

Through Smoked Glass

Volume 1, Issue 1

September 1997

Welcome

by the TSG staff

Welcome to the premier issue of *Through Smoked Glass*, a newsletter devoted to helping Bryant students achieve academic excellence. *TSG* is published monthly through a collaborative effort between the Writing Center and the Learning Center staffs. We chose the title in part because of our shared panoramic view of the unistructure's tinted glass facade, but also because of the symbolism related to the sometimes mysterious, smoky means through which students get to know a college campus.



Forthcoming issues will include advice to help you become more adept at taking notes, preparing for an exam, writing a research paper, proofreading, and similar skills. You will be able to read the suggestions of other students who have struggled through classes and of tutors who have helped them become better learners. We welcome and encourage ideas for publication from all members of the Bryant community.

We will keep you informed of upcoming events sponsored by the Learning Center and Writing Center such as orientation sessions and workshops.

Most importantly, we want this newsletter to be as useful as possible for Bryant students. Therefore, if you have a question you'd like us to answer or a topic you'd like us to explore and report back on, let us know. We will use your input to help make *TSG* fit your needs. ❖

The New Guy

by Jean-Paul Nadeau

As the newly appointed Assistant Director of the Learning Center, I have been referred to during introductions at various campus functions as being "new" to Bryant. Though much has changed since I graduated with a B.S. in Finance from this very

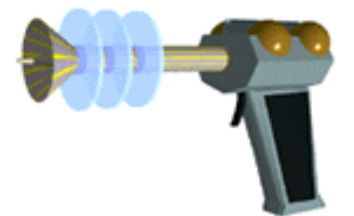
school in 1990, Bryant is still quite familiar to me.

I arrived in September 1986 ripe with confidence in my abilities as a student. I wasn't the greatest writer, but had no problem putting together a research paper when I had to. By October, I was beginning to question how well I could write. I recall getting one paper back full of corrections, the only positive one reading "good title." Having spent a considerable amount of time working on the paper, a paper whose topic I genuinely cared about, I was quite discouraged.

Fortunately, I persevered through this and similar unpleasant awakenings early in my college career and eventually began taking writing intensive courses as electives, enjoying the challenge they provided.

I became fascinated with persuasive language during a Business Communications course I took during my sophomore year. Within those few months I realized how significant the selection of even a single word can be. I later learned that what I had been interested in were rhetorical strategies, an awareness that writing is meant to be read by a targeted audience for a particular purpose.

As I now complete my Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition at URI and return to Bryant to work in its new Writing Center, I can say that my appreciation of language has grown. I'm excited about helping other Bryant students get over their inhibitions about writing, about making the Writing Center a place I wish I could have visited ten years ago. ❖



Cruisin' the Ave.

by Jean-Paul Nadeau

The Learning Center's Avenues to Success in College Seminar is underway, and those participating know what valuable information they are receiving. Avenues is a great way to get acclimated

Send submissions to the Writing Center, Hall 6, 4th floor. *Through Smoked Glass* is published monthly through the Bryant College Writing Center and Learning Center.

to college life here at Bryant. What participants may not know is that their student instructors struggled making the transition from high school to college. They were asked about their experiences as freshmen and responded honestly:

“Upon my arrival at Bryant College, I must admit that my mind was in a whirlwind of thoughts about my new found college life. What activities could I join? Would I be able to handle the stress and rigor of a college course? Was I going to be able to make friends easily, or would I not be the popular big shot that ruled my high school senior class?”

“I went into college with great apprehension. I think I was more worried about the social aspect than the academic. My fears quickly turned around with my first party and first class. I made many friends, but was overwhelmed in my courses...I found managing my time was the key to my success.”

These instructors can certainly appreciate the anxiety felt by many first year college students. Through their involvement with the Avenues Seminar, the instructors quoted above, as well as their colleagues, are helping to relieve as much of this anxiety as possible.

To learn more about how to get involved with the Avenues to Success in College Seminar, call the Learning Center at extension 6746. ❖

Writing Center Workshops for September

Getting started:

Prewriting and narrowing your focus

Thursday, September 18 from 4-5 pm
and

Monday, September 29 from 6-7pm

Writing a critical essay


Tuesday, September 23 from 5-6 pm

Getting Through Freshman Liberal Arts Seminar

by Jessica Dodge, Writing Consultant

“Start by reading the first one hundred pages of Kai Erickson’s *A New Species of Trouble*. Then complete this writing assignment for Thursday. It’s only one page.”

Only one page, huh? That’s supposed to make me feel better? I still have to read **one hundred** pages before I can even write that **one** page. Not to mention that it’s all due Thursday and today is already Tuesday, the first day of classes. I have no idea what she is looking for in that paper. Even if I did, it wouldn’t matter because I have no idea how I am going to get it done in time.



Before I start the reading, I read over the assignment so that I have a clue as to what I am looking for in the text. I make the mistake of lying on my bed so that I am comfortable while I read. One minute I am underlining an important quote on page 13. The next thing I know, my alarm is going off and it’s 8:00 Wednesday morning. Erickson’s book is in my hand and I am still on page 13. What a way to start a morning.

Immediately after my classes are over, I start reading again. This time I take advantage of the study lounge. It’s not quite so comfortable in there and by dinner time I only have a few pages left to read. After dinner, I allow myself to watch *The Simpsons* before I go back to study. I figure I deserve a break. Once I get around to it, the rest of the reading is a breeze. Unfortunately, the writing assignment is not.

I read the assignment four times to try to understand it, but I am no better off than I was the first time I read it. If I could just get started, then everything might fall into place. Instead, a blank computer screen glares at me. There are a few ideas I can think of, but which one is the right one? Which one will come together the easiest for me? Which one will have the most effect on my professor? Which one will I decide is the right one, then put the time into writing it, and eventually end up starting all over again, wondering whatever possessed me to write that in the first place? I realize that I have been consumed by these thoughts for so long that, at some point, the screen saver came on. Underneath the screen saver remains a blank screen.

Knowing that my attempt to write the paper is futile, I give in to the distractions around me and to the excitement of dorm life. I let go of the stress that has built up inside me because of the assignment. As soon as I am relaxed and enjoying myself, an idea hits me and I know exactly what it is that I want to convey in my paper. I write all my thoughts down on paper so that I don’t forget them. I get back onto the computer and the page comes easily. It’s no longer a blank screen.

I still do not know if this is what my professor is looking for. Then again, this is only one paper out of many. She will give me feedback, and I will know what to do differently next week. If I don't do so well and only get a "one," it's okay. Those "one's" will turn into "two's" and maybe those "two's" will even turn into "three's." ❖

A Helpful Reminder

By Dr. Martha Ucci



This semester, I have decided to teach a section of the Avenues to Success in College Seminar. When I walked into the classroom, I could feel the student's apprehension looming in the air. I tried to assure the students that they would enjoy this class, but somehow they didn't believe me. So, I shared with them the following bit of good humor:

TOP TEN REASONS WHY STUDYING IS MORE FUN THAN SEX!

10. You can usually find someone to do it with.
9. If you get tired, you can stop, save your place and pick up.
8. You can finish early without guilt or shame.
7. When you open a book, you don't have to worry about who else opened it.
6. A little coffee and you can go all night.
5. If you don't finish a chapter, you won't get a reputation as a "book teaser."
4. You can do it, eat and watch TV all at the same time.
3. You don't get embarrassed if your parents interrupt you in the middle.
2. You don't have to put your beer down to do it.
1. If you aren't sure what you are doing, you can always ask your roommate to help!

(courtesy of Dr. L. Hazzard)

The fact is, college can seem overwhelming, and maintaining a good sense of humor will help reduce stress and make the experience a great deal more fun. I encourage students to take their commitment to Bryant seriously, but never at the expense of a good laugh. ❖

Citing Internet Sources

By Jean-Paul Nadeau

Cyberspace has become a valuable resource for students doing research on just about any topic imaginable. The new generation of user-friendly browsers like Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer have simplified the search for useful information in the enormous, ever-growing World

Wide Web. Whether working on a history paper or a marketing report, students are increasingly drawn to the Internet as a source of both primary and secondary materials.

Once something useful has been found and included in a paper, however, proper documentation must follow. This has proven to be a problem, as only recently have style guides put out by the Modern Language Association and the American Psychological Association addressed how to do so. Because data on the web is not fixed on paper and often changes frequently, a system acknowledging the liquid nature of a "cyber-quote" was needed.



Currently, there are updated versions of the aforementioned style guides that provide for such high-tech citations. Other reference works are devoted solely to dealing with Internet sources, such as Andrew Harnack and Eugene Kleppinger's *Online! A Reference Guide to Using Internet Sources* (a copy of which can be found in the Writing Center's reference library) as well as numerous web pages that provide similar information in on-screen format. ❖

Courses that the Learning Center currently provides assistance for:

Accounting I & II
 Actuarial Math
 Algebra
 American Women's History
 Applied Actuarial Statistics
 Calculus I & II
 Calculus & Analytic Geometry I, II, and IV
 Economics 510
 Financial Management
 Fundamentals of Computer Information Systems
 General Biology
 History of American Technology
 Humanities I & II
 International Studies
 Introduction to Business
 Introduction to Literary Studies
 Introduction to Politics
 Introduction to Sociology
 Linear Algebra
 Macroeconomics
 Math 500 & 510
 Microeconomics
 Microbased Software
 Math Analysis I & II
 Numerical Analysis
 National Economic Analysis
 Oceanography
 Personal Productivity Software
 Pre-College Algebra
 Principles of Management
 Production and Operations Marketing
 Statistics I & II

In Response



This monthly column will be devoted to responding to questions and/or concerns about academic issues sent to *TSG* by Bryant students. These submissions are published anonymously. Student's concerns are designated with a "C," the corresponding response(s) with an "R."

C I don't know **what my professors will expect** from me when I turn in a paper.

R Here are a couple of tips for determining what your professor expects: 1) Read the assignment very carefully. Make sure you understand the type of writing task that is asked of you. To *evaluate* something is different than *analyzing* something. If your professor requires a five-page limit, don't write ten; (I had a professor flunk a paper I wrote because I exceeded the page limit!). Think of the assignment sheet as a contract between you and your professor. You promise to fulfill your end of the bargain by doing exactly what he/she asked you to do, and your professor promises to grade you based on what he/she's put in that document. So get that straight. 2) Talk to your professor. Most of the time they're glad, even humbled, to clarify the objectives and grading criteria of an assignment. 3) Further doubts? Come see us at the Writing Center. We're trained to "decode" your assignments.

Thomas Grady, Writing Specialist

C I'm having a fair amount of trouble writing. I tend to have **trouble focusing on one topic** when given a very general assignment. It takes me a while to narrow down my focus and to write that first paragraph. Also, it is **difficult to connect my different thoughts** -- transitions are very tricky. Usually my thoughts don't go together too well.

R Coming up with a focused topic from a broad assignment is difficult, but not impossible. I'm generally a lazy, but nervous type, so I'd do this: Talk to a friend or better, a consultant or specialist at the Writing Center. Too many students make the mistake of thinking that we're here only to look at drafts of papers. We can help you out when you're at the very beginning of a paper—before you've even written a single word! But let's consider the testing scenario when you can't consult with anyone else. 1) Come up with a potential topic and/or thesis. Ask yourself, is this too much for one paper? Could someone write an entire book on my thesis? If you answer yes, you probably have to trim your focus a bit. 2) Consciously make the "world" of the topic smaller. Give it a specific

location, time or circumstance. For instance, a professor may groan at a three-page paper that has the thesis: "Abortion should be illegal." You're probably going to write an earnest but very superficial piece, clotted with platitudes and generalities. However, your professor would be more pleased if he/she saw this instead: "Rhode Island should join the recent senate effort to ban late term abortions in spite of Clinton's override." Can you see how adding time, place and manner can start you onto a paper you can deal with in detail using the allotted page length?

Thomas Grady, Writing Specialist

R As to the second part of your concern, the purpose of transition is to connect ideas or to establish a relationship between ideas. A paper with good transition reads smoothly and establishes logical connections among ideas. Transition should occur between and within your paragraphs. The order in which you choose to write your ideas can help make transition between paragraphs easier. When deciding the order of your ideas, think about the relationship(s) between them: consider similarities, differences, and chronological order. Thinking about these relationships should help make moving from one idea to the next easier for yourself as well as your readers.

Mia Ruscetta, Writing Specialist

C In high school I knew the classes to miss, the homework to skip, and how to take a test and ace it without studying or cheating. I knew the system too well. I got away with everything, but **things are not so easy for me now in college.**

R I would say you're the type of student who is headed for success! It takes a sharp, strategic mindset to figure out how to work the system to meet your goals. Your goals at the time were clearly to do as little work as possible for a good grade. However, I understand your distress at suddenly 1. being in a college environment that is a little more challenging to manipulate, and 2. realizing that your educational goals may have changed slightly. The good news is that with your sharp mind and my assistance, you can develop a time management system which allows you to meet your new goals. Stop by the Learning Center to talk with me about strategies for managing your study time and maximizing your learning.

Jacqueline Barry, Academic Skills Specialist ❖

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