

# BLACKWATER REFLECTIONS

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



## Feature Article - Mark Smith

Andrea Rogers, Valdosta State University

The Blackwater Writing Project, a National Writing Project site, has been in existence at Valdosta State University since 1995. Dr. Mark Smith, head of the Department of English at VSU, was the founding director of the project, formerly known as the South Georgia Writing Project. In the decade since its inception, Dr. Smith has seen a great deal of change within the project, but attests that it has been “a consistently effective initiative with demonstrable results in the classroom.”

Dr. Smith went to graduate school at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, where he became familiar with the NWP. Ann Dobie, the director of the Acadiana Writing Project, ULL's NWP site, was one of his major professors. Dobie's name was known everywhere at this time, especially for her mini-grants and in-service activities. Dobie had a profound effect on Dr. Smith, and later, she even went to bat for him when he was founding his own NWP site.

In 1993, Dr. Smith was new in Valdosta and wanted to carve a niche for himself. At the same time, he realized that Georgia was underserved in the number of writing projects. At this time, the closest NWP sites were in Americus and Savannah, so it was not difficult for Dr. Smith to convince Dr. Tom Dasher—then Department Head of English—that VSU needed its own NWP site.

In 1995, the South Georgia Writing Project had its first summer institute. Dr. Smith and Dr. Robbie Strickland in education interviewed 20 candidates, and 12-15 people were chosen to take part in the institute. Finding the location for the institute had been a challenge, but Sharon Flight, then Assistant Principal at Lowndes High, helped secure the consumer sciences classroom for the duration of the institute.

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## Member Updates

Sandra Giles, Abraham Baldwin College, successfully defended her dissertation for a PhD in creative writing at Florida State University. She graduates in April 2008.

Amy Brosemer, Dewar Elementary School, wrote and received a \$250 grant from Valdosta Junior Service League to buy class texts and implement literature circles.

The editorial staff plans to feature teacher-consultants in upcoming issues. If you would like to write a feature, please contact [Diana Chartier](#).

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<http://www.valdosta.edu/bwp>

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The summer institute went well. “Fortunately, the teachers took it and ran with it,” Dr. Smith said. He conducted three more summer institutes, and each was an enjoyable learning experience.

The Writing Project's legacy lives on. The South Georgia Writing Project has now become Blackwater Writing Project, but it still consistently pursues its original goals. Not only has the project led to personal growth for the participants, but also Dr. Smith's own former summer institute participants have taught his children. “Our mission is to teach people well so that they can be good teachers, and that really hits home when they are teaching your own kids. It brings the whole thing full circle,” Dr. Smith said.

When asked what the strengths of the writing project are, Dr. Smith suggested that many of the writing project's strengths lie in its flexibility. The NWP expects each site to meet the particular needs of its service area, but there is also a great deal of flexibility involved in developing each site. And while the curriculum can be tailor-made to fit the service area, the philosophy behind the project, “Teachers teaching teachers,” is deeply ingrained in each and every site.

According to Dr. Smith, there are no drawbacks of being a director of the Writing Project—unless you count the paperwork, which is a necessary evil in order to get the grants needed to fund the project. At this point, Dr. Smith has been at VSU for fourteen years. He is now the Department Head of English, and directing the Writing Project helped him adapt to this role. Being a director taught him to listen, to “keep his ears open.” It also taught him humility, organizational skills, and the ability to work within deadlines. He finds it easier to talk to people and to work with other high-level administrators. All of these skills, and more, he learned and honed while directing the South Georgia Writing Project.

### Getting the Word Out – Goals, History, and Success of BWP

Dr. Donna Sewell, Director of Blackwater Writing Project (left), and Narci Drossos, Valdosta High School English teacher (right), presented “The National Writing Project - Opportunities for Professional Development in Valdosta” to the Sigma Chapter of Delta Kappa Gamma International, Saturday, March 8, at the Ravine at Kinderlou. Dr. Sewell gave an overview of the history, goals, and success of the Blackwater Writing Project, and Mrs. Drossos provided a glimpse of the conference she attended this past summer “Reading, Teaching, and Writing the Holocaust” in New York and examples of student work as an outgrowth of the curriculum units she helped to develop.



## Teaching Stories: The Heart of the BWP

Joel Futch, Lanier County Elementary School

As we all know, the Summer Institute (SI) is a lot of hard work. It is fun and exciting. Sometimes, it is borderline hilarious. With all of the things that constitute the SI, we should never forget that the Institute's purpose: the students, the young people from four to nineteen who reap the benefit of our summer together.

When the legislative group heads for Washington, DC, this April, we need to take with us your stories about the change that your experience has made in your classroom and in the lives of your students. Maybe you've started using journals in your class, or maybe you have incorporated the ideas from other teaching demonstrations. Whatever your stories are, we need to hear them. The Senators and Representatives with whom we hope to speak want real-life stories of how BWP makes a difference in the teaching of writing in real classrooms across our area, and only you can tell the tales. It is vital that you send your teaching stories to Joel Futch at [jfutch@lanier.k12.ga.us](mailto:jfutch@lanier.k12.ga.us) or Jana Williams at [jwilliams@eastcentraltech.edu](mailto:jwilliams@eastcentraltech.edu) so we can tell it like it is in Washington, DC! Also, we need you to contact legislators yourself. Just send a quick letter, asking them to support funding for National Writing Project by signing the 2008 Dear Colleague letter to provide a \$30 million appropriation for the National Writing Project. The deadline for signatures is March 12 in the House and April 3 in the Senate. Although the deadline has passed, please write or email legislators to express your concerns. Contact information for various legislators is provided below.

Legislator	Phone Number	Education Aide	Email
Senator Saxby Chambliss	202-224-3521	Justin Clay	<a href="mailto:justin_clay@chambliss.senate.gov">justin_clay@chambliss.senate.gov</a>
Senator Johnny Isakson	202-224-3463	Tyler Thompson	<a href="mailto:tyler_thompson@isakson.senate.gov">tyler_thompson@isakson.senate.gov</a>
Rep. Sanford Bishop	202-225-3631	Marwan Terry	<a href="mailto:marwan.terry@mail.house.gov">marwan.terry@mail.house.gov</a>
Rep. Jack Kingston	202-225-5831	Meg Gilley	<a href="mailto:meg.gilley@mail.house.gov">meg.gilley@mail.house.gov</a>
Rep. Jim Marshall	202-225-6531		

The National Writing Project has reported that Representatives Bishop and Kingston signed the Dear Colleague letter in 2002. The letters or email simply needs to thank the legislators for their concern for educational issues and to tell your story of why the National Writing Project matters to you. Please help us continue to support the professional development of teachers.



Joel Futch arranged for representatives from the offices of Senator Saxby Chambliss and Senator Johnny Isakson to visit Lanier County Elementary School to discuss National Writing Project initiatives. (Pictured from left to right: Tim Cochran, principal of Lanier County Elementary; Debbie Cannon, aide for Saxby Chambliss; Joey Redding, aide for Johnny Isakson; Donna Sewell, Director of Blackwater Writing Project; Joel Futch, Pre-Kindergarten Teacher and Co-Legislative Liaison for BWP)

## Literacy Movement from Home

Jana N. Williams, East Central Technical College

In the small towns of Fitzgerald and Douglas, the major campuses of East Central Technical College (ECTC) nestle among the Georgia pines and wiregrass that are fertilized by the waters of the Ocmulgee River. With a current enrollment of less than 1,200 students, ECTC is the epitome of small-town life: all the students know each other, and the faculty is like a family. As a family and a pivotal member of the community, the college constantly strives to improve literacy in its service areas of Atkinson, Ben Hill, Coffee, Irwin, and Wilcox counties. ECTC is the foundation of literacy for many of those who embrace the area's rural life.

To prove this, the college has spent the past year advertising the opportunity for surrounding area residents' voices to be heard in the form of argumentative research essays, personal narratives, poetry, and short fiction. To celebrate literacy in the region, ECTC has been calling for entries to its very first literary journal.

Sponsored by the ECTC Foundation, the ECTC Student Government Association, and our very own Blackwater Writing Project, the journal will showcase the best writings in each genre from over 100 submissions. Chosen by dedicated educators from Blackwater Writing Project, these works represent the fight for fully literate communities in even the most rural places.

Fittingly, the journal will be called *The Wiregrass Reader: Rural Voices from Home*. To celebrate its inception, ECTC plans to host a "Write Night" ceremony in March, acknowledging all its hometown voices.

### Write Nights

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

April 15, 2008

May 13, 2008

Summer break - dates to follow

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.

**Check it out. A good quote may come from you and be included in the next newsletter.**

Send newsletter submissions by the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month.

**Think about what you are doing in your classrooms.**

**Can we feature you or your work?**

**Let us know what you want included in the newsletter.**

The next newsletter will be published on September 1, 2008.

Karen Morris, Technology Liaison for Blackwater Writing Project, put the 2007 Anthologies online!

(<http://www.valdosta.edu/bwp/writing.htm>) Take a minute to peruse the memoirs, poems, and teaching stories of the most recent Fellows. Whether you want Southern-flavored stories, poems about family and food, or stories about school encounters, you'll find plenty of good material on the webpage. Below is a list of authors and titles to whet your appetite.

Memoirs	
Title	Author
Agoraphobia	Donna Cook
Barefoot in Georgia	Rebecca Elmore
The Big Table	Joel Futch Jr.
House Shoe Pursuit	Breah Johnson
The Little Pinky Incident	Donna Sewell
No Horror Movies for Me	Katie Eyles
Public Stoning for Extra Credit	Amy Brosemer
Scars	Joel Futch Jr.
Unexpected Love	Amanda Gaither
Welcome to the Land of Motherhood	Sonya Riley

Poetry	
Title	Author
The First Licorice Jelly Bean	Amanda Gaither
The Haunting	Donna Sewell
Love Letter	Katherine McKinney
My Blue Heaven	Rebecca Elmore
Old Man Walnut	Andrea Rogers
She Wasn't Sleeping	Andrea Rogers
Small Town Beauty Parlor	Valerie Bennett
Storm Stories	Andrea Rogers
Through a Poet's Eye	Kathy Cook
Visions du Pain	Sheri Dorsett
What is True	Breah Johnson

Teaching Stories	
Title	Author
The Alphabet Game	Sonya Riley
Crowd Shy	Katherine McKinney
Danny's Song	Donna Cook
Enrichment	Katie Eyles
Special Education in the Drama Classroom	Sheri Dorsett
Talking to a Brick Wall	Amy Brosemer
The Challenge of Ricardo	Valerie Bennett
Voices of an Empty Classroom	Kathy Cook



Write with your peers. Join us on the blog!

## News from National Writing Projects of Georgia

Rebecca Elmore, Hahira Middle School

Jackson, Georgia: Home of Georgia's electric chair and the annual meeting place for representatives from the National Writing Projects of Georgia to convene over Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend. Due to a scheduling conflict, our director Donna Sewell could not attend. In her stead, Co-Legislative Liaisons Jana Williams and Joel Futch made the trek north since the Spring Meeting in Washington was on the agenda. Technology would also be discussed, in particular, the National Writing Projects of Georgia website, which is why I attended as a co-everything.

Jana arrived first in Jackson, followed later by myself around 7:30 Friday night. Construction on I-75 near Cordele detained Joel, but Garmin (since renamed "Gwyneth") helped him find an alternative route to get him safely to the hotel a little after 9:15. Unfortunately, Joel struggled to find his intended destination and knocked on the wrong door several times before finally calling me to ask, "What room are you in?" When he finally found Room 208, not 201, we discussed the weather (a possibility of snow the next day) and had a quick strategic planning session. Then Joel headed back to his roommate and new best friend Danilo Baylen from Cherokee Rose Writing Project, and Jana and I called it a night before Miss America Reality Check was over.

The next morning started with a roundtable discussion of each site's previous summer institute. Present were representatives or directors from Cherokee Rose, Kennesaw Mountain, Red Clay, Central Georgia, Georgia Southwestern, and Georgia Southern. It was interesting to hear how similar we are (recruiting teachers from diverse backgrounds is a struggle across the state) as well as how different we are (one site had teachers who couldn't keep up with jump drives!). Lots of new ideas were shared, and one of our ideas, Donna's practice of having every leadership positions two deep, was admired by many. By the end of the meeting, "Co-" was the catchphrase!

Next, Kathy Albertson from Georgia Southern Writing Project provided commentary on the Georgia Department of Education. The Georgia Department of Education English/Language Arts Committee met last November, and she advocated the need for more writing project teacher consultants to serve on the committee. She also provided an interesting statistic. Ever wonder how many people work on the performance standards that you teach in your English classroom? Three. Guess what? Seventy work on math and science.

Plans for the Spring Meeting in Washington, D.C., were made before we broke for lunch and checked out of our rooms. Snow fell as we put our bags into our cars, and the South Georgia delegation stood outside and took pictures with our phones, even enlisting Danilo to come out (much to his chagrin) and take a group shot to send to Donna Sewell as she staffed the bridal expo booth (the scheduling conflict that prevented her attendance). Strangely, none of our peers shared our excitement over the snow. Wonder why?

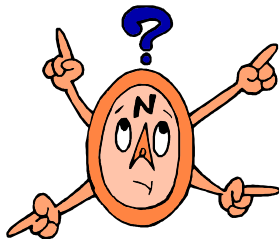
When we came back in, we logged on to the state website, [www.georgiawritingprojects.org](http://www.georgiawritingprojects.org). Ellen Hendrix from Georgia Southern Writing Project gave Jana, Joel, and me publishing rights so that we can publish articles to this website. Our next task will be to set up everyone at our site as authors/editors. Pictures can also be added but will have to be e-mailed to Ellen to be posted for now. This website provides a means for us to see what is going on around the state, but we need to use it. Ellen encouraged every site to post an article monthly.

By 2:00 P.M., we had said our goodbyes to our new friends and were in our cars, driving south down I-75 through snow flurries. I don't know if I speak for Jana and Joel, but I was never so happy to see Lowndes County as when I came home from Jackson. We don't have snow in Valdosta.

## Looking at History through the Eyes of Those who were There . . .

Barbara (Bobbie) Warren, Valdosta State University

Georgia Humanities Council recently awarded me (Bobbie Warren, Summer Institute, 2000; SGWP Co-Director 2001-02), a grant to work with area World War II veterans, gathering their personal histories and testimonials about their wartime experiences. The grant, entitled “Looking Back and Remembering: WWII Veterans’ Voices from Southern Georgia,” will collect oral histories for archiving at the Library of Congress in Washington, along with filming interviews for inclusion in Georgia Public Broadcasting’s WWII Veterans Oral History Project. I am the On-site Interviewer for the GPB project, which is a lucky break that fell into my lap along with the grant itself. Being able to link my work with GPB and the Library of Congress is way more than I could have asked for. But the really exciting part of this work is that this research will enable the design of classroom curriculum for all levels of teaching, beginning this fall with incorporation into VSU English 1101 and 1102 courses where I teach. It’s not often that we teachers get the chance to have a resource like these veterans available to us. I’m hoping that this will provide the students with an opportunity sort of like the Foxfire project of the 1970s—a way for them to gather the research data from primary sources rather than just from the Internet. At any rate, I am excited to get to work with these incredible exemplars of history and invite any or all of you to join me in this work. It’s difficult to find anyone who doesn’t have a family connection with WWII—uncle, father, aunt—and there is much work to be done in getting the stories down. If you are interested in either helping with the project or in having your class participate in some way, please contact me. My email is [bnwarren@valdosta.edu](mailto:bnwarren@valdosta.edu), and my home phone is 229-247-1191 and office is English Department, VSU, 333-5946.



We are still looking for the following people. Remember to let us know should you have an idea where they are now.

## Where are They?

As part of Blackwater Writing Project's goal to provide professional development opportunities for all past participants, we want to make sure that the newsletter reaches everyone. Despite our best efforts, we have lost contact with a few Fellows from previous summers. If you have stayed in contact with any of the following people, will you please ask them to contact Donna Sewell ([dsewell@valdosta.edu](mailto:dsewell@valdosta.edu)) at Valdosta State University (or you can send us their contact information yourself)? Thanks for your help.

Kathy Hand  
Stephanie Hildebrandt  
Melissa Kirksey  
Lydia Loskot  
Judy Martin  
Helen Bagley  
Joseph Brown

Cathi Martin  
Lynn Reis  
Carla Ricketson  
Lori Walker  
Pamela K. Wright  
Lee Ogletree

Darla Grob  
Rose Bradley  
Jennifer Bowling  
Marie Butts  
Dana Miller  
Elizabeth Cranford

We are also hoping to find a valid email address for the following people: Lee Ogletree, Nena Stone, and Darci Tuten. Can you help us?