

The Writing Program at Beaver College

Elaine Maimon

The philosophy of the writing program at **Beaver College** has been influenced most by the work of Mina Shaughnessy, Kenneth Bruffee, and James Kinneavy. Shaughnessy has taught us that our students' errors often reflect their innocence of how writers behave and that it is our job to model the processes of writing and revising for them. Bruffee has taught us that we can best teach these processes through collaborative learning. And Kinneavy has taught us that faculty members in all disciplines can improve the teaching of their own subject matter when they become teachers of writing who assign projects that require feedback which forces students' attention on the aims and audience of their work.

We implement these philosophical principles through a program which includes: **freshman composition; instruction in writing in all college courses; a Writing Center; and a graduate program in the teaching of writing.**

Freshman Composition

All entering students are required to take two semesters of composition. Approximately fifteen percent of the freshman class is placed in **Basic Writing** before they enter the freshman composition course. They receive full academic credit for **Basic Writing** as well as freshman composition.

The freshman composition course is designed to introduce a variety of writing processes; to teach collaborative learning procedures, including how to share drafts of work in progress; to exemplify elements of writing through a brief cross-disciplinary, reading list; and to provide opportunities for practice in the conventions of standard written English. At least one of the four major writing projects of the course is coordinated with

an assignment in another freshman course. This practice of encouraging students to make their content area writing assignments the work of their freshman level composition classes leads naturally to cooperation between the composition staff and colleagues in other departments.

Writing in All College Courses

Faculty members in all disciplines reinforce the procedures that students have learned in composition by assigning extended papers in draft stages and then providing the major portion of their commentary on preliminary drafts, reserving until the end the grade which assesses all elements of the finished product. Courses in most disciplines provide for a variety of collaborative learning procedures, and students are required to write formal acknowledgments to the responses they receive from peers and from instructors. Professors in all disciplines also use writing as a mode of teaching by asking students to do brief in-class writing exercises that supplement the usual lectures and discussions.

The Writing Center

Trained undergraduate writing consultants staff the **Writing Center**, which is a place for collaborative learning, not for remediation. These writing consultants are prepared to help students at any stage of their writing process, from the battle against writer's block to the final proofreading. But the pencil is always in the hand of the writer, not of the consultant, and writers must thank the writing consultants for their help formally on the acknowledgements page of the finished paper.

Writing Center consultants are available during specified hours in the student activities center. Writing consultants
(cont. on p. 95)

procedure is that it accomplishes two goals at once: it enables the teacher to focus on materials of his or her discipline and at the same time to teach students a discovery procedure which they can use in writing their essays.

None of these suggestions, of course, will solve all the problems of teaching writing in other disciplines. None come with any guarantee of certain success. All entail a good bit of work for us and for our colleagues. That, I think, simply acknowledges reality. Improving student writing is a difficult, time-consuming task, one that demands the best efforts of all of us. These suggestions do, however, help us focus our energies; my own experience suggests that time spent in these areas is likely to pay off. At the very least, it will preclude our having to check papers for grammar and style while someone else reads them for content.

Lee Odell, a member of the English Department at **SUNY**, Albany, has written frequently about a wide variety of topics related to the teaching of writing.

Maimon (cont. from p. 83)

also hold dormitory hours, sometimes during those bleak, wee hours when so many undergraduates are actually confronting that intimidating blank page.

The Graduate Program in the Teaching of Writing and Other Outreach Activities

Beaver offers a Master of Arts in Education with a Concentration in Written Communications. During the summers of 1981 and 1982 the **National Endowment for the Humanities** is sponsoring extended institutes on the **Beaver College** campus for secondary and post-secondary humanists who are interested in the teaching of writing.

Elaine P. Maimon is the Director of the Writing Program at Beaver College, Glenside, Pennsylvania

Stander (cont. from p. 86)

disciplines and the logical appropriateness of teaching such conventions in the content areas. Although this idea, in spite of its obvious logic, is not readily embraced by many content-area teachers, the **ECB** presentation was extremely effective. **Andover's** staff grew as a result of its relationship with the **ECB**; and it is hoped that **Andover's** writing program will be further enhanced through a continuing relationship with our **ECB** colleagues at **The University of Michigan**.

Aaron Stander is the Secondary Reading Consultant for the **Oakland Public Schools** , Pontiac, Michigan.

