Dr. Anne Geller addresses “Writing in (Un)expected Places”

Dr. Anne Geller will keynote “Return Week” activities when she addresses the faculty and staff on Monday, August 19th. Associate Professor of English and the Director of Writing Across the Curriculum for the Institute for Writing Studies at St. John’s University, Dr. Geller will discuss the importance of “meaningful writing experiences,” a subject she is researching with St. John’s University students and a topic she speaks in educational forums around the country. More broadly, Dr. Geller’s “research focuses on student and faculty writers, writing centers, writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines, writing program administration, and co-authorship.”

Dr. Geller is widely recognized for her work supporting the improvement of student writing. She is past 2010-2011 Chair of the Northeast Writing Across the Curriculum Cons ortium and is the recipient of a 2010-2011 CCCC Research Initiative Grant to examine students’ writing experiences in cross disciplines at St. John’s University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Oklahoma.

A speaker on the national scene for improvement of students’ compositions, Dr. Geller is currently examining the impact on grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities awarded to colleges and universities over past decades to improve student writing. Her work, *When Johnny Couldn’t Write: What Came of the National Endowment for the Humanities Grants for Writing, 1973 -1987*, will explore the effectiveness of the millions of dollars “devoted to seminars for teachers of writing and to the development of writing programs at large and small, public and private colleges and universities across the country.”

Dr. Geller will meet with adjunct faculty members on Monday evening and will anticipate an all-faculty discussion of “(Un)Common Collaborations in (Un)Expected Places.” Her meeting with the Reading Center and Academic Center for Writing staff on Wednesday afternoon will be directed towards “Building (Un)Expected Bridges”.

Dr. Geller will address the college in her Thursday Convocation Program presentation, “Writing in (Un)Expected Places,” the theme of MVC’s Return Week activities in the context of the QEP focus on improving student success, persistence, retention, and graduation through building more competent and self-confident writers.
The “Ink Spot” Academic Center for Writing anchors MVC student writing success

Under the leadership of Director Kevin Williams, staff of the Academic Center for Writing (ACW) have done nothing short of turning around the academic lives of hundreds of Mountain View College students in a single year!

The key, in part, is the expanded staff which now includes David Couric, Eileen Baland, Anthony (Tony) Beunning, Margaret Geiger, Beverley Woodward, Jason Samuels, and three new writing specialists Luke Story, Ashley Harbers-Iwasko, and Frederic (Rick) Dashiel.

The second factor is the increased use of the ACW by MVC faculty and their students. Center usage jumped from slightly more than 3,300 visits during the 2011-2012 pilot study year to more than 22,000 visits during the 2012-2013 academic year. Writing specialists facilitated well over 1,500 individual writing consultations alone in the spring 2013 semester.

How important is academic support to the success of Mountain View College students? Data from the first-year QEP assessment speaks for itself:

From “Mountain View College Spring 2013 QEP and Writing Center Success Results”

“It is clear that the writing center is having an impressive positive impact on our students’ success.

The success rate for those [students] that utilized the ACW was 80.8% compared to 59.7% for those that did not utilize the writing center.

The success rates for students in WICS that utilized the ACW were 85.1% compared to 59.7% that did not. The success rates for students in QEP-Enhanced Course Sections that utilized the ACW were 94.3% compared to 67.1%.

The following chart reflects most dramatically the contrast in the success rates of students in both QEP courses and non-QEP courses who used the services of the Academic Center for Writing.

Clearly, the support students find in the ACW will continue to be an important factor in their growth as writers.
Dr. Quentin Wright, Dean of Communications and Social Sciences, and Kevin Williams, the Director of the MVC Academic Center for Writing and the QEP, have released the first major report of QEP progress following the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools last September. First-year data collected on student participation in the “QEP Courses” (Writing Intensive Courses and QEP-Enhanced Courses) reveals substantial academic improvement and success.

**From “The Executive Summary”**

The Mountain View College Quality Enhancement Plan is designed to improve student writing through the creation of an institutional structure that contains innovative instructional interventions and writing opportunities outside of a classroom environment. The plan’s primary purpose is to increase the graduation rates of students who begin in Developmental Writing courses. To accomplish this purpose, MVC has implemented three goals: (1) Develop students’ skills in mastering writing principles, (2) Increase writing within the academic disciplines, and (3) Nurture a college-wide culture of writing.

The fall 2012 and spring 2013 semesters have served as a pilot/implementation year for the QEP. As noted in the QEP submission, the purpose of the pilot year was to implement the QEP on a smaller scale and gather information regarding the QEP courses, data collection processes, advising practices as well as baseline data for several of the plan’s outcomes.

**First-Year Findings**

By most measures, the QEP pilot year was successful. There were several WICS and QEP-Enhanced Course Sections created, the data collection processes were implemented, and the professional development certification was finalized. The writing festival, poetry competition, student writing and staff QEP workshops each added a significant impact to nurture an institutional culture of writing at MVC. Our collaborative efforts with the University of North Texas in Dallas (UNTD) and the powerful insights provided by Dr. Cindy King have proven invaluable. This partnership helps to pave a pathway for MVC students to successfully transfer to UNTD and resulted in UNTD’s Spring Symposium with Dr. Harry Denny this past May. This symposium also provides a great lead into our fall 2013 return week speaker, Dr. Anne Geller, who has worked extensively with Dr. Denny on writing center research and writing across the curriculum programs. In addition, the pilot year provided insight into several steps that can be taken to improve the overall plan.

**What’s Coming**

Lessons from the pilot year will lead to several improvements of the QEP. The proposal process will be tweaked to gather more information regarding planned writing assignments and to include earlier deadlines for new course proposals.

The data collection process will be improved through the development of guidelines for writing assignments that will be submitted as QEP samples. The committee will decrease the confusion regarding the QEP offerings by labelling all course sections as QEP courses and allowing each to have an option Honors credit.

The distinction between Writing Intensive and Writing Enhanced will be determined internally.
Expansion of WIC courses exceeds QEP objective

Going into the fall, 2013, the number of QEP Courses (Writing Intensive Courses and QEP-Enhanced Courses) far exceeds initial expectations as well as the requirements of the SACS-approved Mountain View College Quality Enhancement Plan.

The MVC Quality Enhancement Plan, with its focus on student writing success, called for an initial 10 sections of Writing Intensive Courses in the 2012-2013 Pilot Year with expansions up to 50 sections by the year 2017.

The reason for expanding the number of Writing Intensive Courses and QEP-Enhanced courses is to improve student writing, a means to increasing the number of developmental writing students who eventually graduate from Mountain View College. Institutional data driving the development of the QEP Writing Program across the campus indicated that only 4% of those students who are required to take Developmental Writing ever graduate, the target population of our students driving the whole writing initiative.

In fact, during the 2012-2013 academic year, we were able to offer 20 sections in only the first semester and 21 sections last spring. Clearly, the MVC faculty understand the seriousness that effective writing and expression means to so many of our students to be successful in passing their courses, their retention in college from semester to semester, and their persistence toward graduation.

Following the unanticipated degree of support from our faculty during the QEP Pilot Year, the fall 2013 semester will offer students 41 sections in 11 disciplines, an indication that more and more faculty members are stepping forward to join the QEP faculty.

QEP faculty certification requires instructors to participate in a minimum of four hours of QEP training, focusing on the stages of the student writing process, use of the college-wide writing rubric in assessing student compositions, writing across the curriculum, writing to learn, writing software use, informational literacy, critical thinking, and/or other subjects as may be developed.

Whether or not a faculty member has yet to certify as a “QEP Faculty Member,” 2012-2013 CCSSEE data reveals, however, that 49% of faculty respondents indicated that their students “prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in.” This figure suggests that we are moving students in the right direction toward developing more confident and effective academic writers. This year the QEP Committee will implement more activities to recruit faculty from non-writing disciplines to offer “QEP Courses.”

Kevin Williams
Director of the QEP and the
Academic Center for Writing

“Information Literacy” and “Critical Thinking” — Learning Skills Assessed in 2013-14

This year the college will be assessing student learning outcomes (SLOs) for information literacy and critical thinking. The QEP Assessment Team will be conducting its evaluation based upon data collected throughout the Pilot Year. An important component in the instruction of information literacy is the support of the MVC Learning Resources Center. Staff of the library are now assigned as liaison contacts for the academic divisions. Director Vicki Marsh is the liaison for the BCMT Division, Margaret Knox for the SNAP Division, and Rosa Rosales for the COSS Division. Part of their job is to assist instructors in educating students in the disciplines about learning resources and how to evaluate them. Critical thinking is addressed in a QEP staff workshop and in staff presentations on argumentation and reasoning. Student learning in both these areas is assessed in the argumentative research paper required of all students who are completing ENGL 1302.
The first Mountain View College Culture of Writing festival was planned and organized by the culture of writing committee, a subcommittee Quality Enhancement Program (QEP) committee, chaired by Professor James Behan. This festival included a week of visual and performance art, music and literature celebrating writing and the QEP at Mountain View College! Various departments within Mountain View College converged to make this Festival memorable including marketing, graphics, professional development, the office of student life, facilities, media, administration, faculty and students!

The Opening event took place, Tuesday, April 9, 2013 from 12:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Student Courtyard. Professor Darius Frasure facilitated performances by MVC Faculty, staff, students, and professionals from the community. The open mic experience featured MVC Dance with choreography by Professor Michelle Gibson. Professor Cristina Medina’s art students created drawings inspired by the poems recited by the participants of the open mic. African Drummer and storyteller, Leo Hassan, Poet AJ Houston and Actress Ashley Wilkerson performed as special guests while students registered for the week’s workshops and listened to the stories recorded in the Common Book Storytelling Booth by participants during the fall.

The Closing Event took place Friday, April 12, 2013, from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in the Tree Top Lounge and Cliff Art Gallery in the form of a Mountain View College “DaVerse Lounge.” DaVerse was founded by poet and founder of art literacy organization, Journeyman Ink, Will Richey in 2005 at the Dallas Theater Center, and is now the best open mic and creative experience for young people in North Texas. The show happened in conjunction with the Lucas Martell Exhibit Reception, curated by David Kirkland. The seven piece band Melody Memory, led by Alejandro Perez Jr., played original tunes and improvised behind participants of the open mic event. International World Slam Poetry Champion, Joaquin Zihuatanejo and Host of the “Natty Roots open mic,” Natasha Carrizosa performed feature sets.

Art and co-founder of multidisciplinary art organization, ArtLoveMagic, David Rodriguez created a painting for the MVC writing center, and attendees responded to the experience, drawing their own works of art with Professor Cristina Medina's Art Club. Nationally renowned Art Organization, Big Thought, bussed student participants in their “Thriving Minds” Program from Wilmer Hutchins and L. V. Stockard Middle School. At the end of the night, the winners of the 2013 MVC Culture of Writing Poetry Contest were announced. Traye Sims won 3rd Place, Patrick Hughes won 2nd Place, and Heidi Bennett won 1st Place, which included an iPad from the MVC Office of Student Life! Over 200 students participated in the festival activities, and this number does not include the guests from the community.

The QEP Program is now accepting faculty applications for fall, 2014 courses

The QEP Committee is soliciting applications now for teaching QEP courses (Writing Intensive Courses and QEP-Enhanced Courses). Faculty members teaching courses that do not normally involve extensive writing activities as learning work are especially encouraged to apply as a means for expanding our writing improvement in all disciplines.

To be eligible to teach a QEP course, faculty members must be certified. Certification requires faculty applicants to complete a minimum of four hours of training, including introductions to the college-wide writing rubric and its applications and the writing process and its related assessment strategies.

To complete an application, go to the following URL and complete the online form:

http://www.mountainviewcollege.edu/QEP/Pages/proposal-form.aspx

Kevin Williams, Director of the QEP and the Academic Center for Writing, will contact interested faculty members and set up a training schedule.
MVC partners with UNT-Dallas in QEP Assessment

Dr. Cindy King, from the Department of English at The University of North Texas in Dallas, joined MVC faculty in assessing Pilot Year student writing samples. Dr. King’s observations provide independent analysis and evaluation helpful in preparing our students for matriculation into senior universities.

There were 40 student samples from WICS. Of these assignments,

- 53% met expectations on SLO 1.1: Engaging in the phases of the writing process.
- 77% met expectations on SLO 1.2: Developing written compositions.
- 55% met expectations on SLO 1.3: Employing principles of usage in written compositions.

There were 15 student samples from QEP-Enhanced Course Sections. Of these assignments,

- 80% met expectations on SLO: 1.1: Engaging in the phases of the writing process.
- 86% met expectations on SLO 1.2: Developing written compositions.
- 67% met expectations on SLO 1.3: Employing principles of usage in written compositions.

**Assessment Analysis:** The assessment team found SLO 1.3 to be the most critical area for needed improvement. Specifically, improvement is needed in the areas of punctuation, sentence structure, grammar, and sentence variety. In addition, despite achieving the 60% target on SLO 1.2, there was a significant amount of samples that did not contain proper topic sentences and sufficient paragraph development.

Dr. King noted that a large number of the samples were not acceptable in these areas. Despite the lack of data for SLO 4, she identified the ability to incorporate information appropriate to audience and subject was a critical area needing improvement.

**Recommendations/Action Steps:** Based upon the data gathered from the 2012-2013 academic year, the QEP committee has three recommendations for the next academic year:

- The assessment team will develop a common set of guidelines for writing assignments that will be submitted for the QEP sample. These guidelines will include research components and suggestions for including critical thinking elements.
- The Academic Center for Writing (ACW) will offer 20-minute editing and revising in-class workshops to target the areas of usage and development in an effort to assist instructors in teaching these concepts.
- The QEP committee will develop a framework for incorporating information literacy into QEP courses within each tier of the DCCCD core.

---

New guidelines established as a basis for evaluating student writing in the disciplines

Drs. Geoff Grimes and Dr. Quentin Wright, have developed a set of “minimal” guidelines as a basis for assigning writing in QEP courses. These guidelines will be presented to the QEP Committee for review and approval early this fall.

Approaching the 2013-2014 pilot year of the QEP, the focus was on generating a writing rubric that would be useful in assessment of writing across the disciplines. The rubric adopted by the QEP Committee and the Gen/Ed Committee as a college-wide assessment tool identifies five areas for evaluating a student paper: 1) student engagement of the writing process, 2) grammar and mechanics, 3) organization and development, 4) use of information, and 5) critical reasoning. What these standards for evaluation do not do, however, is to identify what a successful academic paper “looks like”—what constitutes a “C” paper, a “B” paper, and an “A” paper.

These guidelines define the standards between a paper that “meets expectations” and one that “fails to meet expectations,” the fundamental standards used in the MVC writing Rubric. At the same time, they establish for any paper “The beauty of these standards,” says Grimes, “is that they are applicable across all disciplines or content areas and useful for instruction in both the Writing Intensive Courses and the QEP-Enhanced Courses.”
No ‘Texas Brag’/Just ‘Texas Fact’: The QEP Initiative is changing students’ lives

Xochitl Aguilar and Alexander Shaw are just two of the hundreds of students who visit the Academic Center for Writing (ACW) each week and who can attest to the role that support in the ACW has meant to them in their studies.

“I’ve seen them here just about every day this summer,” notes Director Kevin Williams. “They’re just two of many of our students you’ll see pretty much camped out here.”

Xochitl (pronounced “Zo–chi”) is a sophomore student. “My name comes from the Aztecs,” she beams proudly. “I’ve been going here for two years,” she says. “I’ll be finishing my studies for my Associates degree in the spring.”

Xochitl is pursuing a career as a bilingual education teacher and is a member of the “ITT” Teacher Education cooperative between Mountain View College and Texas Tech University. She plans to continue at Mountain View College in the Texas Tech teacher preparation program to complete her four-year degree.

“I started here with English as my second language,” Xochitl explains. I had a lot to learn about English and expressing myself, so it’s been a real struggle. But I have received a lot of help in the Writing Center. The [staff] go over my papers and help me edit them.” This past semester, Xochitl studied biology with Dr. Sarah Hutchins. “I wrote a paper—a research paper—on ‘global warming.’ Dr. Hutchins helped me a lot on it. She reviewed it for everything. I think I rewrote that paper three times before I finished it. I got an ‘A’ on it! I’m very proud of that.”

Alexander points out another advantage of working in the ACW. “Free printing!” he says with a smile. “You can save a lot of money!” Alexander is preparing for a career in mechanical engineering. He’ll finish his studies, he says, at The University of North Texas.

“The biggest benefit I get from working in the Writing Center,” he claims unequivocally, “is better grades!” Oh, like Xochitl, I get help in editing and all that, but more important, the writing specialists here first help me understand what I am supposed to do on an assignment and what the paper should look like.”

A recent student of art professor James Behan, Alexander visited a local art museum as a part of a class assignment.

“The MADI Museum,” Alexander explains, “is a modern art center in Dallas. I had to go there and write a paper on the principles of the design and sculptures I saw. It wasn’t an easy paper! The Writing Center people helped me to revise my approach and my organization. They helped me to better focus my paper on the objective of the assignment.”

“The bottom line for me,” says Alexander, “is that getting help in the Writing Center has helped me greatly to improve my grades.”

“Xochitl and Alexander are now typical students who come here for help,” says Williams. “And now we have the staff to help make success happen for more and more of our students, and we have been getting much more support—like Professor Behan—who send their students here for help with their papers.”

“In the past,” explains Kevin, “we were getting a few students from Developmental Writing classes and some English classes, but now—and I think because of the QEP awareness throughout the college—we are getting students coming to us from ‘unexpected places,’ students with writing assignments from across all the disciplines, and that’s a good thing!”
QEP courses designated as Honors credit courses

Students enrolled in “QEP Courses” who complete their work with an average of 90 or above, or the equivalency for an “A,” will receive Honors credit for their achievement.

The QEP Committee agreed to allow the awarding of honors based upon the increased amount of writing and related critical thinking the QEP courses require.

Both “Writing Intensive Courses” and “QEP-Enhanced Courses” are promoted generally as “QEP Courses.” This is to avoid student confusion about the two designations. However, while emphasizing writing in both, there are significant differences in the amount of writing the two types of courses require of students.

WICS require students to write a minimum of 7,000 words, including a major research paper and others that are created with periodic instructor intervention in reviewing the evolving compositions. The assignments are assessed based upon the college’s common “QEP Writing Rubric.”

“QEP-Enhanced Courses” require fewer written assignments than that required in WICS, but nevertheless, writing not normally included in the discipline’s learning work. Professor James Behan requires students in his art classes to write papers based upon observations of art works and visits to centers of art in the Dallas area. Professor Tamar Slider requires her math courses to write several short compositions addressing issues in mathematics.

While students in “QEP-Enhanced Courses” write fewer compositions, at least one paper receives instructor intervention during its development, and students are encouraged to seek supplementary assistance in the Academic Center for Writing.

Honors credits received in the “QEP Courses” parallel Honors credits awarded in traditional courses across the disciplines in the MVC “Honors Scholar Program” and count toward the designation as an “MVC Honors Scholar,” the highest academic achievement recognized by the MVC college faculty. MVC Honors Scholar” designation requires that students complete a minimum of 30 hours of college courses at MVC with a GPA of 3.5 or higher and six courses with “Honors.” Honors credit require students to complete a course with a grade of “A” and an additional “Honors Project” negotiated between the student and the instructor.

Students completing Honors credit in “QEP” courses are eligible to participate in a drawing for an iPad provided each year through the Office of Student Life.