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# Writer's Block

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From the Writing Center at Prairie View A&M University ·

A Newsletter for Students, Faculty, Administrators, & Educators · Volume 2, Issue 1 · Spring 2010 ·



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## Professor Talks Quality Enhancement

### Dr. Laurette B. Foster discusses efforts to improve education quality.

*Keith Evans and Joy Patterson, Writing Center consultants and English Graduate students at Prairie View A&M University, have a one-on-one talk with Mathematics Professor and QEP (Quality Enhancement Plan) Chair, Dr. Laurette Foster. Together, they discussed what the QEP is, its importance to the university as a whole, and how the Writing Center could play a part in its success. Below are highlights from the interview.*

**Evans:** What is your role in the implementation of the QEP report?

**FOSTER:** Currently, I chair the Quality Enhancement Plan Leadership Team. This team has been working continuously for the last several years to develop a proposed Quality Enhancement Plan to submit to the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges as part of our reaffirmation for accreditation process.

**Patterson:** What is the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and its purpose?

**FOSTER:** The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) defines a Quality Enhancement Plan as a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue directly related to enhancing student learning.

**Evans:** How did you choose the focus for the QEP?

**FOSTER:** Over the last five years, students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni and other stakeholders of Prairie View have been invited to participate in open discussions, town hall meetings and assemblies to determine the focus of the proposed QEP. We have reviewed the data of our students on several assessment instruments such as the MAPP, BC-SSE, NSSE, and CIRP in addition to surveying students across the campus to help identify a topic that has a specific goal of enhancing the learning of the Prairie View A&M University student.

**Patterson:** What do you envision as the Writing Center's function in helping to accomplish the goals of the QEP?

**FOSTER:** Our proposed QEP is iREAD, Increasing Reading

and Engagement for Academic Development. The Writing Center along with all units on campus are invited to support this plan. In particular, students participating in the iREAD plan will be required to maintain an electronic portfolio that captures their reading and assignments over their college career. We hope the Writing Center will assist the students in writing their reflections and assignments as they progress through the program.

**Evans:** How do you and your committee plan to publicize and market the QEP to the campus?

**FOSTER:** We are already publicizing and

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*“The Quality Enhancement Plan [is] a carefully designed and focused course of action that addresses a well-defined topic or issue directly related to enhancing student learning.”*

**Dr. Laurette Foster**

# What the numbers say

by Joy Patterson

## Statistics show that the Writing Center serves a campus-wide, interdisciplinary student body.

Since the inception of the Writing Center in 2003, with its primary mission to improve the quality of writing for students—not only for English majors but also for any discipline at Prairie View A&M University, we have consistently strived to prove the need for such a resource. Although the majority of the consultations consist of English writing assignments, there have been growing numbers of consultations with other disciplines. Using a variety of resources, especially a Title III grant, the Writing Center provides a comprehensive service.

The Title III grant allows the Writing Center to purchase supplies, books, technology, as well as fund graduate and undergraduate consultants. Title III tracks the Writing Center's progress through the data collected from intake forms that each student is required to complete before each consultation. This form includes the student's major, writing assignment, course, and the instructor, which is then entered into an excel spreadsheet monthly and reported to Title III quarterly.

Besides tracking progress, the data allows the Writing Center to see what types of consultations were conducted each semester. For instance, Fall 2009 numbers show that 20% of the consultations were for the APA style. This is reflective of the updating of the APA manual to the 7th edition. Other interesting trends include 15%

of the consultations consisting of writing assignments outside of English classes. We also noticed an increase in personal statements and résumé consultations.

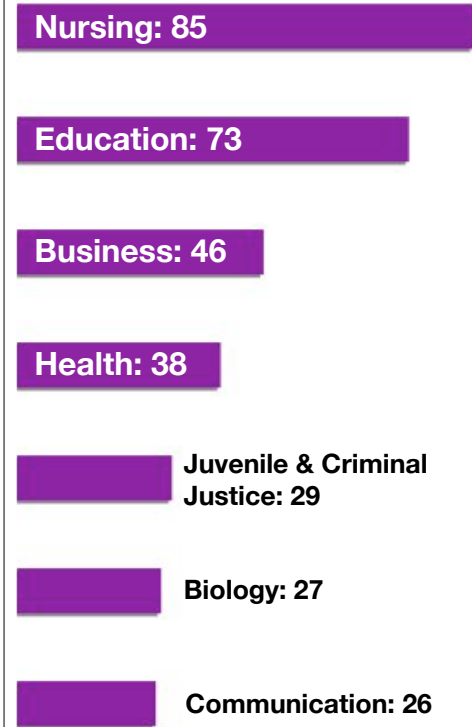
Additionally, the numbers indicate that not only was there diversity among the writing assignments but also among the students' majors. The top three majors totaled exactly 50% of all the consultations. In decreasing order, the majors consisted of Nursing, Criminal/Juvenile Justice, and Education. These majors are typically the most seen in the Writing Center; however, there was a noticeable increase in Engineering, Social Work, and Business majors in the Fall 2009 semester, which reflected approximately 20% of the total visits. This indicates the growing popularity of the Writing Center among different faculty and the students.

In an effort to steadily increase our numbers, the Writing Center has put forth more efforts to advertise in other disciplines. Many professors have invited the Writing Center staff to give presentations to their classes at the beginning of the semesters. These presentations consist of briefly explaining to the class what services we offer. If any faculty would like the Writing Center to conduct one of these classroom visits, please call ext. 3724 or email [writingcenter@pvamu.edu](mailto:writingcenter@pvamu.edu). §

"Words - so innocent and powerless as they are, as standing in a dictionary, how potent for good and evil they become in the hands of one who knows how to combine them."  
- Nathaniel Hawthorne

## Student visits by top-six majors between January and May 2009\*.

\* out of 421 total student visits



# From the Director



*Dr. Tonya Scott, the new Director of the Writing Center*

Each year, to help celebrate Black History Month, program directors disseminate important information by and about people of African descent. Although rightfully heralded as champions of Black history, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, and their ilk, are not the only contributors; as such, those who pay homage to predecessors of progress must realize that Black history icons are not only well-known activists but also are artists, inventors, scientists, doctors, lawyers, educators, engineers, and writers.

*“Reading and writing  
are interdependent  
hallmarks of literacy.”*

Prairie View A&M University has made its mark on history for various reasons, and,

unlike other well-known accomplishments, the success of the Writing Center has played a role in PV’s—“You Know!”—enviable reputation. Of the 106 Historically Black Colleges and Universities, only about 26 have a writing center; and Prairie View A&M University has been in that number since 2003.

In addition to its establishment, specific historical events are helping the Writing Center carve its niche into PV’s history. From the passing of the torch of directorship to the Writing Center’s role in the implementation of the QEP to the events of National Day of Writing, this year marks an exciting one in the history of the Writing Center.

In August of 2009, I became the new Director of the Writing Center. (On January 2010, the former Founding Director, Dr. James M. Palmer, became the Interim Chair of the Department of Languages and Communications.)

The new QEP, “iRead: increasing Reading and Engagement for Academic Development,” is designed to enhance student learning and will aid in our continued quest for “Quality without Compromise.” Since reading and writing are the interdependent hallmarks of literacy, the Writing Center will have a more active role in student learning and the QEP through reading workshops and presentations.

For the first time celebrating the National Day of Writing, on October 20, 2009, the Writing Center hosted diverse writing workshops that encouraged all Panthers to “Get Their ‘Write On!’” Throughout this day-long event, several faculty, staff, and students took time out of their busy sched-

ules to make our first annual National Day of Writing celebration an event to which we look forward each year.

Many prospective productive Panthers utilize the Writing Center’s resources. Although no one can rewrite history, it is imperative that every person reading this helps to change the course of history and to make our Writing Center second to none.

Write on! §

**Dr. Tonya Scott**

## WRITING CENTER STAFF

**Tonya Scott, Ph.D.**

Director  
Assistant Professor, English

### Peer Writing Consultants

**Keith Evans**

MA Student, English

**Joy Patterson**

MA Student, English

**Shashimo Simpson**

Political Science

**Michael Moore**

Political Science

**Eugenia Anyanwu**

Biology

The Writing Center · Rm. 118, Hilliard  
Hall · Open Monday-Friday  
writingcenter@pvamu.edu

# &mpersand: Dr. Mike on writing

by Michael Moore

Dr. Michael J. Nojeim is a published and experienced Associate Professor of Political Science with a strong opinion about the value of writing to a mind and a career. He asks a question about the mind: “What does the mind do that is more amazing than reading and writing?” Dr. Mike, as he is often called, goes on to explain that in reading and writing, the brain conveys meaning by arranging arbitrary symbols into a prescribed pattern and delivers messages that can topple governments or change lives.

According to Dr. Mike, “The purpose of developed writing in my class is to help students think and express themselves succinctly and quickly, when otherwise they would not.” Dr. Mike also says, “I use [writing assignments] to assess students’ thinking ability, analytical ability, expressive ability, receptive ability, and the ability of students to follow explicit directions.”

Students need to tackle many kinds of writing assignments to achieve success at the university level. Dr. Mike encourages students to write and write well, regardless of the class. When questioned regarding the right circumstance for a trip to the Writing Center, Dr. Mike felt that students could bring *any* assignment in for consultation. “I tell my students they should write their papers once and rewrite it at least twice. I cannot imagine any reason why someone *wouldn't* go to the writing center.”

While Dr. Mike considers writing important for academic pursuits, how is writing useful to a professional? When asked what purpose his writing skills have served for him, he says, “In short, they guarantee my continued employment. Without my writing skills I would not have this job. It’s as simple as that.”

Part of the reason Dr. Mike emphasizes the writing process in his classes might be the way most assignments start out. After all, the reason for the process is the fact that a paper is never perfect on the first attempt. Never. “I think that the quality of writing on campus is less than optimal, but, with the university’s new Quality Enhancement Plan, called iREAD, I expect the reading and writing skills of PV graduates to increase significantly in the coming years.”

Dr. Mike truly cares about the quality of his students’ learning experience, and his reflections about his time in academia convey that. He commented that the highlights of his academic career are his experiences with students in the classroom, describing a synchronicity similar to the one basketball players might experience when every shot is a score. Students should give his perspective some thought and become the best writers they can be. The Writing Center might be the first step. §



Dr. Mike Nojeim, Associate Professor of Political Science

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*“I tell my students they should write their papers once and rewrite them at least twice. I cannot imagine any reason why someone wouldn’t go to the Writing Center.”*

Dr. Mike Nojeim

# Recent Changes in APA & MLA Formats

by Keith Evans

Venerable style and formatting guides now accommodate an age of digital composition.

Last year saw the release of new editions of both the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* and *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. However, some professors and even more students are not aware of these changes. With Freshman Composition courses now utilizing both MLA and APA papers in their classes, and an influx of consultations with students from various disciplines, now is the perfect time to become acquainted with the changes in both of those writing guidelines.

As academia progresses into a new technological frontier, the 6th edition of the APA format steps into the modern age by gearing itself toward friendlier online and electronic publishing. Technology has provided students with new types of sources to research as well as more sophisticated and greater detailed analyses to incorporate into their papers. This has also required the manual to focus more on the ethical issues concerning research and essay writing.

Among the many changes that will appeal to students are a simplified heading conducive to electronic publishing, and that Times New Roman is no longer the only acceptable font. Students may now use 1 or

2 spaces after a period at the end of sentences, and bolding text may now be used for level headings rather than italics.

In addition to new guidelines for reporting statistics, data tables, and graphics, there are also more guidelines for what constitutes academic language to decrease bias, and/or information on the publication process.

The new heading style for an APA paper

*“The 6th edition of the APA format steps into the modern age by gearing itself toward friendlier online and electronic publishing.”*

includes significant changes to the running head, which is now placed in the header of the cover page, is no longer included in the body, is left justified, and should be on the same line as the page number. It will be included in the header on every page in all capitals: RUNNING HEAD.

Level headings now follow a different pattern: Level 1 headings are bold, centered, and have uppercasing. Level 2 headings are bold and left-justified with uppercasing. Level 3 headings are bold, indented, have lowercasing, and end with a

period. Level 4 headings are indented, bold, italicized, and end with a period. Level 5 headings are indented, italicized, and end with a period.

*The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th edition* has gone further in embracing new technology and has included a web component with exclusive content only available online through MLA's website to those who have purchased the book.

Among the changes are that italicizing is now the only acceptable method of signifying titles of publications both in text and the works cited, where as underlining is no longer used. Students must now use only italics to designate foreign words. Most importantly, however, a citation in the works cited now must include a medium designation, e.g., Print for print publications, Web for online sources, etc. Finally, online sources no longer require a URL to be included in the works cited.

The 7th edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* are much more compact than their predecessors; however, they both contain necessary, up-to-date information for modern-day academic papers. §

# Unblocking Writing with Technology

by Dr. Tonya Scott

Software and cloud computing help the writing process.

Technology is ubiquitous, but in this age of social networking many students fail to understand how important, low-cost technological resources can be to their scholarly acumen. The following list includes some helpful resources for holistic writing growth.

ReadPlease is text-to-speech software that helps students to self-edit by allowing them to hear their writing in another's voice.

FindReplace is a feature within the word processor that finds all periods and replaces them with double carriage returns, which breaks paragraphs into individual sentences and makes it easier to proofread and edit sentence by sentence.

EtherPad.com is a web-based word processor that supports real-time writing collaborations. Google has acquired EtherPad and no longer accepts new users for their etherpad service, unless they will use a public pad.

Although pricey, ranging from \$30 to \$300, several creative writing software packages are available for creative writers who need a little help with the creative writing process from sparking an idea to publishing a work of art. Among the more popular are Master Storyteller, Storybase, and Dramatica Pro. §

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## The Writing Center DOES

- ✓ help with invention techniques such as brainstorming and freewriting.
- ✓ help students understand an assignment and instructor's expectations.
- ✓ provide constructive feedback on student writing.
- ✓ offer guidance with organization.
- ✓ help develop better research and documentation skills; avoid plagiarism.
- ✓ offer encouragement and support.

## The Writing Center DOES NOT

- ✗ do a student's work.
- ✗ offer opinions about or suggest a grade on an essay.
- ✗ proofread or edit.
- ✗ take responsibility for any stage of a student's work.

## Professor talks quality enhancement

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*from PAGE 1*

marketing the proposed QEP across campus. We have presented and announced the QEP in several assemblies just this semester. We have promotional items across campus such as T-shirts, socks, books, lights, buttons, and posters that say iREAD. Our Provost, Dr. Thomas-Smith, along with Ms. Prairie View, Chelsea Bianca, and several others were interviewed on the Frank Jackson show on KPVC 91.3. On March 6, 2010, Dr. Thomas-Smith spoke about iREAD to an audience of over 500 on campus for the Waymon Webster Counseling Conference. We will continue with new marketing ideas designed by faculty member Ms. Tracy Moore.

**Patterson:** Now that the final draft is printed, what is the next step, and how do you foresee the pieces of the project unfolding?

**FOSTER:** The final draft of the proposed Quality Enhancement Plan has been submitted to the on-site SACS review team. They will visit our campus on March 22 – 24 and will determine if in fact they accept our proposed plan. We are confident that we have a great plan for our students and hope that they will think the same. We are not able to implement anything until we get a green light from SACS which will not be announced until December 2010. We will then be able to conduct a pilot program with pieces of our plan addressed. Our full implementation date will be Fall 2011. §

# The Writing Center staff

**Keith Evans.** I graduated from Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, where I received my BA with Honors in English in the Spring of 2007. I joined the Graduate Program there, but decided to take a year

off to return home to Waller and help my family after my father was diagnosed with cancer. Now I have returned to



school at Prairie View A&M to achieve a Master's in English. I joined the Writing Center staff to help ease the financial burden on my family and to polish my own skills in writing and rhetoric. My specialty is creative writing, a path I hope to expand upon and make my career as an author. When I am not working or studying, I write, or play video games, including old nostalgic games on the NES and Atari. I love to read and write, especially dark horror or science-fiction stories. My absolute favorite author is Howard Philips Lovecraft, the father of modern horror. My favorite movie is *Repo! The Genetic Opera*.

**Shashimo Simpson.** I am an undergraduate who first worked for the Writing Center as a sophomore in spring 2008. My major is political science with a minor in business management. My ultimate goal is to become a lawyer and a restaurant owner. I am from the small island of Jamaica, where I was first introduced to the world of writing at age 8. I entered reading and writing competitions for Jamaica Mandev-

ille Parish Library, and after a few years of this involvement, I began writing articles for the *Teen Herald* newspaper before entering high school. Whenever I am not writing or reading, I enjoy playing tennis, baking, dancing, hanging out with friends, and going to the beach.



**Micheal Moore.** I came to Prairie View as a 16-year-old engineering major through the ESCI program. Shortly thereafter, I decided engineering was not for me. I decided to play to my strengths. I became a political science major, and through my studies there I was connected to the Writing Center. Political science classes offered me a wealth of opportunities to develop my understanding of the human condition. In doing so I have demonstrated my writing ability and improved my skills. I've



been writing for years, starting with lyrics in middle school, and moving forward with essay-style assignments and research papers; this sort of writing dominates my academic responsibilities to this day. I still

write lyrics and produce music when I can, and I can be found in Hobart Taylor playing keyboard from time to time.

**Joy Patterson.** I first worked as a Writing Center consultant as an undergraduate at Prairie View A&M University. I received a BA in English with a minor in Business in 2005 and then worked as a Marketing Representative for Surety Systems, Inc. before entering the English graduate program. My favorite books are *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo A. Anaya, and my favorite movies are *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, and *The Devil Wears Prada*.



**Eugenia Ayanwu.** I was born in Houston, Texas, where I graduated from Alief Hastings High School. Currently I am a senior biology major and chemistry minor involved in various organizations, including the Undergraduate Medical Academy, Beta Beta Beta Biology Honor Society, and The Fellowship of Christian College Students. I expect to graduate May 2010 with a Bachelor's degree in Biology. After acquiring my degree, I hope to attend medical school and eventually become a dermatologist. Some of my favorite books include *Of Mice and Men* and *Tuesdays with Morrie*. §

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Prairie View A&M University  
Writing Center  
Department of Languages and  
Communications  
P.O. Box 519; MS 2220  
Prairie View, Texas 77446-0156  
writingcenter@pvamu.edu

...

Dr. Tonya Scott  
Director

Dr. James Palmer  
Title III Activity Six Director

Dr. Antonio L. Jocson  
Editor

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*“Improving the Writer,  
not just the writing.”*

The Writing Center  
Room 118, Hilliard Hall



PRAIRIE VIEW A&M UNIVERSITY  
Writing Center  
Department of Languages and Communications  
P.O.Box 519; MS 2220  
Prairie View, Texas 77446-0156

