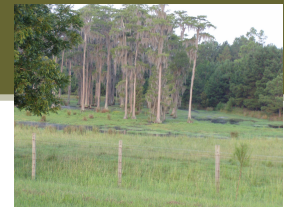


BLACKWATER REFLECTIONS

Blackwater Writing Project
Dept. of English, Valdosta State University
1500 N. Patterson St. Valdosta, GA 31698



Member Updates

Charles Alex Alvarez received applied for and received five grants to establish an Environmental Awareness Club at Valdosta High School.

Latahshia Coleman is in the news:
http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/2007-03-26-cover-baltimore-schools_N.htm

Narci Drossos received a fellowship to attend The Memorial Library Summer Seminar on Holocaust Education: Reading, Writing, and Teaching the Holocaust.

Narci Drossos was appointed to ELLE magazine's 2006 Grand Prix Readers' Jury in fiction (her review was published in the May 2006 issue). Also, she was selected for the 2007 Grand Prix Readers' Jury in non-fiction.

Lindi Elliott and Donna Sewell attended NWP's Rural Sites Network Conference in Albuquerque, NM, March 5-7, 2007.

Jason Fisher's wife, Valerie Fisher, passed away unexpectedly. In lieu of flowers, her siblings have set up a trust to benefit her sons' education. Contributions may be sent to the Valerie Quinn Fisher Memorial Trust, P.O. Box 725406, Atlanta, GA, 31139.

Carlyn Maddox, Donna Sewell, and Jana Williams attended the NWP Spring Meeting in Washington, DC, March 28-31, 2007.

Carol Thompson has been named STAR Teacher at Brooks County High School.

Jenifer Trevisol Peper currently directs the Writing Center at the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). The Writing Center recently made the news:
<http://www.thecampuschronicle.com/features/articles/070119d.cfm>

Kimberly Ross married Karl Dixon on April 1, 2007, at 2:00 p.m. at Gin Creek.

Do you have an update? Send it to [Diana Chartier](mailto:Diana.Chartier@bellsouth.net) (5chartier@bellsouth.net) for inclusion in the next issue.

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Welcome, 2007 ISI Fellows

Valerie Bennett, Gray Middle School
Amy Brosemer, Dewar Elementary
Donna Cook, Lanier Co. High School
Kathy Cook, Hahira Middle School
Sheri Dorsett, Coffee High School
Rebecca Elmore, Hahira Middle School
Katie Eyles, Wacona Elementary School
Joel Futch, Jr., Lanier Elementary
Amanda Gaither, Lanier County Middle
Analiese Hamm, Lowndes High School*
Breah Johnson, Brooks County High
Katherine McKinney, Valdosta State
Sonya Riley, Moulton-Branch Elem.
Andrea Rogers, Valdosta State

*Currently student teaching

News from Lake Seminole: A Report from the Writing Retreat

By Donna Sewell

March 23-25, 2007, Blackwater Writing Project Teacher Consultants met at Lake Seminole to write, share, and respond.

Everyone arrived by 7:00 or so Friday night, but people struggled to find Chere Peguesse and me, the two facilitators. Cell phone service didn't exist for any of us within the park—one problem with hosting the retreat at a state park. However, the spacious accommodations and low cost more than made up for the lack of cell phones.

After dinner Friday night, we retreated to cabins to write for two hours. Saturday morning some people wanted feedback on their drafts after breakfast while others wanted more writing time. The writing retreat allowed people to follow whatever path worked for them.

Speaking of paths, we opted for a walk along the gopher tortoise trail, which went through some flatwoods and over Seminole Pond. We saw no gators, no tortoises, just some dog crap and a black snake. One twisted tree engaged us, and of course we entertained ourselves with our own talk. The walk energized us, helping us resist the post-lunch temptation to nap. Beautiful weather greeted us throughout the weekend, trying to lure us from our cabins, but we resisted—mostly—as we drafted and revised our texts.

Writing projects varied from revising a teaching demonstration for an article, organizing a thesis, writing an article about using pop culture in the classroom, applying rubrics to student essays, and writing an article about the collaborative use of rubrics. The diversity of projects prompted lots of discussion as we gathered for meals and caffeine injections.

It was a good, productive weekend. Between writing sessions we refueled on caffeine, sandwiches, chips, crab and artichoke dip, brownie, lasagna, and pigs in a blanket.

We noted what needed to change for next time: plan it over a three-day weekend, bring a working printer, and add responding groups. Overall, though, the participants rated the retreat highly and plan to reconvene again. We thank the National Writing Project for the mini-grant that helped support this retreat.

Write Nights

Write Nights will be at Hildegard's 6:30-8:00 p.m.

May 10, 2007

June 14, 2007 (A Special Family Write Night)

July 19, 2007

August 16, 2007

Blog with us from home.

It's easy. Go to <http://www.blogger.com> and log in. Don't have a link to the blog for BWP? Email Donna Sewell (dsewell@valdosta.edu), and ask to be invited.

Send newsletter submissions by the 15th of each month.

The next newsletter will be published on June 5.

BWP Goes to Washington

By Jana N. Williams

The cherry blossoms lining the streets of the National Mall welcomed us to the city. The silhouette of the Capitol or the Washington Monument greeted us at every turn as we made our way through Washington, DC. On March 29, 2007—voting day for Congress on the Iraq War budget—Carlyn Maddox, Donna Sewell, and I represented Blackwater Writing Project at the National Writing Project Spring Meeting. Our mission? To join hundreds of National Writing Project (NWP) site Teacher Consultants (TCs) to meet with our senators and representatives to lobby for continued NWP funding, stressing the program's long-running, ever-expanding impact on improving literacy across the nation.

On Wednesday evening, we were met in the lobby of the Washington Court Hotel by other TCs from Georgia sites. We chatted briefly, brainstorming our dialogues that would occur the following morning with our legislators and reviewing an NWP folder containing brochures and facts about the NWP's success so far. After a quick general meeting on Thursday morning, we were guided towards Capitol Hill to meet with our senators and representatives.

Carlyn and I, along with Southwest Georgia Writing Project representatives, met first with Sanford Bishop's Legislative Assistant, Marwan Terry. He informed us that most of the representatives were in session all day, but he shook our hands and offered us Coca-Cola and salted Georgia peanuts. We explained our visit to the Capitol, and having taken the trip the year previous, Carlyn Maddox knew Terry and was able to lead the conversation on the importance of Bishop's support for the National Writing Project. Terry expressed sincere interest in our mission, stating that Representative Bishop had signed the "Dear Colleague" letter asking for NWP support in previous years. Terry assured us that Rep. Bishop would be interested in supporting it again.

We explained to Terry that the National Writing Project is currently composed of 197 sites and has served over 1 million teachers since its inception in 1974. Legislative support is crucial to maintaining the success of the National Writing Project. He was impressed with our vignettes and assured us that Congressman Bishop would hear all about our visit. As a first-timer to DC for the NWP Spring Meeting, I was eased by everyone's receptiveness and enthusiasm about our work.

As the morning progressed, I found myself and my colleagues standing amongst CNN and C-SPAN reporters, camera equipment, and security officers as I shook Rep. Jack Kingston's hand outside of a House of

Representatives Defense Department Appropriations Sub-Committee meeting. Having been met at Kingston's office by Legislative Assistant Meg Gilley, we discussed the Writing Project briefly before she informed us that Rep. Kingston wanted to speak with us personally. As we stood in the hallway outside the Defense Department hearing, Rep. Kingston exited and greeted us enthusiastically. He chatted with us about the National Writing Project and asked each of us to share stories about the NWP's influence on our teaching. Much to our surprise, he concluded our hallway meeting by inviting us to sit in on the hearing. We followed Rep. Kingston and took seats behind Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Peter Pace and Department of Defense Secretary Robert Gates, facing Rep. John Murtha. We sat in awe during this experience. As writing teachers, a room full of reporters with notepads and pens made us feel right at home. Thanks to Rep. Kingston's generosity, we got to experience the *real* Capitol Hill.

Our next meeting was with Representative John Linder's Legislative Director, Don Green, as Rep. Linder was also in session that day. After we explained our purpose for the trip, the conversation turned to Rep. Linder's views of education. He, along with several legislators, feels that the bulk of responsibility for educational programs should be invested at the local level, authorizing educational leaders to manage funding and accountability for their community's education. We used this opportunity to explain how the NWP fits perfectly into this mold since individual sites help to strengthen education at a local level and holistically improve literacy across the nation. Green took an opportunity to teach us as well as he explained the appropriations process through the Senate, the House of Representatives, and eventually to approval by the President.

Finally, our lobbying day closed with a meeting in Senator Johnny Isakson's office. Legislative Correspondent Hayden Rhudy met with us in Sen. Isakson's office, assuring us he would have made the meeting if he could have. Rhudy was bright-eyed while we elaborated on the National Writing Project's success, and she took the opportunity to discuss No Child Left Behind. Senator Isakson is a strong proponent of the NCLB, but Rhudy took notes as we suggested changes that could improve the initiative. The National Writing Project has grown into an infrastructure that generates three times the federal funding support it receives each year. With current discussion of No Child Left Behind reauthorization in Congress, this session mainly

Continued on Page 4

Washington Importance of Inservice

consisted of our explaining the importance of the NWP on the nation's literacy levels, thus emphasizing the necessity for more focus on writing in the NCLB initiative.

After returning to the Washington Court Hotel that evening and getting ready for an NWP reception, we slowly made our way to the United States Postal Museum. Over hors d' oeuvres and cocktails, NWP representatives buzzed with excitement over their day. Other site representatives from the National Writing Projects of Georgia met with aides for Sen. Saxby Chambliss, Rep. John Barrow, Rep. Jim Marshall, and Rep. Lynn Westmoreland. They, too, felt that the sessions were successful for the NWP and the nation's educational system.

Luckily for those like me who wore high heels for Thursday's lobbying, Friday morning's meeting was held in the conference room of the Washington Court Hotel. (Note to self: Congress doesn't care what shoes you wear!)

As Richard Sterling, Executive Director for NWP, announced the immediate impact of our efforts on Thursday, the room erupted into cheers and clapping. The Senate total for Dear Colleague support reached 21, including signatures from senators as different in their views as Hillary Rodham Clinton and Trent Lott. Our efforts for NWP support did not go unnoticed.

Over coffee and breakfast in the bustling food court of Union Station on the last morning of the trip, Georgia site representatives debriefed. Although the Senate signatures were not due until April 13, we knew we had a successful trip. Each site representative agreed that legislators desired to know *how exactly* involvement with the National Writing Project improved teaching. Representatives wanted sample student work, sample teacher testimonials, and tangible proof of the NWP's impact on education. To prepare for next year's meeting, NWP sites need to demonstrate NWP's effects on the nation's education. Every summer, nearly 3,000 educators participate in a National Writing Project invitational summer institute. As these teacher consultants return to their schools in the fall and provide inservice to an average of 15 of their colleagues, the impact of this professional development program continues to grow. These thoughts comforted us as we sunk into taxi cabs on our way to the Washington-Dulles Airport and DC's Cherry Blossom Festival began its first day. The taxi driver paused in traffic for me to take a quick snap of the Jefferson Memorial through the blossoms. The Potomac River banks were cluttered with sightseers just making their way to the city. National Writing Project representatives, on the other hand, were saying goodbye to the city, already anticipating next year's Spring Meeting success.

Blackwater Writing Project Leadership Team

Ryan Dixon, Graduate Assistant

Narci Drossos, Publicity Chair

Lindsi Elliott, Co-Director

Adam Hathaway, Co-Director

Diana Chartier, Newsletter Editor

Carlyn Maddox, Professional Development Coordinator

Karen Morris, Tech Liaison

Donna Sewell, Director

Jana Williams, Legislative Liaison

By Carlyn C. Maddox

When I first participated in the 1997 Summer Institute, I had no idea the impact that the Writing Project would have on my life and career. I was a high school teacher at the time and burning out fast. But I was so inspired by the Writing Project's model of "teachers teaching teachers" that I became co-director in 1999 and 2000. I also presented at three national conferences and participated in the first Teacher Exchange Program to Tucson, Arizona in 2001. At that point, I was hooked! No where in my professional experience had I encountered a professional development model where I felt I was really *learning the right stuff*. Teachers are our best resources for techniques and best practices, and South Georgia Writing Project (now Blackwater Writing Project) shaped my career into a calling and a profession.

Becoming a Teacher Consultant after the Summer Institute is an exciting and vital part of Blackwater Writing Project, and our schools need us more than ever. Our schools are struggling with new standards and statewide tests. They need help in tailoring professional development that will meet their needs, whether these involve reading strategies, writing across the curriculum, or research-based writing. Schools want their teachers to have the best training and the latest know-how, and Teacher Consultants from the Blackwater Writing Project are their best resource.

Since I have been a Teacher Consultant, I helped an elementary school in Thomasville align its curriculum with its grade level standards and practices. When I worked with the Southwest Georgia Technical College, we designed a program for research-based writing and writing across the curriculum. The key to these demonstrations was to work closely with curriculum directors and teachers to figure out what they needed most. Another important part was to create demonstrations so the teachers felt they walked away with hands-on tools to use with their classes.

Ultimately, the goal of Blackwater Writing Project is threefold: to create lifelong writers and teachers in our classrooms, to educate teachers about the best practices in their field, and to create professional consultants who will carry their knowledge to their schools and to other schools. This last part is especially important because the work of the National Writing Project lives through the work of participating teachers. Outreach activities, Write Night, and other Inservice programs will continue to grow with Blackwater Writing Project, and I urge all teachers to continue their professional development after the Summer Institute and become active Teacher Consultants.

For more information concerning Professional Development through Blackwater Writing Project, contact Carlyn C. Maddox at 229-228-6727 or email at carlyn@rose.net.

Lines from the Blog

"In fact within the written works, gremlins are at their most hateful. They jump and tear, scramble paper into confetti, and cause mayhem worthy of a tantrum from a two year old. It seems the more I think I have learned, the less I really know. I will never remember what a dangling modifier is, only that such a creature exists and has chewed up several good drafts of mine."--Diana Chartier

"The music distracts me now. Have I mentioned that I rock at finding distractions? I struggle to stay still, moving my shoulders slightly to the music, but that's it. When I bounce my leg, the laptop threatens to fly into Diana's lap, so I stop, not wanting to startle Diana or tear up my second laptop of the day. BWP's laptop spurned me earlier, so I left it with Information Technology. I'll teach it to be rude."--Donna Sewell

"I relish the way words roll together and then stop abruptly with the right punctuation--when someone else has written it, and my job is only to enjoy."--Lindsie Elliott

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