

THE SOUNDING BOARD

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WRITING COLLEAGUES BRIDGE THE GAP

Throughout my high school experience, my writing style was strangled and smothered by harsh teacher comments, low grades, and an overall sense of defeat. I did not know what my teachers were looking for or how to produce a sample of writing that would be acceptable in their eyes. I was conflicted by an inner desire to create brilliant writing, yet did not have the proper encouragement to accomplish it. I was truly frustrated by my high school's linear way of thinking and narrow-mindedness. I did not want to conform to their ideals of what a paper should look like, nor did I want to continue on the path that coined me a mediocre writer. What was left for me to do? I ended up choosing a road that cautiously scaled the two extremes. I decided to write in a strictly academic and uncreative manner that consecutively answered the prompts, yet lacked my original spark that separated a B paper from an A. To me, this was a sign of utter surrender...College changed everything.

Julie Isaacson '10

Writing Colleagues Seminar, Spring 2007

Julie's experience is like that of many college students who performed well in high school, but did not enjoy the process. For some, entering college marks the first time they are ever asked, "What do you think?" Although Julie's high school writing experience was unrewarding, she says she excelled in writing once she was given the opportunity to explore and become passionate about her work. Through meetings with her writing colleague, Julie also had the opportunity to experiment and compose drafts before she received a grade. She had a knowledgeable peer to lead her through the writing process and an engaging professor and first-year seminar to get excited about. And, like many other writing colleagues, Julie came to the Program through a recommendation from the writing colleague in her first-year seminar.

Lev Vygotsky, a developmental psychologist, identified a significant principle of how people learn. He wrote, "what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow."¹ He called the gap between what one can learn to do unassisted and what one can learn to do with assistance "the zone of proximal development." Essentially, Vygotsky found that an experienced person teaching and modeling a skill is the bridge between what someone has not yet learned and the mastery of that skill.

Writing colleagues are often referred to as bridges. They are specifically trained

to serve as another means of communication between students and professors. They are also trained to discuss the fundamentals of writing and successfully completing writing assignments. As one student wrote in an evaluation last spring: "the writing colleague helped me understand what my professor's comments meant. She also asked me the right questions about my writing." Regarding course materials and discussion, another student wrote: "My writing colleague and I talked over a lot of ideas that we discussed in class. I came to understand them on a different level." This, of course, speaks to Vygotsky's theory that learning is a social experience.

"The writing colleague helped me understand what my professor's comments meant. She also asked me the right questions about my writing."

Outside of the classroom, writing colleagues often become mentors both intellectually and personally. As one student describes: "I feel as though my writing colleague and I have become good friends through the writing process. This helped with my learning and made the environment more friendly." The role of the writing colleague requires that students build a strong rapport—one that allows an easy flow of ideas and questions and discussion.

According to feedback we receive from writing colleagues each semester, the top two reasons writing colleagues enjoy their field placements are 1.) helping their peers do well and write better and 2.) getting to know new people.

Julie and 17 other writing colleagues will enter the first-year seminar program next fall. We anticipate great work from our active writing colleagues and, as a result, a new group of passionate writing colleague candidates to bring peer mentorship to the class of 2012 and beyond.

1. Vygotsky, Lev, *Mind in Society*. (1978)

Heidi G. Beach '02, *Coordinator*

Interested in a Writing Colleague for your course next semester? Interested in becoming a Writing Colleague? Please contact:

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Check out *The Sounding Board* online:
www.hws.edu/academics/enrichment/writingcolleagues.asp

BEFORE YOU JUST PLAIN GOOGLE IT

FINDING QUALITY ON THE INTERNET

Discerning the credibility of internet sources is a fairly new obstacle for students conducting research today. Although information is more accessible than ever before, we are confronted with a new responsibility to verify the accuracy of the information in addition to the credibility of its source.

Below are some questions you can ask yourself and things to look for while you sort through sources and information on the Web:

1. Who is the author? Check the website's home page.
2. Is the author affiliated with any institution? Check the URL for .gov or .edu.
3. What are the author's credentials? Check an online database (such as LexisNexis) to see if this person is published in any journals or books.
4. Was the information reviewed or peer-edited before it was posted? This is unlikely—unless the posting is part of a larger publication. If it has been reviewed, the submission process for publication can be verified on the home page.
5. Is this web page part of a larger publication? Try the links on the page to see if there is an access point to the home page of the publication.
6. Is the information documented properly? Check for footnotes or methodology.
7. Is the information current? Check the "last update," usually posted at the bottom of every page.
8. What is the purpose of the page? Examine content and marginalia.

9. Does the web site suit your purposes? Review what the purpose of your project is. Review your information needs: primary vs. secondary, academic vs. popular. And always consult your professor.

Consider these sources before you just plain Google it:

Warren Hunting Smith Library Archives

<http://academic.hws.edu/library/databases.asp>

Search thousands of articles in a wide range of disciplines through databases such as LexisNexis, JSTOR, ProQuest and many more.

Librarians' Index to the Internet

<http://lii.org/>

Search and browse this website for the best of the world wide web. They have over 20,000 entries, maintained by librarians and organized into 14 main topics and nearly 300 related topics.

Google Scholar

<http://scholar.google.com/schhp?tab=ws>

Search across many disciplines and sources: peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, abstracts and articles, from academic publishers, professional societies, preprint repositories, universities and other scholarly organizations.

A Note on Domain Names

.com = commercial (marketing a product)

.org = organization (generally nonprofits, but may also be for commercial purposes)

.edu and **.gov** = educational and government institutions only; often the best producers of bonafide research.

Material adapted from Rosenwasser and Stephen, *Writing Analytically with Readings* (2008)

WRITING COLLEAGUE PLACEMENTS FALL 2007

Alysa Austin & Professor F. Botham
FSEM 49: Sacred Earth

Jamie Billington & Professor L. Bloss
FSEM 182: Imaginary Indias

Caitlin Caron & Professor H. McCabe
FSEM 75: Fitting in and Standing out in Contemporary China

Molly DiStefano & Professor J. McCorkle
FSEM 147: Africa: Myths and Realities

Mike Ellis & Professor M. Deutschlander
FSEM 56: Bird Obsessions: The Beauty of the Beast

Corey Gallagher & Professor D. Albro
FSEM 166: Truth & Reconciliation

Alex Hanson & Professor J. McCorkle
FSEM 25: Odyssey and Enlightenment

Julie Isaacson & Professor S. Mathews
FSEM 50: Structure and Form

Courtney Jones & Professor J. Tessendorf
FSEM 29: Why Aren't All Countries Rich?

Sam Koval & Professor M. Hess
FSEM 61: Native Heritage: Walk in Balance on the Earth Mother

Jay Mills & Professor C. Muller
FSEM 77: Metamorphosis: Metaphors of Change

Jonathan Shaker & Professor J. McCorkle
FSEM 42: Mirrored Histories

Shane Simon & Professor G. Joseph
FSEM 42: Mirrored Histories

Rachel Stephansky & Professor T. Pinto
FSEM 42: Mirrored Histories

Margaret Stirling & Professor L. Erussard
FSEM 25: Odyssey and Enlightenment

Maria Trainor & Professor J. Tessendorf
FSEM 29: Why Aren't All Countries Rich?

Regina Triplett & Professor C. Oberbrunner
FSEM 65: Philosophy Through Literature, Drama and Film

"If you write one story, it may be bad; if you write a hundred, you have the odds in your favor."

Edgar Rice Burroughs, novelist and creator of Tarzan