Literacy Link

From the Editors' Desktops

As a parent (and a former parent) of elementary students, we've struggled over the past few years watching our children accumulate various awards, ribbons, and trophies. Seriously. Although we believe that our children are very smart and accomplished, we see these awards given to them not for their notable performance in a given activity, but for merely participating in the activity. Although we understand that this practice is done to boost children's self-esteem, this trend often does our children—and others—a disservice. As Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell point out in *The Narcissism Epidemic*, "A major review of research on self-esteem and achievement found that high self-esteem does not cause better grades, test scores, or performance ... better performance causes higher self-esteem" (46). In fact, we know that students who grow up expecting to be rewarded for simply participating—or showing up—often become disappointed quickly when they reach college. This practice heralds confidence at the expense of competence. Besides, how many little plastic trophies or blue ribbons for playing soccer, reading A.R. books, or singing in a church choir does one small child need?

On some level, all the articles in this issue of *Literacy Link* deal with this relationship between competence and confidence. Although it wasn't planned on our part, the authors discuss ways in which SVSU works to build competence for students at all levels of ability. SVSU seniors Justin Brouckaert and Danielle Rohac examine these issues as they apply to those students most struggling with academia in their first semesters. Justin, a senior majoring in English, writes about the First Year Writing Program, particularly English 080, and the practices and procedures that have been implemented to provide those students with a more consistent and programmatic learning experience. Danielle, our *Literacy Link* intern and a Professional and Technical Writing (PTW) major, writes about the Math Department, including the Basic Skills courses and Math and Physics Resource Center, all of which work to provide students with both a sense of competency and confidence.

In her article "Slaying the Gen Ed Dragon: Starting a Fire of Desire for Student Critical Thinking," Dr. Fenobia Dallas moves us into the General Education program, specifically in the Category 10 course English 212, and her attempts to implant in students a sense of the real-world applications of course content. And finally, Dr. Paul Teed speaks of those students at the other end

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of the spectrum, those who often come into SVSU having earned advanced credit for some of their Gen Ed courses: the Honors student. As Chair of the Honors Program, he talks of recent changes to the program and how he has worked to define the program and its students by systematically addressing their needs in and outside of the classroom—often by challenging them to obtain greater competencies by moving out of their comfort zones.

All of our authors provide food for thought regarding teaching practices that develop students' confidence through competency. Our collective goal at the university, after all, is our students' continuous improvement— no matter their ability level at the beginning of the term.

It is this focus on continuous improvement that leads to our last few notes. First, we offer our thanks to Danielle for her work on *Literacy Link* this past year and wish her much luck as she prepares to graduate in May. We also ask you to join us in welcoming Emily Beard and Jason Kahler, from the English Department, as the new editors of *Literacy Link* for the upcoming 2012–13 academic year. Having served six years as co-editors, we are pleased to have Emily and Jason take over this journal (and we'd like to note they did so without being offered a trophy or blue ribbon as a reward). We hope you continue to share your practices about improving literacy on campus with our new editors next year.

Sincerely,

Helen and Chris

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Defining the Honors Student: Opportunities and Challenges

Paul E. Teed
Professor of History and Chair of the Honors Program

Over the last three years, I have had the privilege of serving as the Chair of the SVSU Honors Program. Working with some of the University's most talented and motivated students, I have designed course schedules, provided advice on thesis projects, and helped students prepare for graduate schools, professional schools, or employment opportunities. With support from the President and the Vice President for Academic Affairs, I have also made a variety of changes to the program that are designed to define it more clearly, expand its role in the University's larger mission, and, most importantly, to enhance the experience of the students. Throughout that process, I have wrestled with perhaps the most difficult question that any honors chair or director must answer: "What is an honors student?"

I believe that members of any university honors community should be especially curious, open-minded students with a commitment to ongoing learning. Like nearly all of our students, SVSU's honors students have come here with career objectives. They are practical and quite utilitarian in their attitudes toward education, but an honors program should also give students the opportunity to take classes that are, in the narrow, vocational sense, impractical. Whatever their career goals or majors might be, students should be exposed to ideas and approaches to the world that cannot be reduced to a marketplace value, but which will help develop more critical, informed understandings of the world. Honors courses

should aim to instill that critical spirit, asking students to explore unusual topics in unusual ways and make connections across disciplinary boundaries.

With this in mind, I have moved the Honors Program toward a curriculum that requires students to take interdisciplinary seminars at the freshman, sophomore, and junior levels. The inspiration for this approach was an honors course on alternative energy taught in the winter of 2011 by Visiting Scholar Lilianna Aniola-Jedrzejek, a senior lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages at the Poznan University of Technology in Poland. Her course approached the topic from a variety of angles that included the physical and environmental sciences, economics, and international relations. Using a topic of real contemporary relevance, Professor Aniola-Jedrzejek led her students to appreciate the complexity of the issues surrounding alternative energy development as well as the crucial importance of solving them. Although the students found the experience challenging, they were struck by the interconnectedness of the various disciplines and came away with a passion for the subject matter. I hope that our program can offer more courses like this model in the future, and I welcome any suggestions from faculty members for developing innovative topics and approaches that will encourage our students to think broadly and critically.

One of the benefits of this type of course is that it helps prepare our honors students for the development of more creative and significant honors thesis projects. However, throughout the program, students must cultivate the skill of working independently. I have found that while honors students are bright and hardworking, they are reluctant to choose topics that they fear are "beyond" them. More innovative, interdisciplinary courses are certainly one way to encourage them to be more imaginative about the formulation of research or creative projects. Often, the problem is one of confidence. When I met recently with a very bright and capable student to discuss her thesis project, she told me of a desire to develop a project on animal conservation

but had resigned herself instead to work on what she thought was a "safer" and less ambitious project. These are the kinds of moments when being the Honors Program Chair is a very important job. I encouraged this student not to settle for anything less than the pursuit of her passion and informed her of various ways to formulate and fund her project. As the recipient of a Student Research and Creativity Institute grant, she has taken that advice in directions that I could not have imagined, but which I applaud.

Critical thinking and intellectual independence are best fostered in community. I therefore believe that being an honors student means engaging in a coherent and visible honors community that models academic excellence and a commitment to others. Though I initially worried that this would be a difficult goal to achieve, I found that our students themselves were not only willing, but eager to pursue it. With just a bit of encouragement from me, the honors students created HonorCorps, a student association that has become a vibrant part of SVSU student culture. HonorCorps sponsors thesis project workshops and social events, and it engages in service activities with the Saginaw Community Foundation, the Bay Area YMCA, and other organizations in the surrounding area. During the first year of its existence, the HonorCorps established a mentoring program that paired new honors students with juniors and seniors in the program. Additionally each year, the group leads an Honors Mid-Year Orientation program that addresses the concerns of all honors students and provides guidance on thesis development and campus engagement. The energy and creativity that the student leaders of this organization display is remarkable, and I have found my role as the group's advisor to be among the most enjoyable parts of my role as Honors Program Chair.

In my attempt to create a sense of community among the honors students, I built on the work of previous Honors Program Chairs in arguing for an honors

We need to teach all our students to be creative, intellectually curious, and confident—to move out of their comfort zones, create learning communities, and have an ongoing passion for ideas.

housing option. It became clear to me from my discussions with prospective students and their parents that the opportunity to live on campus with other honors students was deeply attractive. With the help and support of Don Bachand, Bob Maurovich, and the Department of Residential Life, we created an honors living-learning community for honors freshmen in the Living Center Southwest. Like the HonorCorps, this aspect of our program is designed to provide students with a sense that they belong to a special community of like-minded students who can make a difference in the classroom and in the wider campus community. For the last two years, cohorts from this community have applied to Residential Life to create an "affinity housing" cluster in their second year at the University. These groups of honors students choose to live together and engage in academic or service projects of their own choosing and design. These are solid indications that the Honors Program is developing a new and more powerful presence on our campus.

In the end, the honors students at SVSU have helped me to answer the question that I started with three years ago: "What is an honors student?" They are curious, intellectually engaged students who welcome the opportunity to think and act in innovative ways. Those characteristics should be present in the classroom, be apparent in independent thesis work, and be part of a vibrant honors community. These are qualities, of course, that instructors should strive to cultivate in all university students. We need to teach all our students to be creative, intellectually curious, and confident—to move out of their comfort zones, create learning communities, and have an ongoing passion for ideas. As Honors Program Chair, I have had the privilege of working with faculty members, administrators, and staff members who share and support that understanding of university education. However, most of all, I have learned from the students themselves as they embrace both the challenges and opportunities that the program offers.

Slaying the Gen Ed Dragon:
Starting a Fire of Desire for Student Critical Thinking

Fenobia I. Dallas
Associate Professor of Rhetoric & Professional Writing

I am a technical writer. Simply put, this could mean that I know something about technology and writing—which I do. However, and more importantly, being a technical writer means that I understand how the two areas converge—and diverge.

In my first foray into technical writing, I was hired to be a systems analyst, debugging and conducting tests on a mainframe computer system. Later, my technical writing career evolved into other related fields, including network administrator, operations research analyst, and university professor. But it was the previous experiences in cubicle city that shaped how I teach about writing infused with technology in the academic village.

Technical writing is more than simply using a computer or specific software to design and produce documents. Technical writing is more than being a writing expert in a particular field. For me, technical writing involves connecting the content of the course with the practice or application of the course material. In this instance, the content is viewed as the required education course, whereas the practice is connected with the desire for taking the course and identifying an appropriate application of the course material.

A Teaching Opportunity

We teach our students in order that they learn. This is the expected result of any teaching opportunity. But the active engagement with the student in this process is the tenuous link. Teaching a general education course can be fraught with the challenges of keeping students' interested, developing course assignments

that enable students to see the connection of the course material with their projected course of study, and ensuring that students take something—a lesson or experience or understanding to be applied in a different context or circumstance—with them.

Wehlburg (2010) discusses the continuing evolution of college curricula to connect general education with specific discipline coursework, noting that although interdisciplinary instruction is beneficial, providing a space to connect the general education experience to the overall curriculum has the potential to "transform how students view their baccalaureate experience" (p. 10). Schneider's discussion (2010) on "cross-disciplinary inquiry" and "big-picture thinking" as the integrative parts of course content explores how to connect content with the application step of the course.

Students' attitudes about general education courses, including whether the course is considered "easy," can impact how and what they learn. The amount of time spent reading assigned course materials is examined in the study of Hilton et al. (2010). They note that students are more apt to not only read the material, but also connect to the content when they are offered a set period of reading time and given an incentive for the reading. Thomas' discussion (2010) of a general education second language requirement reveals that although students chose to study a second language as mandated by curricular requirements, the second or ancillary choice was just as informative. In this case, another reason for studying a second language was that students anticipated either traveling or living in a country where the second language became the primary means of communication. Thus, the required purpose of the course is supplemented with the desire to take the course—the practical application of using the language under study in travels to the country.

Starting Small

For me, teaching the Topics in Critical Writing (ENGL 212) general education course was an opportunity to engage students with the content of extending their command of the written word from the freshman composition course (ENGL 111) and allow them to connect their writing for the course with the practical application step. Teaching a writing course means addressing questions like "How will this help me in my course of study or life?" This is the desire that we want to instill in our students by providing the connecting practical application step. This step became my focal point of instruction.

The goal of this Category 10 course is to help students develop their critical reading and writing processes connected to various modes of communication. Rather than submitting to the expected intellectual entrenchment/entrapment about learning from a general education course, I chose to offer students a different opportunity. They were expected to not only learn something about extending their writing practices, but also to rethink their understanding about and identity within a general education course. A part of this rethinking is connected to the course material itself, but another segment was made available to students to traverse on their own—and make their unique discoveries along the way.

The Content Part

The Topics in Critical Writing course is structured to help students further develop their research and writing skills that can be applied in their course of study. Undertaking basic research, learning about and using the draft and revision process, and understanding in-text citation and reference formats are key concerns of the course. In the section I taught, instruction centered on a news story, "Septic Woes Force Family from Home," that was printed in *The Saginaw News* on May 21, 2006. This news story focused on a new homeowner's plight in dealing with the incorrect placement of a septic tank in a home and the resultant deterioration of quality of life, along with failed health and zoning inspections (Lounsbury, 2006). Although it would have been simple

Teaching a general education course can be fraught with the challenges of keeping students interested.

to examine the story and discuss its viewpoints, I encouraged students to think about the course catalog description and pay "attention to disciplinary conventions and rhetorical strategies for argument in academic discourse." This meant thinking about the news story from the perspective of the homeowner, the township zoning administrator and septic inspector, the county septic tank installer, the county clerk and building administrator, the local health department, the mortgage holder, the previous homeowner, state representatives, lawyers, builders, and other inspectors. Students were required to research the job duties and responsibilities of these interested parties to understand how their responses in this news story were framed.

> *I sought to locate spaces that allowed students to make their own connections with content, and then see how the practical application worked for them.*

But there was a next step. After students researched the interested parties, they were to make a judgment call on the situation. It became important for them to understand how their writing could contribute to or make an impact on this story. It is this "next step" that we hope our students seek. However, how do they connect the course material in a broader context? In this instance, I asked students to consider the practical application of what they learned in the course.

Starting a Fire of Desire To Learn

To that end, I asked students to take their critical thinking one step further—by "becoming involved." This meant addressing the "Septic Woes Force Family from Home" news story by offering feedback in the form of a letter to the editor. Students were to write the letter to the editor using the area of expertise from their content-focused research. The letter would be written from the perspective of someone involved in the news story, using the research-based information that could offer some enlightenment to the situation described in the article.

The students were quite adept at connecting the letter to the editor response to the researched perspective. One student wrote from the perspective of a septic tank installer and noted that "access to the tank was made nearly impossible with it being in the crawl space. There is a system called a mound system that ... [should be used] when building a tank underground is impossible." Another student who became a real estate agent stated that "part of an agent's responsibilities is to inspect and ensure the quality, or lack thereof, of all the houses they are working with." Still another student wrote the letter to the editor from the perspective of a local health care provider relating that "if a septic tank isn't properly taken care of, the dirty water and raw sewage can contaminate, not only this household's well, but also other people's wells, or nearby rivers, lakes, and streams. This contamination can lead to illnesses such as Hepatitis A and gastroenteritis."

These students moved from the critical thinking step of collecting and researching a situation to the decision-making step by offering a solution or at least making their voices heard. These are the skills sets that we hope our students exhibit in their college courses and in their community lives.

The Practical Application Continues

In this instance, as a technical writer, I focused on non-rhetorical terms for students—mainly thinking about audience and context. Sure, I could go with the rhetorical strategies that form the foundational basis of my discipline, the logos, pathos, and ethos that many disciplines claim as their own. However, the majority of my time would be spent dissecting and explicating the nuances of those rhetorical strategies across disciplines. Rather, I sought to locate spaces that enabled students to make their own connections with the content and then see how the practical application worked for them.

Teaching general education courses can be challenging, but also invigorating. As we seek to provide a foundational learning place for our students, we can locate content that resonates within our disciplines, but is applicable for engaging students in a larger context. We have experiences and community assets that can be used towards this effort, and our students

can only benefit from our knowledge and willingness to share that knowledge.

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Competency + Confidence = Stronger Students

Danielle Rohac
SVSU Senior, Professional and Technical Writing (PTW) Major
and Literacy Link *Intern*

It is unavoidable. It is a requirement. Every student who graduates from SVSU will have faced it at one time or another. It is not paying tuition or purchasing books or even finding a parking spot in a crowded campus lot—it is passing at least one math course. All SVSU students have to take some level of math to obtain a degree; however, there is much more at stake than not obtaining a diploma. Students who are not able to develop competency in mathematics and confidence in their ability to perform basic functions in computation and calculation are not going to obtain the valuable skills they will need in college and their professional lives. As in all disciplines, students develop competency in math through knowledge and application, leading to student confidence. The SVSU Department of Mathematical Sciences, along with the Math and Physics Resource Center, practices a number of strategies to help students develop their math skills to be successful.

Basic/General Education Math Courses

To move into the higher math classes, students must pass or place out of the basic skills requirements of Math 081, Math 082, and Math 103. These courses are non-credit bearing classes that are required of certain students based on their ACT and/or placement scores. (See Table A for more specific information.) As a significant number of students need to take these classes, for the upcoming Fall 2012 semester, the Math Department will be offering twelve sections of Math 081, twenty sections of Math 082, and ten sections of Math 103.

To help some of these students, the department and the Math and Physics Resource Center both offer Math 081/082 in Alternative Formats. This course covers much of the same material as the traditional class, but in an atmosphere where students set their own pace. The alternative format courses are located in a computer lab where students work through tutorials and problems specific to their needs, with assistance from the instructor and the math tutors who are on-hand. Students can consider spreading the class over more than one semester; however, they must cover tuition costs each semester they are enrolled.

Not until Math 120 (Algebraic Methods) can students begin earning credit, fulfilling

their General Education Category 3 requirement for numerical understanding. Eighteen sections of Math 120 will be offered in Fall 2012 in two "versions." Per the *Course Catalog*, in Math 120A (Algebraic Methods), students use, as its title suggests, "algebraic techniques ... [to] develop analytical reasoning skills to construct mathematical models, solve problems and interpret results." As an alternative, students going into economics and business can also take Math 120B (Algebraic Methods: Finite Math), which emphasizes, according to the catalog, the "study [of] equations and inequalities, functions, systems of equations, linear programming including the simplex method, quadratic functions, exponential and logarithmic functions, mathematics of finance, and introduction to differential calculus including derivatives and applications."

Math and Physics Resource Center

In addition to developing carefully sequenced courses to help develop competency in mathematics, the Math Department has another resource crucial to student success: The Math and Physics Resource Center. The Center is very popular with students at all levels of math; in the 2010–2011 year, the Center had 10,539 student visitors, and in the last two fall semesters, the Center averaged over 7,000 visits. The Center assists students with a wide-range of abilities. Tutoring is provided up through Math 262 (Introduction to Differential Equations), with private tutoring considered for classes beyond this level.

The atmosphere at the Math and Physics Center is particularly welcoming: students are invited to come inside to do their homework and stay as long as they wish within the scheduled hours. The space is filled with long tables, and drinks and snack food are provided to students free of charge. Students know if they have a question about a problem or just want to check if they are on the right track that there are tutors standing by. Every table has small flags—pink for math, green for physics. If a student has a question, he simply has to flip the flag up and a tutor will come over to help. Depending on how busy they are, tutors are willing to stay with one student for as long as needed.

Teaching Strategies

The Math Department and the Math and Physics Resource Center point to various ways to help students think through mathematical problems and formulas, not only to develop their math skills, but the students' critical thinking ability. Brad Mazure, a current tutor at the Math and Physics Resource Center, often sees issues with students' equations or calculating skills; however, Mazure finds that lack of organization and comprehension of concepts are larger issues. He sees students who "read the problem once and have no idea where to go, so they just lose confidence right away." By walking them through his own train of thought for problem-solving, Mazure helps these students understand problems so that they not only know how to do it but are confident that they can do it on their own. Developing these types of problem-solving skills is useful not only in the math classroom, but in others as well. "Math in general teaches you logic, deduction, problem-solving, and things you really don't learn any other way except through math," Dr. Amy Hlavacek, co-director of the Math and Physics Resource Center, says. A student who organizes math problems in a systematic and understandable way may have an easier time following directions in a chemistry lab or setting up the format for a paper. Math tutors like Mazure help

Table A: 2011–2012 Basic Skills Math Placement Scores and Requirements	
ACT Math Scores	**Course Placements**
16 or below	Math 081
17–20	Math 082
21–22	Math 082 prerequisite

© Amy Hlavacek
Students can spend time studying in the Center and also receive one-on-one help from tutors.

students develop positive habits they can use in all their classes and in their professional careers.

The assistance that Math and Physics Resource Center tutors provide is supplementary to good teaching practices in the classroom. As a math education major, Mazure has also spent time student teaching in the public schools, and he sees the importance of making personal connections with his students. This is the type of method math instructor Jerry Boehm practices and recommends to other teachers as well. Boehm taught high school math for forty years before retiring in 2005. A few years later, he started teaching basic math courses at SVSU, but his philosophy of "You take the students from where they are, and you move them forward" has remained consistent over the years. Some of his methods for encouraging students are praising the students when they answer problems correctly, sending encouraging emails, getting to class early for questions to sustain personal connections, and encouraging office hour visits and use of the Math and Physics Resource Center. Boehm finds that a combination of these methods improves students' desires to

come to class, participate, and do the homework. He believes that if the students know he cares about them, they are much more likely to put forth their best efforts.

There is no failsafe way to address the struggles students have when it comes to succeeding in the classroom. However, the SVSU Department of Mathematical Sciences provides a number of simple yet effective ways for students to succeed through its courses, resources, and teaching practices. The avenues they provide, from personal connections to a helpful nudge in the right direction, cultivate skills that result in better prepared students and a stronger SVSU community, leading to a winning equation: competency added to confidence yields student success.

Math and Physics Resource Center

Hours:
Mon.–Thurs.   9 a.m.–8 p.m
Sun.   4 p.m.–9 p.m.

Location: Zahnow 202A

Private tutoring appointments can be made online via VSpace.

Back to the Basics: Best Practices in Basic Writing

Justin Brouckaert
SVSU Senior, Creative Writing and English Literature Major

As a current senior at SVSU, I'm pleased to see how far I have come as a writer in these four years. Working in the genres of journalism and creative writing, as well as writing within my major courses, I have developed many discipline-specific skills that have helped me grow as a writer. But we have to start somewhere in order to grow, and although the memory may be a bit painful, it's still not too difficult for me to recall where I started as a first-year writer.

My high school did not offer an impressive variety of Advanced Placement (AP) courses, but it did offer one in English, and I jumped at the chance to take it. When I scored high enough on the AP exam to bypass not only English 111 but also a Category 10 General Education course in written communication, I was ecstatic; after all, taking fewer classes meant spending less time and money on school.

> **"Part of that confidence for 080 students comes from believing that what they have to say is valuable and important to others. Just because they're in a developmental course doesn't mean they're not writers."**

So with the unrivaled confidence that must surely be unique to college freshmen, I began my sophomore-level English courses, but was quickly met with the disturbing realization that I was not as good a writer as I thought I was. Shocked by this idea, I worked frantically to remedy the problem. I eventually gained the favor of an English instructor who recommended that I apply for a position at the Writing Center, where, after a less-than-spectacular interview, it was gently suggested that I take more introductory writing and literature courses before re-applying.

It seems to me now that the problems I encountered while adjusting to college writing really boiled down to the lack of a solid foundation. Although I may have had some talent as a writer, my AP credits allowed me to pass on an opportunity I needed to take my raw talent and shape it to university expectations. What I thought was a step ahead really set me back.

Although I may not have had the foundation necessary to immediately succeed in college literature courses, I did have some raw talent and an avid interest in reading and writing—advantages that many students entering English 080 and 111 courses aren't fortunate enough to have, whether due to a lack of exposure to good writing, a lack of basic skills, or a lack of confidence. The English Department's First Year Writing Program is designed to help these types of students succeed.

Currently coordinated by Bradley Herzog, an associate professor of Rhetoric & Professional Writing, the First Year Writing Program consisted of 71 sections of English 111 (Freshman Composition) and 14 sections of English 080 (Developmental Writing), with 39 faculty members teaching more than 1,700 students during the Fall 2011 semester. English 080 and English 111 courses share a common text, Ann Raimes's *Keys for Writers*, as well as common rubrics, course goals, and course outcomes. Because every fall so many students take English 111, the cornerstone of university writing and research that serves as a gateway course for all academic writing across the curricula, the First Year Writing Committee's focus has been making sure that the goals and outcomes of English 111 courses align with university courses, especially communication intensive courses and General Education Category 10 courses in written communication. According to Herzog, the First Year Writing Program is "very deliberately and consciously trying to make connections between our goals and outcomes and what will be expected of students, and trying to prepare them to be successful in those writing courses."

Out of the 85 sections of classes the First Year Writing Program offered this past fall, only 14 were English 080. Although these numbers might seem small, the impact of the English 080 course on student retention and success is high.

"The challenge rests on the shoulders of those who teach in the first-year writing program to coach and mentor these students through a full year of writing instruction," notes English lecturer Christina Montgomery. "This is no easy task even for the most well-equipped and well-intentioned instructor."

Students place into English 080 with an ACT composite score of 15 or below, and are required to pass English 080 before they can enroll in English 111 the subsequent semester. Thus, English 080's purpose is to develop the basic writing skills necessary for students to complete English 111 successfully. English 080 students write approximately 5,000 words in the course to develop writing processes, to read critically and analyze material, and to learn and participate in reading and writing activities. These outcomes prepare students to enter English 111, where they will write roughly twice as much and learn to develop their ideas through critical assessment, summary, and research.

Although much of the focus of the program is placed on English 111 students meeting the expectations of upper-level general education courses, in the last three years, important improvements and additions have been made to English 080 classes to ensure that the First Year Writing sequence works smoothly and that students are adequately prepared for their next courses.

In the Classroom and the Computer Lab

One constant feature of the English 111 course is the guaranteed use of a computer lab during at least one class meeting each week. Working in computer labs provides an opportunity for both instructors and students to engage in the teaching/learning process by sharing documents, presentations, and ideas beyond the confines of the textbook. Until a year and a half ago, English 080 students didn't have this same luxury. Faculty members formed a committee and submitted a proposal for the 080 program to match the format of English 111 and get students in computer labs and accustomed to working with technology.

English 080 students now spend the same amount of time in computer labs as their 111 peers, and instructors believe that using technology in connection with composition is helping students become more successful and prepared for English 111.

The English 080 Writing Awards

Another important feature of the program is its writing awards. 2012 marks the third year that students were eligible to receive a first, second, or third place prize for writing generated in English 080. Each winter, winning entries are selected by a committee of English 080 faculty, and then students, their parents, and their friends (as well as SVSU faculty) are invited to a reception held in their honor. Like the popular English 111 awards, students who win are given cash prizes. Montgomery emphasizes the importance of this inclusion, noting that instilling persistence and confidence in students is an essential goal of the English 080 course. "Part of that confidence for 080 students comes from believing that what they have to say is valuable and important to others," she maintains. "Just because they're in a developmental course doesn't mean they're not writers."

Dedicated Tutors

To offer English 080 writers additional support, former First Year Writing Coordinator and current Writing Center Coordinator Helen Raica-Klotz implemented a program of embedding specialized tutors in English 080 classes and in the Writing Center. Funded for its second year by an SVSU Unit Research Grant, the program now includes five 080 tutors who work inside classrooms and the Writing Center once per week to provide tutoring to these beginning writers.

"I think [that, when I am] inside the classroom, students are more likely to ask for help because it's easy, and I'm already there," asserts Miranda Strasburg, a sophomore biology major in her second year as an 080 tutor. "Working with one or two different classrooms is perfect because I

get to know each student, which makes it easier to approach them and makes them feel like I am more approachable."

Strasburg believes that some students are more hesitant than others to come into the Writing Center for help, but most become comfortable once they arrive. "Some students just don't like making the trip to the Writing Center, but once they get there, they are always full of questions," she says. "Other students learn how helpful a resource the Writing Center can be and make multiple trips during the semester."

The program also allows tutors to track the progress of the students they work with throughout the year, an advantage Strasburg says has been beneficial to track students' growth. "I can definitely see a change in many of my students... throughout the semester," she claims.

As a first-year writer, I struggled to adjust to college writing just like many English 080 and 111 students. Although I may have had advantages that other young writers did not, the First Year Writing Program can be beneficial for competent writers needing guidance as well as students who struggle with writing.

"All students need a solid foundation for writing successfully in college—and beyond," says Director of University Writing Program Diane Boehm. "A recent article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported that 89 percent of employers identify communication ability, both oral and written, as their most important requirement. Thus the work each of us does to develop students as competent writers is key to our mission of creating 'opportunities for individuals to achieve intellectual and personal development' that will help them accomplish their current and future goals."

Call for Papers

The editors of *Literacy Link* invite members of the campus community to submit articles for review and possible inclusion in the Fall 2012 issue.

Literacy Link is a campus publication that began in the winter of 1992 with the support of Dr. Robert Yien and the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs. Editors Sally Cannon and Jenny Senft, in the first issue of *Literacy Link*, focused on three key areas of literacy: writing, reading, and thinking. Over the years, individuals from departments across campus have added to the conversation. For example, members of the Mathematics Department and the Criminal Justice Department have contributed articles on career literacy, members of the English Language Program have written on language development and the challenges of writing in a second language, and members of other departments such as English and Chemistry have focused on research assignments and their effect on student literacy. Collectively,

Literacy Link's contributors discuss teaching practices, student comprehension, and writing standards in various disciplines, as well as the use of writing as a teaching tool.

Articles for *Literacy Link* should run 500 to 1,500 words in length. Authors should follow either MLA or APA format.

Submit articles to:

SVSU Department of English
Literacy Link
7400 Bay Road
Brown 326
University Center, MI 48710-0001

Or email submissions to Emily Beard at ejbeard@svsu.edu.

Submission deadline for the Fall 2012 issue is **September 21, 2012**.

For more information about *Literacy Link*, go to www.svsu.edu/literacy-link.