



Friday @ the Center: March 30, 2007

Course Evaluation Responses Rise

We had a significant increase in our rate of course evaluation responses for last quarter: from 31% (fall) to 42% (winter). A number of factors might have contributed to this rise: increasing numbers of faculty are requiring the completion of evaluations as part of their course participation points; others are offering extra credit if a certain percentage of students complete the evaluation; I sent a letter explaining the importance of the process to all students and invited their comments; and the Center conducted a publicity campaign aimed at the students via posters and an advertisement in the *Falcon*. Students continue to say that two factors keep them from participating: 1) their belief that faculty don't pay attention to the evaluations, and 2) it takes too much time. Several wrote me saying that they thought the process was important, but at a crunch time they only did what was required, so maybe we should make it required! Convincing students to complete their evaluations is a matter of changing campus culture, and we all need to continue to emphasize the importance of student participation. Why not take the time next week to talk about course evaluations with your students?

Writing for Everyone: Part 5

This is a continuation of a series begun last quarter, in which we consider ways in which all instructors can help students learn to write. Each week's column has two components: 1) a discussion of an aspect of the global process of writing, and 2) an explanation of one of the most common "finishing" errors that college students make. In working with students on their writing, it is important to pay attention both to global issues of focus, clarity, logic, and organization, as well as to the finishing details of grammar, punctuation, documentation style, etc. Each discipline has its own kind of writing assignments, expectations, and documentation, yet there are some common elements in good writing on which we can all focus. References are to our university-wide writing handbook, *The Everyday Writer*. For past columns, see the *F @ the Center* archives at <http://www.spu.edu/depts/csfd/fridays.asp>.

GLOBAL TIP: You may remember that we've talked about the writing process as including the steps of creating, shaping, and finishing. Of course, while we work on writing, we often move back and forth between these steps. In many forms of academic writing, one of the difficulties in the shaping process occurs in the use of supporting evidence from sources. Many assignments require synthesis of a number of different sources, but students tend to rely too much on one source. They then may need to go back to the creating stage in terms of doing more research. You may need to teach students how to do effective synthesis in your discipline.

STRATEGY: Give students material from three sources and a topic sentence and ask them to write a paragraph putting it all together. Then show them the paragraph you would write. This is a good warm up exercise for a paper that requires synthesis. (Don't even think about grading these! Just give the students the experience of practicing.)

FINISHING TIP: The fifth most frequent punctuation error in college writing, according to Lunsford's research, is **missing commas(s) with a nonrestrictive element**. Any part of a sentence that provides *extra* but not *necessary* information should be set off with commas. Another way to think about this is to ask whether these words, phrases, and clauses *limit* or *restrict* the meaning of the words they modify. **Herman Melville, who sailed the seven seas, wrote *Moby-Dick*.** (Extra info, but not limiting) **Those mariners who sailed the seven seas often died at an early age.** (Limiting info) See the difference? It's tricky.

April Events of Interest:

- *April 10, 2007*
Vali Nasr
1:00 pm -1:50 pm, Upper Gwinn
A public lecture by one of America's leading voices on the history of Islam.
- *April 11, 2007*
Social Venture Plan Competition Showcase
3:00 – 6:00 pm, Weter Lounge
Students from all disciplines display plans for social venture projects—businesses that help others.
- *April 12, 2007*
Is Grad School For You?
1:00 pm - 1:50 pm, DH 353
An informational meeting for undergraduates that addresses questions such as what kinds of graduate programs are there? How do I know if I can do graduate level work? MA or Ph.D? How do you pay for graduate school?
- *April 17, 2007*
NWCCU Self-Study Forum
1:00 pm – 1:50 pm, Upper Gwinn
A forum hosted by President Eaton that explains the SPU self-study and upcoming ten-year university accreditation visit (April 23-25)
- *April 19, 2007*
NY Times Workshop & Faculty Luncheon
12:15 pm - 1:50 pm, Upper Gwinn - Cascade Room
An informative workshop regarding using the resources of the *New York Times*.
- *April 19, 2007*
Winifred E. Weter Lecture, by Professor Todd Rendleman
7:30 pm - 9:00 pm, DH 150
“I know y'all think I'm pretty square, but tuh, I believe what I believe": Images of Evangelicals in American Film”

I don't know about you, but I'm hoping that all our **March** showers will bring **April** flowers.

Have a good week,

Susan

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