concepts thought to be basic to mathematical literacy. Some are long, many are detailed, and some are broadly written in general terms and seem to encompass just about every form of mathematics that exists. Among the best known, at least in this state, is the Michigan Curriculum Framework for Mathematics. Filling hundreds of pages, it describes the mathematics students should know from the time they enter school until they graduate. It comes complete with periodic testing, culminating in the high school competency test known as the MEAP.

Even so, actually defining math literacy remains tricky. It is tricky because math literacy has changed over time and will continue to do so. It is tricky because many people have different beliefs about it, and tricky because vastly different mathematical demands are made on different individuals. One possible working definition for math literacy might be: ***Understanding enough mathematics to be able to succeed in life and in our chosen career.*** This is still not as simple as it sounds. By implication, it means we should choose our lifestyles and our careers first, without being limited by math skills. Our math skills should then be strong enough to carry us through our lives and our chosen careers, or at least strong enough to allow us to learn additional math when our life or career demands it. In other words, math should not be limiting for us. Without question, algebra is the key here. It is the language and basis for virtually all mathematical study. Certainly many people live their entire lives and never use algebra, but conversely, many people have limited their lives, limited their careers, and limited their future because they lacked algebra skills. Perhaps math literacy is a little like medical insurance. We may not use it for long periods of time, but when we need it, we need it badly.

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Being math literate, then, means being able to choose the career we really want, it means never limiting our future because of math anxiety, and it means being ready when the need for math skills arises. In today's world this means, at a minimum, computation skills and thorough knowledge of algebra (just getting a "C" probably isn't enough), perhaps a bit of geometry and some very basic statistics. Beyond these things, math literacy also demands developing a good attitude toward math, recognition of its value in our society, and willingness to learn more math skills when they are needed. It may be more about attitude than about skills. Math literate people should never be afraid of math, should recognize it as an invaluable and irreplaceable tool, and should learn to embrace it as a friend. Above all else, math literate people should be flexible and adaptable in their math skills, and able to change as the world around them demands different skills.

Reaching the Land of Writing Literacy

by Sandy Claypool
Mentor, Writing Center

"What are some of the things students, as a whole, do well in their writing?"

I found it difficult to answer right away. After thinking about the four hundred papers I have read and all the students I have worked with during my three years at the Writing Center, I could only think, "Everything" and "Nothing." This question can be very baffling to someone who has spent years directing students to the land of writing literacy. Where does one start?

Then I examined the question from another angle. While it is rare that a student will do everything well, it is extremely rare that a student will do nothing well. This is because students have an idea of what good writing is — by reading, they have seen a picture of the land of writing literacy—but the vast majority of students hesitate at the idea of how to navigate a path to get there. This hesitation usually exists at each point where a student is missing an understanding about how to handle a writing issue. Many students seem to plod along the hard way, thinking that they are just bad at writing or that the ability to write is a gift they don't have. What they don't know is that what makes a good writer is not a mysterious gift of words, but the knowledge of how to *think* about those words.

Whether or not it is a realized goal, all students are on a path to writing literacy. However, because of varying experiences and natural methods of learning from these experiences, each student's path is different. While it is easy for us to see how far a student has to go until he has reached writing literacy, it is better for us to try to see where the student is and how we can best help him to plot a course. In the Writing Center, "our job is to produce better writers, not better writing." (27)

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Perhaps a few stories would help. I remember one student; let's call her Maria. She confessed to me that she thought of herself as a horrible writer and handed me a five-page paper consisting of three paragraphs. Before I began reading, I was uneasy about her understanding of argument structure and clarity, thinking this draft would be similar to freewriting. After reading her paper, I couldn't help but be delighted. Her argument was sound, logically organized, and clear. Her biggest problem was that her transitions flowed so well she didn't know where to break

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demand that, our students strive for excellence. This does not mean spending inordinate amounts of time in exchange for marginal changes in performance, but it does mean that we should give due consideration to each part of the academic position description. To strive for excellence in only one area, and settle for mediocrity in other areas, is not what we obligated ourselves to do upon accepting our position in the academy.

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students a sanitized approach to learning by "watering down" our classes when we understand how important developing critical literacy in the 21st century is for our students?

To ensure that we are meeting the goals of General Education in making all of our courses critical thinking and reading experiences, instructors need to allow students to make their own meaning "through dynamic interaction among a learner's existing knowledge, text[s], and context" (Quinn 331). If we expand the resources of our courses by challenging students to read widely from a variety of sources rather than "shrink wrapping" material into neat packages, our students will begin to experience this "dynamic interaction." If we fail to provide opportunities for critical thinking and reading throughout their college years, how will our students **choose** to be readers? Reacting to "Reading at Risk" in The New York Times, Andrew Solomon suggests that "we must weave reading back into the very fabric of the culture, and make it a mainstay of community" (4). As college teachers, we **must** make critical, multidimensional reading a reality on a daily basis.

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her paragraphs! After taking some time to show Maria how to analyze her own structure, I left her with more than three paragraphs and a better understanding of how to think about structure in her writing.

"So much of writing has to do with the perspective the writer has about writing; how aware each writer is about what's beyond the words on the page."

Not every student who comes into the Writing Center is this close to reaching writing literacy. Another student, let's call him Bob, was prompted to write about what he thought was "the best thing in life" and why. He chose to write about his experience as a football player. He admitted that writing wasn't anything he was good at and handed me a football narrative. Unlike the other student I worked with, he didn't understand how to analyze his assignment or how to structure the argument he needed to. It was difficult for me to try to engage him in his writing. He had a different kind of writer's block: he blocked himself from thinking he was a writer. This prevented him from being able to think about the concepts behind writing. It was as though Bob could see only one path in front of him , and that path only circled around the land of writing literacy.

So much of writing has to do with the perspective the writer has about writing; how aware each writer is about what's beyond the words on the page. Maria had been through a lot of struggles in her journey, but still she had made it very close to her destination. All she needed was a new perspective on her writing process. Bob had also struggled greatly with his writing. He wasn't a poor writer. But, because he thought he didn't have the "mysterious gift" of writing, he blinded himself from reading the map that would direct him from where he was to the land of writing literacy.

Considering the many students I have worked with during my years at the Writing Center, I know I have helped students with more errors than I care to count. At times I have been depressed, wondering when students would finally understand how to make a thesis statement or how to fix a comma splice error. But then I step back from my frustration and realize I am taking the wrong perspective. All the students I have worked with have learned much already, and much of that they learned the hard way: without the knowledge of navigational tools. I remind myself that it isn't my job to walk blindly with the student, but to show them how to read the map—how to think about writing.

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