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“The Woman Upstairs”

An Insider Perspective from a University Learning Center Tutor

Many composition minded CSUF students are familiar with the writing center, but the first floor of Pollak Library is not the only place on campus that students can go for feedback on their writing. Club member, Christina Kennedy is a graduate student here at CSUF and an English tutor at the University Learning Center (ULC). She was kind enough to answer some of our questions about what goes on in the other tutoring center:

TWC: What is it like working in the ULC?

Christina Kennedy: In a nutshell, it's the best job I've ever had and I love it! And for the record, I've done it all: retail, restaurants, pizza delivery, and library cataloging.

TWC: What kind of training did/do you go through?

CK: Tutor training at the ULC is never-ending! Before I began tutoring, I read through the ULC tutor handbook. Tutor training continues with monthly staff meetings, new tutor training, and discussions with other tutors. All of this training is constantly helping me grow into a more effective writing tutor.

TWC: What information is in your ULC tutor handbook?

CK: The tutor handbook was tutor theory for the most part. I think it also had example tutoring scenarios and it introduced me to the "put the pencil down" philosophy. It feels like eons ago, so I'm

having a hard time remembering more details about the handbook.

TWC: What is it like working with tutors outside of the English discipline? How often do you see them?

CK: I see non-English tutors every day in our break room. I think it's wonderful working with them because, based on

CK: From what I've gathered, it's pretty basic tutoring and not different from most tutoring places. The tutees check-in for their appointments or come in on a walk-in basis and then I greet them and introduce myself while we get situated at one of our designated tutoring tables. I then have the tutee explain to me what we will be working on and give me as much background information as they can. Usually, the materials they bring to me are full drafts of papers for English 99 or 101 courses. I typically have the tutees read their papers out loud to me while I follow along because they often find their own errors without any assistance from me. For example, I never point to a sentence fragment and say, "This is a sentence fragment. This is how you fix it." The tutees usually read it out loud and then pause after reading errors because they know it sounds incorrect, but it is more difficult for them to correct it than it is for students whose specialty is English, literature, and composition. I've never really contemplated my tutoring philosophy, but I suppose I can equate my attitude on tutoring to something like Jiminy Cricket: You want to guide your tutees to grow as writers, but you can't just give them the easy way out because that's not how learning works. [Continued on Page 2]



our break room chats, I'm exposed to material that I have not even seen or thought of since my days at community college. Biology? Mathematics? They're distant memories for me. Other students are tutors for subjects that I've never even delved into such as Computer Science, Anthropology, and Chemistry. The interaction between the tutors is always peaceful and, although our conversations aren't always academically based, they are always engaging and enlightening because we come from a plethora of backgrounds and interests.

TWC: How would you describe a typical tutorial? Do you have a tutoring philosophy?

ULC Inside Perspective, Continued

TWC: Is there anything you wish tutees knew?

CK: Yes! I wish tutees knew that tutors do not simply hand out answers. Tutoring is a process in which, like I mentioned earlier, you guide the tutees to grow and discover their answers. Yes, the goal is to have a flawless, academic paper, but the journey to achieving that paper is the most important aspect of the tutoring experience. It's cliché, but it really is the journey, not the destination.

TWC: How often do you have meetings? What are your meetings like?

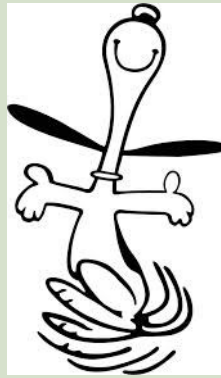
CK: The ULC has monthly meetings on Fridays that last 2 hours. Throughout that time, we have an ice-breaker question and then move to a worksheet or activity that either allows us to give thought to what we have been experiencing as tutors or teaches us a lesson on tutoring. Usually these activities are done alone and then we get into groups to share and reflect. We also open the floor for anyone who wishes to suggest new ideas for how things are run at the ULC. We also have an Employee of the Month, which is great because they are chosen by their peers. The peers' positive comments about the Employee of the Month are revealed before the tutor is named. You can always tell it makes the tutor feel special and valued. After the 2-hour meeting, new tutors (tutors who have been employed at the ULC less than a year) stay for another hour of "New Tutor Training." This extra hour consists of similar activities, but it seems to be more focused on approaches to tutoring and discussion about what works and how to handle certain scenarios with tutees.

TWC: What was the application process like for the ULC? And how long have you worked there?

CK: I have worked at the ULC since November 2013, so only 4 months, but that's a lot of tutees. I remember filling out the application online and then handing it in to the ULC front desk (Pollak Library, north, 2nd floor). The application can be found un-

der the "Job Opportunities" tab at <http://www.fullerton.edu/ulc/>. After I submitted the application, a resumé, and a letter of recommendation, I was interviewed by both Lea Beth and Dannaca. I remember the interview lasted about 30 minutes. I originally was being interviewed to fill the position as an online writing tutor, but was asked at the time of the job offer to work as an in-person writing tutor. In hindsight, I feel like I made an excellent choice in agreeing to do in-person tutoring. The connection between tutors and tutees is closer when you're both looking at their work at the same time.

TWC: What is the most challenging thing about working in the ULC?



CK: I think all tutors have different personal challenges, but I think one that we all find challenging is strategizing tutoring methods for each individual tutee. Some approaches work well with most tutees, but then others are more difficult. Since everyone has different ways of learning, tutees must have multiple ways of teaching to accommodate their tutees.

TWC: What is the most rewarding part of your job?

CK: The most rewarding part is when the same tutees begin to regularly visit me and I see improvements in their work! Also, a few weeks ago I had a tutee who I had seen a few times in the fall return for more tutoring. She made a point to share with me that she did well in her classes that involved English composition and her thanks were plentiful. Even though I take minimal credit for her improvement and told her she did most of the work herself, I was definitely Snoopy dancing my way to the car that night.

The Final Countdown: Finding Your M.A. Project Idea

Laura Powell-Martin, English MA student and Teaching Writing Club secretary, reflects on the struggle to locate a thesis topic. For help, she turns to fellow students and instructors in the department.

It's come to this: You're over halfway through the master's program, you're going strong, but the time is quickly approaching when you should make your grad check appointment with Dr. Blaine and choose a faculty advisor for your final project. There's only one problem: you have NO IDEA what you want to write about. Like many (or, I hope, at least some) of you, I have been struggling to find an idea for my master's project. Sure, I have subjects and areas I like, but nothing really stands out. I've done research here and there, but the gaps seem harder and harder to find. So, I decided to interview students in the graduate program and professors in our English department to see what I could glean from their wisdom. If you are struggling with your final project idea, as I am, I hope that this short article will help you on your journey.

Did your idea come from a genre or heuristic that you were already passionate about or did it come from somewhere surprising?

My project idea came from somewhere unexpected, actually. Initially I talked with my advisor about something I felt sounded "academic" or "project-worthy," more of a traditional exploration of a theme throughout a couple of novels. However, when he asked if I "loved" the topic, I wasn't so sure. He reminded me that I would be working on this for the next two semesters, which really put me into a moment of uncertainty. I had come in to gush about a book he had loaned me for leisure reading, a collection of essays comparing blues music and our literary heritage— not something I had initially categorized as particularly scholarly— so I was a little surprised when he pointed at it, asking, "Why not do something like that? Consider writing something you'd be thinking about anyways." Pop music always managed to trickle its way into my seminar papers, in some way or another, but I'd never considered making it the center of any serious venture. I was worried that others might knock my subject as low-brow or frivolous, a concern he was very quick to dismiss: "Don't think about other people. This is your project. The project is sort of your last chance to dance, so you might as well make it to a song you like; do you really want to get down to Chicago, or is it going to be Otis Redding? You know you want it to be Otis." Long story short, the most natural and exciting ideas are sometimes so obvious that we can't see them sitting right in front of us.

- Bob Neis, TWC Treasurer

Aside from what one is interested in, what would you say is the best starting place for students who do not have an idea?

Read. And then read more. Academic projects do not come from information you already know, but from discoveries you don't understand. You can't have those discoveries unless you are open to new texts (and of course grad seminars are a great place to explore new texts).

- Dr. Kelman, CSUF English Department

There is no one perfect project idea. My advice is to enjoy your classes, write about what interests you most (not just what might get the grade), and let your ideas develop from patterns in your writing. Then, try on some ideas by reading further and even writing out questions you have about those topics. It's also a good thing to talk about your ideas. Find someone who is at least a little bit interested. If that proves difficult make an appointment at the writing center. They get paid to listen.

- Emily King, TWC President

I would suggest two ways, which ultimately should intersect. Start with something that interests you, no matter how small. Try reading widely on this subject to look for examples and see if it is an isolated case or part of a trend. This is basically what I did when I was looking around for a specific argument to make about space and theater/drama. The second would involve examining the trends of scholarship to see what has been done, what hasn't been done, what's happening right now. If you can identify a trend in the making, you do a lot toward justifying the implicit mandate of any project: why is it worth doing. If, for instance, you recognize that the scholarship on Eugene O'Neill has been mired in autobiography for decades, you can challenge that by introducing a new direction. Or, if the scholarship had long emphasized one interpretation of a work (like the nymphomania reading of Blanche from Williams's *Streetcar Named Desire*) but is not going in another direction (like considering Blanche in terms of trauma theory), that's something that you can jump on.

- Dr. Westgate, CSUF English Department

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The Final Countdown, Continued

What would you say students should do if they like many different periods and styles of literature and do not favor one particularly? If students simply do not have the passion for one specific area of study, how can they go about narrowing their focus?

Two suggestions come to mind. First, just choose what has the most potential. If a student cannot decide based on enthusiasm toward one subject over another, then consider which one has the most potential for original scholarship. This might, by default, be the more contemporary work since there is less time/scholarship on most of these. Second, you could do something comparative, which considers more than one period or style. I just had a student do a project on a Jacobean playwright and an absurdist playwright, who were separated by nearly 400 years. The project worked well.

- Dr. Westgate, CSUF English Department

My first answer: welcome to comparative literature. If you are interested in the relation between literary periods, between different genres or texts, if you are interested in relation, then you are already a comparatist. But the second answer (if comparative literature doesn't appeal to you) is simply: read deeply and take seminars on specific genres or literary periods. You can't be passionate about things you haven't encountered (unless you're passionate about "unknown unknowns," but then we're back in Comp Lit...).

- Dr. Kelman, CSUF English Department

Do you have any other advice or comments about discovering the “big idea” to write about?

It would be wise to begin with an end in mind, and ask yourself what career purposes you would ultimately want your efforts applied to. Too many M.A. projects die once they are submitted. Ask yourself how you might get some additional mileage from your investment.

- Professor, CSUF English Department

Concerning creativity, David Lynch suggests that ideas are “like fish. If you want to catch little fish, you can stay in the shallow water. But if you want to catch the big fish, you’ve got to go deeper. Down deep, the fish are more powerful and more pure. They’re huge and abstract. And they’re very beautiful.” The “big ideas” lurk in murky depths of consciousness. Stay open minded, take some chances. You don’t always know what the outcome will be, or what you will find, but do you really want to stay in the shallow end with your project?

- Bob Neis, TWC Treasurer

It seems like it comes down to several things: what do you like, what’s going on in your current classes (any gaps/ interests/things to investigate), talking to people, and making sure to read a lot. Passion and interest are the key. I wrote the first part of this article at the beginning of the semester. Since then, I’ve talked to a few people and I had a friend encourage me, saying “you have lots of good ideas Laura. I don’t think you’ll have a problem.” That little boost of support and confidence made all the difference in the world to me. I was nervous that I wouldn’t have an idea and focused too much on time running out, but once I talked to a few people and took the above advice to heart, I realized I have several main interests and may even possibly find a gap in scholarship! I’ve narrowed my project down to three possible options, and I am planning on spending our break digging a little and then talking to the potential professors afterward. I would say you should do the same—talk to people, encourage each other, read stuff that confuses and interests you, look for trends in what you continuously write about, think about the subjects you are studying and consider not just what you enjoy, but what you could write about for a long time and not lose interest. What I also learned is to not force things. Yes, there is a time frame, but use the time you have to see what rises to the surface of your consciousness. Every semester, we are harried in our classes, but it’s important is to take time to listen to yourself and observe what it is that remains with you after the projects are over.

How I Found, Lost and Re-found Eco-criticism by Elle Mooney

When I decided to go to grad school, the term eco-criticism wasn't circulating through the department. I wasn't sure what focus I wanted to take with my Master's, so when I had to write my personal statement I took out all of my essays from my freshman composition class to my last semester 400-level classes and spread them out to look for a trend. Through this, I discovered that I really liked poetry and the analysis of nature metaphors. Even when I was discussing novels or short stories, my analysis lingered around settings and scenery. I wasn't sure what this meant beyond that, but I decided to go for it.

In "Intro to Grad Studies," Chris Westgate introduced the class to trauma theory and ecocriticism to help push our theoretical ideas. We were also given an assigned list of literature to write our projects for the course. Since H.D. was the only poet on the list, I knew I'd write about her. But, perhaps ecocritically? What did that mean? What was this madness? I checked out the 1996 *Ecocritical Reader* from the library, skimmed through the essays, and found Neil Evernden—probably because of the pictures. My paper turned into a case study of sorts in which I

examined H.D.'s imagist technique in *Sea Garden* using Neil Evernden's ideas on the ecological interrelatedness of subject and object and the permeable boundaries between the two. Since H.D. is not considered a nature writer, I felt this look offered some interesting insights into her poetic technique that would enhance any psychological and/or feminist reading of the text. In other words, I was hooked and was determined to try it again. With each subsequent paper, I worked to find these connections especially where they were unexpected. However, the more I studied eco-critical theory, the more skeptical I became of its monocular focus on nature writing and environmental policy, seemingly to the exclusion of a broader application into non-nature texts. And I knew didn't want to read "nature" poetry. I started to distance myself from ecocriticism in search of theory that was more in line with my own interests. In that search, I found spatiality and geocriticism, which rock (no pun intended).

However, lately I am coming around again. Evernden's work with the subject-object is awesome, and so is his study of aesthetics in literary environmentalism, both of which help integrate science and poetics. Also, I find I gravitate towards Michael McDowell's Bakhtinian ecocriticism which looks at differences rather than symbolic similarities to avoid totalizing environmental perception. Both essays are found in that original *Ecocritical Reader*, and both now inform my master's project. Besides, I figure that if ecocriticism is lacking in divergent voices, maybe I should be there adding to the conversation. My time away from ecocriticism allowed me to explore more theory and helped me find a true interrelatedness of all theory that these ecocritics would approve of. Spatiality, geocriticism, ecocriticism—as long as I am able to continue to look at what I find compelling in texts then I am where I should be.



Upcoming Event: TWC's Interview Skills Workshop!

If you attended our "Ask A TA" Workshop you know what the TA job will be like. Now it's time to find out how to get that job! Join us on **Thursday, April 17th from 7-8:30** for our **Interview Skills Workshop**. Jeff Sipos, an experienced teacher, workshop leader and interviewer will share his knowledge of successful interviewing. We'll also have an opportunity to practice answering some common interview questions so we're ready to make a great impression. While this workshop will be geared toward getting

teaching jobs it is open to any interested in sharpening their interview skills.

This workshop will count towards the Professional Teaching and Writing Certificate (which, we should add, doesn't look too bad on your CV when it's time to apply for teaching positions). The conversation will be great, you'll get credit for attending, and you'll gain some new skills! What's not to love?

Call for Papers: Go South and Go Green!

The South Atlantic Modern Language Association will hold its Ecocomposition, Green Rhetoric(s), and Digital Environments conference in Atlanta, GA on Nov. 7-9, 2014.

They are seeking papers that attempt to understand ecological and sustainable approaches to composition and rhetoric. 300-word abstracts are due by May 15th. For more info, visit <http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/56084>



*Special Panel: The Rhetoric of Waste and Sustainability. **Is the rhetoric of waste and sustainability a validation or a critique of neoliberalism?***

If you're interested in these topics consider joining this panel for the conference.

Submit a 300-word abstract by June 15th. For more info, visit <http://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/node/55998>

Call For Officers!

The Teaching Writing Club has open positions for club officers for the 2014-2015 academic year. Being an officer in a department club is a great service opportunity with academic and professional benefits. It's also not bad for your social life and it keeps you informed.

If you're interested in serving as secretary, treasurer, workshop director, fundraising coordinator, newsletter coordinator, volunteer service coordinator, or something else email a short letter of intent (like a few sentences) and two recommendations (no letters, just their contact information) to teachingwritingclub@gmail.com.