

# Hand in Hand

## Partners in Teaching, Learning, & Assessment Clarion University

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### October 2008

**Workshop—Oct. 24<sup>th</sup>.** *Academic advising: The nitty-gritty.* Venango Campus, 10-11:30a, (location TBD).

**Informal meetings, Oct. 24. Nov. 7, 21.**  
Michelle's at 3:30pm.

### Building a compost bin: On publishing poetry in academia

~ Phil Terman (English)

I needed locust posts. Our compost bin of steel bars and fence wire was rapidly sinking in on itself, and, though it still did the job of containing our leftover foodstuffs, it looked—unaesthetic. What would the raccoons and skunks think? Forage they would, but there'd be talk in their circle of our low fashion sense. Besides, the wire and steel were meant to be temporary—sooner or later we'd get around to making a real compost bin, with real locust posts planted below the frost line.

Why am I writing about compost? Because I'm a poet. One advantage of publishing in my field is that, for me

my *life* is my library, and anything my life takes a fancy to can be material for my work. And my fancy followed the compost bin and, well, if Robert Frost can write about birches....you get the drift. The 'publishing' side of my 'academic' profession has consisted of writing about, among other subjects: gardens, the weather, Chinese children, Amish auctioneers, used cars, birds, and obscure Jewish mystics.

Fifty years ago, universities did not reward poets for publishing work about the minutia of their daily lives. There were of course a few exceptions—the previously mentioned Robert Frost being among the most famous of them. The general attitude among English departments was that poets should be “taught but

not seen.” As well, many scholars were skeptical of offering “creative writing courses” because, well: how can you measure quality in poetry? Better stick to the “academic” side of poetry.



It wasn't until the sixties that “creative writing programs” began, most notably at the University of Iowa. Soon, Stanford and Columbia got into the act. Early on, “Creative Writing” was seen as a field separate from “English Departments.” It wasn't until the seventies, as “Creative Writing” programs were becoming more

popular, and thus—not to be left out of the popular trend, English Departments incorporated creative writing classes until, today, over 400 colleges and universities have creative writing programs. According to a survey conducted for the academic year 2006-07, of the 916 tenure-track academic jobs available in the field of English, 167 of them were in Creative Writing, up from 47 in the academic year of 2000-2001 (<http://www.awpwriter.org/careers/taibles01.htm>). That's quite a leap of interest.

All this is very good news for the poet who also likes to teach. When I came to Clarion, I was assured that my poetry writing would, indeed, “count” towards the “publishing” part of my academic duties, an attitude still not to be taken for granted, and I've felt fortunate,

### What is Hand in Hand?

*Hand in Hand* is a monthly e-newsletter published by Partners in Teaching, Learning and Assessment at Clarion University. *HiH* is dedicated to recognizing good teaching, fostering excellence in teaching, and creating an environment that fosters learning among students and faculty alike. Partners' activities and *HiH* are supported by a Presidential Advancement grant.

We encourage submissions to *HiH* that focus on general rather than discipline-specific issues in teaching, especially articles that are creative, respectful, and recognize the best in all of us. Articles can be on teaching philosophies, technology, pedagogy, or book reviews, but should be no more than 600 words. Articles should be submitted for review in Word to jslattery. More information on submissions can be found at <http://psv1.clarion.edu/HiH/HiHguidelines.pdf>

indeed, that there have been folks here who have understood that there's value in including creative writing as an important part of the curriculum by supporting our creative writing courses, our literary journals, and our visiting writers' program.

And those locust posts? They're not easy to find, but I finally did, after speaking to Jake Byner at the sawmill: he told me to follow a road off a road off a road. The important thing is that the compost bin got built, and the poem about the experience got drafted. Like the compost itself, I hope that our need to reflect our lives through poetry will keep feeding me, and academia:

### Building the compost bin

Among the rotten and the rank,  
the decaying and the decomposing,  
where the skunk and the raccoon  
feast—

the melon rinds and tomato skins,  
all of this season's leftovers, the garden  
remnants—bruised apples and corn  
sheaves—where the flies and worms  
celebrate, here, I stake my claim,  
with shovel and spud bar and post-  
hole digger, tape-measuring each hole  
I've been digging myself into down  
to two feet under, below the frost line,  
where I'll plant the six locust posts—  
"Four dollars a piece," Jake Byner  
said, in the grove behind his house,  
between a corn field and a bean field,  
all sweat and sawdust, chain-  
sawing and hauling them over:  
"and they'll last seventy years."

*Locust posts for the compost bin,*

I whispered to myself, over and over,  
as we loaded them onto the truck.

### WRITER'S BLOCK

In coming issues, HiH will introduce a new feature to showcase the diverse talents of our faculty. To this end, we invite faculty to submit works that go beyond the traditional scholarly article. Free form verse, essays, anecdotes, comic commentary, and other creative pieces are welcome. Regrettably, we are limited by length and our own opinions in what we will publish.

## Reducing technostress

~DARLA R. AUSEL (LTC)

Overwhelmed with technology gadgets? E-mail taking over your life? Can't find anything on your computer? Feel like you don't have any 'downtime'? If so, you may be experiencing technostress; but don't panic - you are not alone.

Weil and Rosen (1999) defines technostress as any negative impact on attitudes, thoughts, behaviors, or body physiology that is caused either directly or indirectly by technology. One well-documented form is the escalating problem of information overload – "data smog." Technostress can cause several symptoms including memory problems, insomnia, difficulty relaxing, headaches, irritability, GI discomfort and hypertension.

Studies show that for university faculty members, the effort to keep pace with new technology has created a significant rise in stress. According to a Higher Education Research Institute (2000) report, keeping up with technology causes faculty more stress than either teaching or research pressures (respectively, 67, 62, and 50%). The report concluded that, while faculty perceive technology as beneficial, 2/3 also reported that keeping up with it causes them stress. Men and women equally reported technology-related stress.

Technology causes people stress for a number of reasons. First, it speeds up the pace of work and expectations about how rapidly work could and should be done. Second, technology is demanding, time-consuming, and requires learning new hardware and software to realize its benefits. Third, it can lead to an erosion of downtime, with an expectation of 24/7 availability and work. Fourth, it can be more difficult to nurture relationships via email and create effective teams in an online environment. Finally, change itself is often stressful.

*Technology is only valuable when it supports you. Find ways to make it match your needs and reduce your stress.*

### References

- Higher Education Research Institute. (2000). *Executive summary: The American college teacher: 1989-1999 HERI faculty survey report*. Author.
- Trapani, G. (2008). *Upgrade your life: The lifehacker guide to working smarter, faster, better*. Indianapolis, IN: Wiley.
- Weil, M. M., & Rosen, L.D. (1997). *Technostress: Coping with technology at work, at home, at play*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

### 10 TIPS TO HELP REDUCE TECHNOSTRESS

(summarized from Trapani, 2008)

1. Make choices that support you. Recognize that you have control – rather than it controlling you! Choose technology-related tasks that match your skills, priorities, and values. Make your workplace a place that supports you by adding music, furniture, and art that you enjoy.
2. Set reasonable boundaries. Don't do everything, especially not all at once. Set manageable deadlines and reasonable boundaries around your time.
3. Back up your work. Enough said.
4. Control your email! Email can expand to fill the time allotted to it. Check only at specific times and empty your Inbox regularly. Develop listservs and nicknames for people and groups emailed frequently. Set up filters to sort your mail for you. Finally, set limits on your email time by responding rapidly and crafting informative, but precise responses to common requests.
5. Control your data. Find ways to make your files easily retrievable, either by using folders effectively

or by using your desktop's built-in file search features.

6. Search smart. Sites like Google can make finding what you want extremely easy. Google Images and Google Scholar can be especially helpful. Google's cheat sheet <<http://www.google.com/help/cheatsheet.html>> can help you search smarter.
7. Customize your software. Create button bars for Office software that match your frequently performed tasks. Put your faves in your browser's toolbar. Learn the keystrokes for your software that you use most frequently.
8. Organize your photos. Sites like Picasa <<http://picasa.com>> are free, but also allow you to organize, label, caption, search, create slideshows and albums, and edit your photos.
9. Let others remind you. Take advantage of free reminders that you can get from email, online calendars, banks, credit cards, weather stations, and professional journals.
10. Power down. Rather than always being available, give yourself "technology-free" breaks. Turn off your phone, computer and PDA. Decide when and how you want to be available (e.g., by email, but not IM; weekdays only).

## Advanced Group Management

~Marilyn Harhai (Library Sci.)

If you use group projects in your online class, setting up the groups manually can be time consuming. Fortunately, there is a tool within Blackboard called Advanced Group Management that can make that task much easier. The group management tool can be used to create the shell groups and then to assign students to those groups. One very nice feature of the tool is that it will randomly assign students to groups. You can

also easily change to which group a student is assigned.

The Advanced Group Management tool is found in the control panel menu. The next time you are setting up groups in Blackboard, give this tool a try. If you would like a demonstration or have questions, please contact me at [mharhai@clarion.edu](mailto:mharhai@clarion.edu).  $\delta$

## Ask Ms. Scholar

**DEAR MS. SCHOLAR:**

I'M A NEW faculty member who's never taught more than one course a semester. Now I'm expected to teach four courses, serve on three departmental and two university committees, and continue my research. My Research I graduate program didn't prepare me to think about how to balance all of these competing demands while moving towards tenure and promotion. Help! Drowning Fast

**DEAR DROWNING,**

What balance?! To me, balance is attention to all the demands of our job equally. Thinking this way only sets you up for the impossible.



To begin, get back in the boat and hold on. Instead of trying to seek balance, think about the ebb and flow of tides. For your teaching commitment, peak times usually occur at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester. In these times class preparation and grading should be your focus. If it's any consolation, most of your colleagues will be in the same boat so committee work and research might be at a minimum during these times.

Service, a requirement toward tenure and promotion, requires some planning as does your teaching. Accept committee assignments that can be accomplished during non-peak times or that can be worked on over the course of the semester or academic year. If that's not possible,

then try to schedule the same time every day or week to work on the assignment. Whatever you do, volunteer for only what you can accomplish. Taking on more than you can realistically do and letting the committee down is not good practice.

Once your schedule begins to flow and you think that you've got a handle on things, take advantage of this period to begin outlining your research agenda. Begin small and chip away at the agenda when you can. The key is that each little chip may lead to a publication or conference presentation. By doing this, you will be making progress toward the tenure and promotion process.

Finally, just as the tides change, so does the professor's work. The ebb returns quickly. Hold on tight and remember that you already weathered the first storm and this too shall pass. The flow will return.  $\delta$

If you have questions regarding teaching, student/faculty issues, or other comments and suggestions, please write Ms. Scholar c/o [MsScholarColumn@gmail.com](mailto:MsScholarColumn@gmail.com)

## "CARETAKE..."

~RACHEL SNYDER

Before you can caretake others, take care to take care of yourself. Take care of your arms so you can lift another up. Take care of your own heart so you can inspire another to open hers. Take care of your mind so you remain a clear and focused guide. Only then are you ready to caretake an elder, an infant, an invalid. Caretake the living, the dying, the injured, the fallen. Caretake a school, a house, a farm, that tiny park that no one else seems to care about. Caretake an organization that is floundering, a neighborhood that's crumbling, a woman who has lost her way. Take time to care mindfully and to care well. Most important, take care you don't give up your entire life by taking care of everyone but yourself.

### PROMOTION ADVICE

Don't do things in order to get promoted. Be able to tell the Promotion Committee the things you've done that make you worthy of being promoted.

~ Randy Potter (Psychology)

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Find a "promotion buddy"—someone who has already been through the process—who will keep you on track and give you moral support and encouragement. You'll find you'll need a "helping hand"...someone with whom you can discuss your ideas/thoughts/questions.

Patty Kolencik (Education)

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The most important thing for me to remember in the writing of the narrative was that my audience was not familiar with my discipline. I had to teach them about what I do without talking down to them. I also think it is very important to establish a "voice" that is accessible to those outside of your discipline. I have heard that some members of the committee appreciate the infusion of a little sense of humor - but not TOO much. And neatness really does count.

It is sometimes a game of fitting square pegs into round holes. Don't obsess that there aren't any holes that fit your pegs - explain why your pegs only LOOK square but are REALLY round. Good luck!

~Marilouise "Mel" Michel (Theatre)

## Thriving in academe

~Elisabeth Donato (French) & Jeanne Slattery (Psychology)

By most measures, we both have successful careers. Each May we offer a promotion workshop and, in preparing for it, spend some time mulling over what it takes to be successful at Clarion. In this spirit, we offer idiosyncratic and unsystematic advice drawn from our

own careers and through watching our own mentors and others who have been successful here. Our observations:

1. Find a mentor and models. Learn from the people who approach this profession in the ways that you like.
2. Talk to colleagues and find out what is required for success in your department and in the promotion process. Keep these in mind as you decide how to spend your time, although choose what matches your own interests and skills.
3. Develop short- and long-term goals. Consider where you want to be in 5, 10, and 20 years and take steps to get there.
4. Balance breadth and depth in your professional life. While Clarion University encourages breadth – teaching, research, and service – make choices that are meaningful to you and that help you develop some depth of interest and expertise.
5. Learn to say No. Be protective of your time and make time for professional activities that are important to you.
6. Do what you enjoy; enjoy what you do. We cannot always do the things that we want, but choose among options wisely and make sure you have fun.
7. Surround yourself with a community of interested, committed, hardworking colleagues. It rubs off – and influences how others see you.
8. Don't be afraid of making mistakes. Learn from the mistakes you do make.
9. Network with others. Listen to and learn from them.
10. Be collegial. Volunteer to do things that help your department or colleagues.
11. Establish a reputation of being responsible, reliable, competent and thoughtful.
12. Develop computer and organizational skills that help you work rapidly and well.
13. Don't be afraid to assertively, respectfully speak your mind and make a difference. Act with integrity.
14. Pay attention to departmental and university politics and avoid investing in and being ensnared by no-win situations.
15. Recognize that life comes with limitations. Accept the things you cannot change, but courageously change the things you can. Of course, develop the wisdom to recognize the difference between these (loosely paraphrased from the Serenity Prayer).
16. Participate in departmental social events. Spend time talking to colleagues around the water cooler.
17. From time to time, assess where you are professionally and personally. Fine-tune your goals and approach as appropriate.
18. Most importantly, stay physically and emotionally healthy. Make time for yourself. Relax. Revitalize.

Of course, we must note that neither of us chooses to do all of these. We do many of these things, though, as do the people whom we see as successful.  $\delta$

### Upcoming Issues of *HiH* (tentative):

- Undergraduate research
- General Education goals
- Classroom climate

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The opinions expressed in these articles reflect those of the authors themselves and may or may not reflect the views of the *HiH* editorial staff or those of Clarion University as a whole