



# Midwest Messenger

Two-Year College English Association (TYCA Midwest)

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## Message from the Chair

*Paul Resnick • Illinois Central College*

Every TYCA-Midwest regional conference is an eye-opener, and last October's conference was no exception. And, the people we meet are an inspiration ... I will call her "Kate," though everything else about her is true. She is in her first year of a tenure-track English position at a college in Wisconsin. She is young, bright, and fresh out of graduate school from a prestigious Midwestern university. I met her before her session. She was nervous because this was going to be her first professional presentation out of graduate school.

I asked her a few questions about her new position. She told me she was teaching 6 composition courses during the Fall semester. She told me the faculty were thrilled that their new contract only specified teaching 6 courses per semester instead of the usual 7. She said her average composition class size is 35 students. The simple math shows that Kate is teaching 210 composition students this semester.

I thought "her load is too high, her class size is too high, and she is teaching composition for all sections." Can anyone say "burnout"? I then asked her who is teaching all of the literature and film courses. She said the more senior English faculty are teaching those courses. I thought, "let's add another to the list of inequalities." The faculty policies are not right if they do not allow new faculty to teach something other than composition.

She was bubbly and energetic. I didn't want to tell her that five years into teaching, I was looking for a new job because I was exhausted teaching four composition courses and one literature course. How is Kate going to stay bubbly and energetic five years from now? What saved me was having the option to teach two literature courses along with three composition courses. That was still a lot, but at least manageable.

Kate's session was smart, insightful, and professional. She has everything going for her, except her contract and all those composition courses. Hopefully, her situation will improve to a more humane class load, class size, and class variety so she can stay in our profession and continue to give such great sessions. Full-time tenure track positions in our field are already scarce, but overloading Kate and other new faculty will only exacerbate this lingering issue in our profession.



# Reflections on the '10 Conference

Alan Hutchison, Eden Pearson, Judy Hauser and Lauren Rice • Des Moines Area Community College

As we left the conference on a gorgeous October afternoon, we were more than relieved that our duties were executed and the TYCA Midwest 2010 Conference was over. Now we could get back to our grading, our administrative duties, and see what our families look like again. There was a fan-fare of hand wiping; we were done.

However, in November, as we reflected on those long days of autumn, only the best memories percolated to the surface.

If you missed the TYCA-Midwest 2010 Conference in Des Moines, you should be kicking yourself right now, because it was awesome. If we had to make a list of the top 10 things you should be jealous that you missed, here they are:

1. Keynote speaker Brent Spencer brought the house down and left us all a little misty-eyed as he mused about the heart of teaching and the meaning of our work.
2. Not only did we have insightful, informative, and practical presentations: we had vegan peanut butter cups, and toys.
3. Fueled by canapés and cocktails, we rocked out listening to the 2nd Avenue Jazz Band as they brought down the house at the Thursday night reception.
4. Eric, our technological wizard, demonstrated his skills throughout the conference, beating recalcitrant computers and projectors into submission with his super-hero-like skills.
5. Conference-attendees were treated to breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, and so much more by book publishers. Some got their Christmas shopping done with a selection of Iowa-themed books from Beavertdale Books.
6. Have you met Carol Luvert and Karla Brown? Yeah. You should.

7. Most attendees planned on returning home and framing their conference programs, designed by DMACC student and soon-to-be-famous Danny Kim.
8. Farm Boy breakfast burritos from the Downtown Des Moines Farmer's Market.
9. Teams of volunteers from the DMACC marketing department all the way to Marshalltown brought their A-game.
10. We reveled in scintillating conversation and decadent dishes during Friday night dinners at Dos Rios, El Bait Shop, the Continental, and the Royal Mile, among other exotic locales.
11. Group showers at El Bait Shop. If you have to ask ...



Okay, so there's more than ten. We don't care. It was that good.

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# 2010 Conference Awards

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## Outstanding New Faculty Award

Mary Gruis



## Outstanding Adjunct Faculty Proposal Award

Rebecca Rivard

- and -

Laura Gabrion



## Norton Writer's Prize

Carrie Barker

Kirkwood Community College Student (center)

ALSO PICTURED:

Marilyn Moller, Presenter (left)

Heal McKnight, Carrie's Professor (right)

# Upcoming 2011 Conference

Ingrid Emch, Columbus State Community College

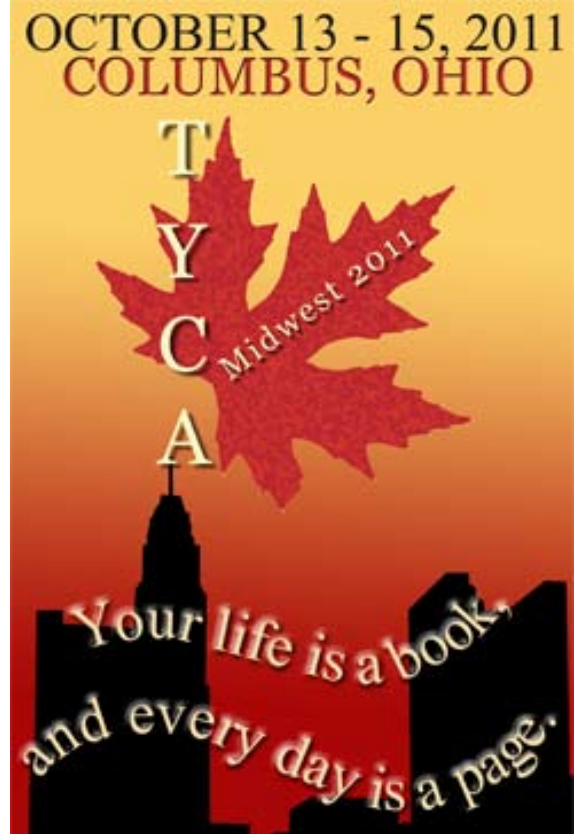
## Your life is a book, and every day is a page ...

The 2011 TYCA Midwest Conference will be held in Columbus, Ohio, from October 13-15, 2011, and we hope you will plan to join us! Through our conference theme — “Every Day is a Page” — we invite you to consider how we can help our students write the books of their lives and how community-college teachers compose their own pages through the socially conscious, life-changing work that they do, even in the midst of challenges. Two-year colleges face budget cuts and burgeoning enrollments: how can English departments address the practical concerns of the institution and curriculum yet inspire each individual student’s creative spirit? What tools can we use? What communities can we build? What futures can we write? And what forms will our compositions take — print? audio? video? hypertext? sculpture?

TYCA 2011 will be hosted by Columbus State Community College, and the conference will be held on our campus at the Columbus State Conference Center. Within walking distance of the conference center is our conference hotel, the Hyatt Regency, in downtown Columbus. The conference registration fee (\$100) covers a reception on Thursday evening at the Hyatt Regency and a luncheon on Friday at the Columbus State Conference Center.

The TYCA 2011 planning team is proud and excited to announce our keynote speaker for the luncheon, Dr. Cynthia L. Selfe, Humanities Distinguished Professor in the Department of English at The Ohio State University and co-editor of *Computers and Composition: An International Journal*. Dr. Selfe will discuss the Digital Archives of Literacy Narratives, a publicly available repository of literacy narratives in a variety of formats (print, video, audio) that together provide a historical record of the literacy practices and values of U.S. citizens.

To complement our keynote address, we need your proposals for a panel, session, or discussion forum that addresses the theme of inspiring and empowering students and teachers to write the books of their lives. At our conference we will explore how we can design our classrooms, curricula, and colleges to enable all of us to balance career, craft, community and creativity. Proposal submission forms will be available soon and you are invited to submit a proposal by May 1, 2011.



Attending the TYCA Midwest conferences gives participants the chance to visit various unique Midwestern cities, and Columbus is a fine destination. Our beautiful city of Columbus is the capital of Ohio, so you’ll find our historic statehouse just blocks from the conference hotel. You’ll also be within walking distance of restaurants, shops, museums, galleries, and theaters. You’ll find plenty of fine dining in the eclectic Short North neighborhood and dynamic Arena and Brewery districts. The nearby North Market offers locally-grown food, casual dining, yummy baked goods, and amazing coffee. And the Columbus Museum of Art showcases the folk art of Elijah Pierce, our conference muse, who wisely said, “Your life is a book, and every day is a page, and one day that book will be read to you and you can’t deny it because you’ve written it.”

# Students Speak

Delores Robinson • Illinois Valley Community College

Thank you for the new column “Students Speak.” Our faculty at Illinois Valley Community College are encouraged to regularly assess student learning through CATs (classroom assessment techniques), and thus I’ve just collected from my students their end-of-the-semester informal and anonymous evaluations. I ask each class several questions, looking for both self-reflection and also advice for me about my curriculum or teaching techniques.

After reading through the responses, I shared a couple of the most discouraging with co-workers. As my colleague Tara Coburn says, “Assignments like these are like getting a fitness test or a blood screening. I know I need to know the results, not all of it is bad, and some is reassuring. But a few things will blow my mind.”

Take a moment to digest these student comments (from two different response sheets):

**Me:** How do you think you have grown and changed as a writer, as a student, and as a person this semester?

**Response:** “I use [sic] to struggle with sentence structure I have greatly improved in that area [sic].”

**Me:** What do you plan to do differently in your life after this semester? Explain.

**Answer:** “I’m getting back on my meds, so a bad grade doesn’t cycle around and around in my head and make me go nuts.”

I spent some discouraged moments wondering what I had actually accomplished with my students in light of these two responses. However, I’ve had some time to reflect on the answers, and I think I can take some valuable lessons from them. First, students’ perceptions are often markedly different from instructors’ perceptions. In a semester during which I tried to ease students’ fear of writing by focusing on their ideas and their support for those ideas, I am reminded that it won’t hurt students to be reminded that the final polishing step during which they proofread and run spell-check is still important in successfully communicating with their readers — even in an informal self-reflection.

The second student response is more sobering and a reminder that our community college students are struggling more than ever with obstacles to their education. As at all colleges, this semester brought higher numbers of the walking wounded to my classes – students scarred by tours of duty, harsh economic realities, and crumbling home lives. Being aware that my class is sometimes far from the most pressing concern in students’ lives helps me choose better readings for my writing assignments, structure the pace of the class, and respond to students as rounded individuals.

I’m thrilled that almost all of the responses to my question, “What advice would you offer a student who is new to Freshman Composition,” elicited an understanding of the valuable support services a community college provides. Some representative responses:

“I would tell the students to go to the Learning Commons [tutoring lab]. They are a great help!”

“Advice I would give to future English students is to use the resources available and ask for help when needed.”

“I would tell them ... to use all the help offered in the Writing Center and during Office Hours!”

“This semester I’ve grown to accept when I need help and to ask for it. I realized that there are a lot of resources available at [the college].”

Almost none of my students knew of support services such as the Writing Center at the start of the semester, and I need to be reminded that college as an institution is an alien place for many community college students. Although I teach English, I also need to guide students as they navigate through the unfamiliar educational environment; seeing them become students instead of feeling like outsiders is incredibly rewarding.

And despite the danger of the double-sided sword of student evaluations, responses like this mean I will continue to ask students how they have grown and changed over the course of the semester:

“The first essay I wrote this semester I had struggles writing. However, as I kept writing more and more essays I noticed that it was easier for me. As a student I have learned how to be organized and responsible. As a person I have noticed that I have a lot of potential. I just need to stay on track.”

NOTE: The TYCA-Midwest newsletter invites you to poll your students for a new section called “Students Speak”. Any survey you give your class that would be of interest to other instructors would fit nicely here. You might ask what kind of comments they prefer, how they use your comments, or which assignments they like best and why. Your question might be a question others would like to ask their students and your students’ answers might inspire other instructors to try something new. Compile your answers and send them to Michelle Byrne (mwb@uakron.edu) or Jen Richrath (jrichrath@icc.edu).

# Office Hours: Part of the Problem

Michelle Byrne • Summit College, University of Akron

I'm used to the swearing on our campus shuttle: students using the s-word, the b-word and worse. I'm not offended and believe that some day they will, like I did, control their language in different situations. Swearing so liberally is still kinda cool to them.

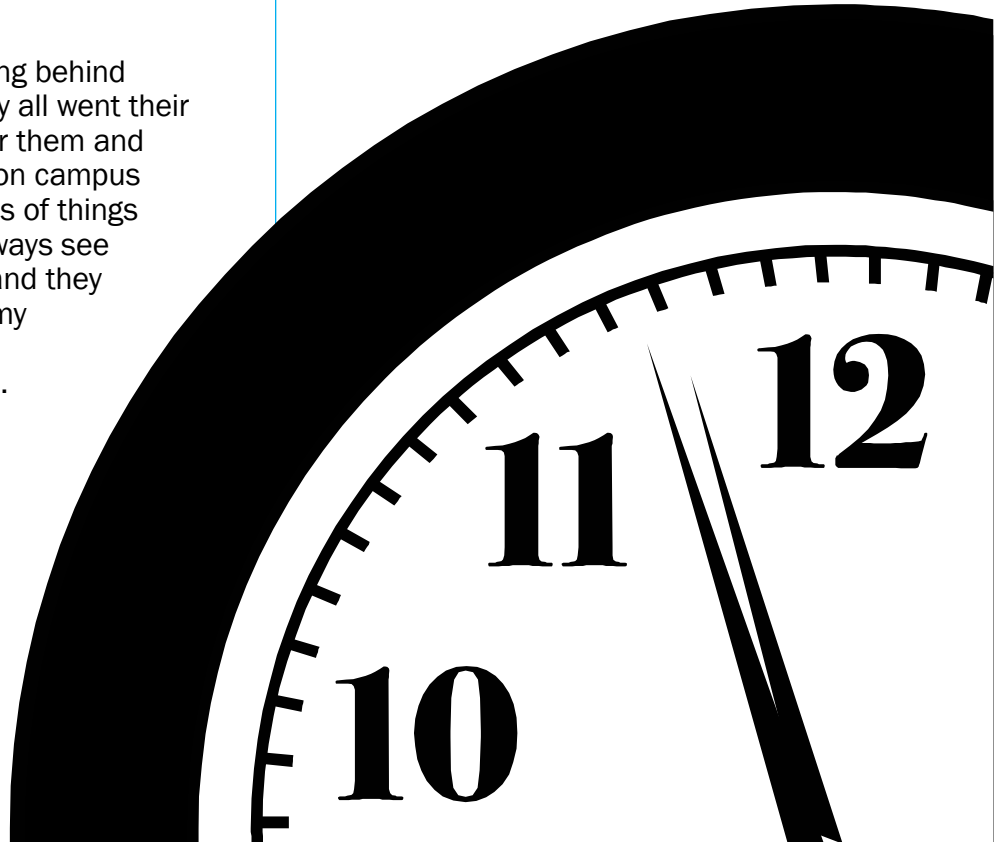
But I am never prepared for the f-word. Not the 4 letter one, the one referring to gay men. Three young men sitting across from me were talking about another student in their class. When they used the word, it was with a very hard "f" and a very hard "t" at the end. My stomach began to knot and each time they said it, maybe nine times during our short ride, the knot tightened.

I stared at them, but none of them ever caught my eye, all the while I wondered what to say. "Boys! Enough!" or even just "Stop." I thought it, but felt paralyzed. I admit these boys scared me—not that I worried they would hurt me—but their raw emotion, their obvious frightened homophobia, seemed dangerous.

I followed them off the bus, walking behind them, for 4 or 5 minutes until they all went their separate ways. I could barely hear them and realized that any of the students on campus might be saying any of these kinds of things and yet, when I look at them, I always see innocent faces. I walk into class and they look like such nice kids (most of my students are 18 or 19 years old). They're casual with me, but polite. They giggle when I first mention Anne's Lamott's great essay "Shitty First Drafts". Are these the kids who get on a bus and call each other names? My students?

I've heard my students refer to things or events as "gay" in my class and I always call them out. I call them out if they use the word "retarded" in a derogatory way. I've heard students refer to "colored people" and told them to change their language. But that's when they see me as the Professor in Front of the Room and in moments like that I call it "My Classroom" as in, "I won't have disrespectful language in My Classroom."

But on the bus, I felt small and very intimidated. Following behind them, I felt even smaller. I suppose it's easy to be big in the class, when I'm standing at the front and they're all sitting down. I was ashamed the whole day that I said nothing, not a single word, to those young men. "If you're not part of the solution, you are part of the problem," and I felt very much like part of the problem. I've since lectured them quietly sternly in my head, and I hope the next time I hear it, I will be able to utter at least one clear "Stop."



# Service Learning and Learning Service: Community-oriented Projects in Technical Writing Classes

Senti Longkumer, Darrell Lagace, and Hu Huth • Zane State College

Recognizing the importance of growing the local economy during tough economic times, Zane State College's English department connected their Technical Writing classes with the community through service learning projects with two local farmers' markets. The instructors have found that students seemed more interested and engaged when writing about a topic that was real and local to them rather than writing about fictional problems and offering fictional solutions.

In Senti Longkumer's class in the Willett Pratt Training Center location in Cambridge, students were introduced to the concept by summarizing an article on eating locally. The Manager of the Guernsey County Farmers' Market visited the classroom to present some of the market's needs to the class and determine what the students could do to help. The four groups of students selected the following tasks:

1. Conducting a survey to determine the impact of local advertising efforts.
2. Promoting the first ever locavore luncheon held three times during the season.
3. Designing and creating promotional materials such as fliers, book marks, etc. for the market.
4. Designing and creating four poster boards for display at strategic locations throughout the county.

The students wrote problem-solution reports where they not only recommended the solutions, but where they actually worked with the market in implementing the solutions while reflecting on their contributions and learning. At the conclusion of the project, to promote awareness of the market and their own efforts, the students distributed fliers and posters to over 70 locations.

Hu Huth's evening Technical Writing class, which met on Zane State's main campus, had five groups visit the Zanesville Farmers' Market outside class time and work on problem-solution reports based on their findings during scheduled class periods. The groups discussed and explored these issues with vendors and market officials: changing the location of the market when it is forced to move downtown to allow the Muskingum County Fair to take over the fairgrounds every August, irrigating crops during droughts, getting more families in the WIC program to use their WIC vouchers at the market, the invasion of the market by vendors other than farmers—especially vendors selling used items. The groups had to supplement their findings with internet research about other farmers' markets throughout America with similar issues and what they did to try to solve these problems.

Three sections of Darrell Lagace's Technical Writing class, which met on the main campus, created problem-solution reports and proposals to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the Zanesville Farmers' Market. Mark Mechling, the Ohio

State University Extension liaison for Muskingum County, presented information about the Market to one section, which Darrell then re-presented to the other two classes. Mark provided information on the history of the market, vendors' rental fees, and the Farmers' Market Board.

Groups of four or five students apiece (60 students total between the two sections) worked on ideas for improving the Farmers' Market, and more than 30 students visited the Market to obtain firsthand information. The groups then each wrote either a problem-solution report or a proposal. Suggestions included adding a machine that would take SNAP/EBT benefits, focusing on organic and local food, and considering new locations for the market.

All three instructors noted that students were more engaged with these projects than with past assignments based on fictional businesses. Students had to confront real-world issues (limited budgets, zoning ordinances, state laws), and were able to practice interviewing skills by meeting with local residents and vendors. In addition, these service learning projects encouraged students to think more critically about local issues.

Having seen great benefits in these projects, the English Department plans to continue focusing on service learning projects for the Technical Writing classes. In addition to continued work with local farmers' markets, some of the classes will be coordinating with other local organizations and companies with a focus on service to the community.



# Midwest Messenger Contacts

## Executive Board

### Chair

Paul Resnick  
Illinois Central College  
presnick@icc.edu

### Treasurer

Rich Peraud  
St. Louis Community College at Meramec  
rperaud@stlcc.edu

### Secretary

Ruth Fairchild  
Ridgewater College  
ruth.fairchild@ridgewater.edu

### Site Coordinator

Tom O. McCulley  
Heartland Community College  
tom.mcculley@heartland.edu

### Membership

Michelle Byrne  
The University of Akron, Summit College  
tycamw@gmail.com

### Information/Web Manager

Deb Bertsch  
Columbus State Community College  
dbertsch@csc.edu

### Adjunct Faculty Representative

Carrie Finn  
Hawkeye Community College  
cfinn@hawkeyecollege.edu

### Midwest Messenger Editor

Jen Richrath  
Illinois Central College  
jrichrath@icc.edu

### TYCA/NCTE Representative

Karla Brown  
Hawkeye Community College  
kbrown@hawkeyecollege.edu

### 4-Year College/NCTE Liaison

Brenda Eatman Aghahowa  
Chicago State University  
be\_aghahowa@yahoo.com

### Archivist

Leslie Roberts  
Oakland Community College  
lrobert@oaklandcc.com

## Local Arrangements Chair

Deb Bertsch  
Columbus State Community College  
dbertsch@csc.edu

## Program Chair

Ingrid Emch  
Columbus State Community College  
iemch@csc.edu

## Advisory Board

### Illinois

Keely Austin  
Heartland Community College  
keely.austin@heartland.edu

### Indiana

Victoria Buzash  
Ivy Tech Community College  
vbuzash@ivytech.edu

### Iowa

Alan Hutchison  
Des Moines Area Community College  
ajhutchison@dmacc.edu

### Kansas

Andy Anderson  
Johnson County Community College  
aanders@jccc.edu

### Michigan

Ella Davis  
Wayne County Community College  
District  
edavis1@wcccd.edu

### Minnesota

Kathy J. Steffen (Interim)  
Ridgewater College  
kathy.steffen@ridgewater.edu

### Missouri

Rich Peraud  
St. Louis Community College  
at Meramec  
rperaud@stlcc.edu

### Nebraska

Andrea Lang  
Metropolitan Community College  
alang@mccneb.edu

## North Dakota

Sybil Priebe  
North Dakota State College of Science  
sybil.priebe@ndscs.nodak.edu

## Ohio

Sheldon Wrice  
The University of Akron, Summit College  
swrice1@uakron.edu

## South Dakota

Linda Johnson  
Southeast Technical Institute  
linda.johnson@southeasttech.edu

## Wisconsin

Sarah Johnson  
Madison Area Technical College  
szjohnson@matcmadison.edu

## Manitoba, Canada

Jaqueline McLeod-Rogers  
University of Winnipeg  
j.mcleod-rogers@uwinnipeg.ca

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English Association.

### Editor

Jen Richrath • jrichrath@icc.edu

### Assistant Editor

Michelle Byrne • mwb@uakron.edu

### Graphic Design and Layout

Jeanne Metros

Illinois  
Central  
College

TYCA Midwest Messenger  
Illinois Central College  
1 College Drive  
East Peoria, IL 61635-0001

# 2010 Conference

