

ARTICULATIONS OF EMPOWERMENT  
FOR THE (UN)SCATHED WRITER...

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Picture this: An 18 year-old Evergreen student sits in a classroom full of 50 relative strangers, waiting for the stack of papers being passed through eager hands to make its way to her desk. Just one week earlier, she had painstakingly crafted her very first college-level synthesis essay, in the confines of a small, bedbug infested dorm, and had anticipated this moment ever since. The room remains silent, except for the occasional crinkle of shifting paper, an almost inaudible sigh from the row behind her, and the steady beat of her heart, now lodged deep in her esophagus. The student to her left passes her the essays with his head down. She closes her eyes and holds the bundle for a moment. *Ah, that first sentence!* She thinks. *What a sentence! And my tone, I hope it sounded right!* All the hours she had spent writing over the years seeped into her mind: writing in Honors English for 3 years, writing in her journal, writing eccentric stories about her mother, writing to release, writing to change, writing to understand, writing to escape. This, however, was decidedly the most pivotal writing she had ever done. THIS was college writing, and it held more promise in her heart than anything else. She retrieves her essay, breathes in a storm of doubt and hope, then looks down.

Red pen. Line edits. Three tense problems. Two typos circled. Four underlined and starred sentences. Five question marks spattered randomly in the margins. And scribbled in haphazard handwriting on the back page: “The assignment was to synthesize, not wax poetic on, our two texts. Next time, go to the Writing Center before you turn anything in.”

She feels the proverbial stab in the chest. Her beloved first paper was proofread, not read. *Was this what she came to Evergreen to study writing for?*

Now discard that picture. It’s a venerable snapshot I’ve tucked far away, next to my copy of Stephen King’s *On Writing*. It holds a lesson I was lucky enough to learn my first quarter: Choosing the right program is important, yes. But choosing whom you learn from is just as integral to your education.

After I cried to my bedbugs and my mother about the uninspiring comments I received on my first college essay, I resolved to be deliberate about choosing my next mentor. Sure enough, the papers I got back after that decision came attached with an entire paragraph of typed (not scribbled) feedback (not line edits) which took into consideration my voice, my clarity, the organization of

my thoughts, what worked, and what needed more work. I even developed a rapport with certain faculty by which they could track my progress in conjunction with what they already knew about my individual style and offer advice based on that knowledge. I finally found balance in the often solitary confines of writing in which I felt comfortable sharing my words. My own little utopic niche.

Speaking of utopia...the Writing Center has taught me the importance of giving the right feedback at the right time. My intention is not to vilify the professor I mentioned above, but to elucidate the fact that any one student is at a different level with her writing at any given time. It is up to her to engage with faculty who recognize the level she is at and who can best empower her voice, as she simultaneously empowers herself.

So how do we learn about this enormous and delicate thing called *writing* which carries such a centralized focus at this institution? How can we cultivate our own writing style? By reading, practicing, workshopping, getting lectured, experimenting, and doing projects, right? Yes, but let's go one step further. All these activities we do to learn about writing are decisions made by the faculty who teach the program. We ought to break the habit of relying on program descriptions alone to influence how we spend the next 10 or 20 weeks of our lives. Sure, they sound provocative as hell, but they often read like invitations to David Lynch's dreams! You may be swayed to enroll in a class because its description includes a vague connection between Foucault and astrophysics, only to find out the Foucault portion is an hour lecture that goes way over your head and you never discuss the guy again. Don't fret. The physical properties of celestial objects can't be all *that* bad...

*Yeah right!* We're paying tuition to get what we want out of our education, not to waste our time! The Evergreen way allows for direct contact with the legion of intellectuals who make up our faculty. These folks are dedicated to the process of creating unique curriculum from the ground up. Literally. In the summer, faculty program teams go on planning retreats to brainstorm and coordinate their upcoming programs. From creating a book list based on texts they have personally loved and learned from, to securing various classrooms in which to conduct the course, Evergreen faculty cover all the details.

Much of our focus at Evergreen is placed upon collaborative learning and the personal relationships we can cultivate with our faculty. It's exciting to have the opportunity to make an informed choice to work with these people. After all, we are the ones who pay to hang out with their brains.

So here's a glimpse of some tasty tidbits I've garnered from my relationships, some years long and some momentary, with Evergreen writing faculty:

*First off, don't shy away from enrolling in an Evening and Weekend course. Many knowledgeable and wonderful people teach these often overlooked classes, and it's important to take advantage of the opportunities these faculty can offer.*

**Kate Crowe** believes in writing from experience and never tells a student what to write except that “I want them writing from their guts.” She has taught an array of classes in the past from the quirky *Beats, Bukowski, and Dorothy*, to a student favorite, *Writing From Life*. For many years she coordinated the credit-bearing Prior Learning from Experience program.

**Emily Lardner**, Director of the Washington Center for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Education, “love[s] teaching students who have chosen to come to Evergreen because they want to be in charge of their own education.” She writes about public issues for journals like *The Green Pages* and *Change Magazine*. Emily is widely respected for her commitment to writing pedagogy.

**Steve Blakeslee**, a self-described pragmatic teacher, says, “If students want to improve their writing, they need to write regularly. They need fluency and momentum to sustain them when inspiration fails.” Each year, Steve offers an overview course called *The Practice of Writing*, as well as an autobiography writing class, a technical writing class, and writing intensives.

**Char Simons**, a freelance journalist and travel writer, opines that “all writing is creative—it is not limited to fiction. The process of shaping ideas and communicating them in the most engaging and informative way possible is creative.” A conscientious writer, she cautions interested students to be prepared for serious exploration of the dark, imperialist, and often racist roots of the travel writing genre.

*For all you hardcore writing devotees, look to the not-so-secret luminaries here at our college who usually offer full-time, interdisciplinary, literature and writing programs. Because writing was my main focus at Evergreen, I especially benefited from working with the following faculty members in their often intense, yet playful and mind-blowing programs.*

**Steven Hendricks**, an Oulipo enthusiast, (look it up!) flying monkey monster, and book arts guru, asserts that “writing enunciates the physics of the imagination; it exposes, too, the imagination of language, the structures and possibilities of narratives; writing is not the exploration of self, it is the exploration of language and literature—the desire to know literature, to escape it, the desire simply for it to imagine, the way it rains.” Expect plenty of constraint-based workshops and a healthy dose of Samuel Beckett if you decide to take a program with Steven.

**Leonard Schwartz**, who also states that all writing is creative, is interested in the practice of using words in poems, in theory, and in other prose forms, or Poetics. He doesn’t teach reading or writing so much as he teaches “wreading”: the suggestion that what one reads shapes what one writes, and how one writes determines what one needs to read. Leonard regularly invites writers to give public readings on our campus.

**David Wolach** brought PRESS, the first annual cross-cultural literary conference, to our campus last spring, successfully stimulating the budding writing climate at Evergreen. A spontaneously combustible, perpetual student, David believes that “reading voraciously and writing critically

about those readings is how one learns a language and expands it, treats it, mines it for hidden commitments, sociopolitical or otherwise.”

**Gail Tremblay** is a poet who writes about literature and art for many publications. She teaches English composition, and expository, technical, and creative writing. She is American Indian with Onondaga and Micmac ancestors and has a strong focus in multicultural and feminist literature and art. She has worked on translations of poetry from French and Spanish and is interested in the problems of translations, translitics, and bilingual texts. She is also interested in the intersections between text and visual work.

**Therese Saliba**, a writer of cultural criticism and creative prose, resists the polarization of “academic” and “creative” writing and tries to meld the two in her writing and teaching. Another avid supporter of Evergreen’s burgeoning writing culture, Therese teaches Third World feminist studies, cultural studies, and comparative and multicultural literature. Her philosophy in teaching writing is to “help voices that have been relegated to the margins find a space on the main page. I like to encourage women, students of color, working class, queer students, and others in finding their voices through writing.”

**Marianne Bailey’s** grace and knowledge has personally influenced me so much that I could not rightfully omit her from this list. She teaches French, German, Caribbean, West and North African literature, theatre, and dance. She also gives extremely thoughtful and valuable feedback to her students. If you’re interested in Nietzsche, translation, surrealism, or existentialism, then take a program with Marianne.

**Sandra Yannone**, the Director of the Writing Center, feels deeply passionate about poetry and the writing process. Years of studying with dedicated, brilliant women writers and mentors taught her that “the best work I can do is to create the space where others can experience the beauty and challenges of their voices. I believe each person has a crucial story to tell. I am devoted to working with all Evergreen writers to achieve their goal of having something to say and through the telling, learn something important about their connection and responsibility to humanity.” Each spring she teaches *Cultivating Voice: A Writing Tutor’s Craft*.

Current deans **Bill Ransom** and **Eddy Brown** eventually will return to teaching writing when their terms as deans expire. Particularly wonderful folks to talk writing with, they are passionate about their commitment to Evergreen.

Bill has an extensive writing career, including co-authoring three books with the science-fiction writer, Frank Herbert. He encourages collaboration between writers, a grounded understanding of mechanics, and practice, practice, practice.

Eddy uses the keen of the photographer to teach creative writing. One of his goals is to bring serious focus on this discipline to Evergreen.

Although they are full-time administrators and therefore cannot teach writing or take on contracts, they are invested in moving the College forward in other important ways, like hiring more writers to teach here. Faculty serve on hiring committees to determine which areas or which disciplines they prioritize for recruitment. Faculty should hear from students about how much they need broader and more in-depth writing opportunities on campus. If you're at all interested in finding more writing courses in your next program catalog, be vocal about it!

This list in no way includes each and every amazing writing instructor we have at our college. I invite readers to let us know who else has inspired you during your writing experiences so that we can adequately acknowledge them in next year's edition of *Inkwell*.

Ah, Evergreen! It is a fairy world of hybridists, sprawling forests, and polygonal architecture! It is ripe with possibility, a unique student body, and a progressive education style! It is an ideal place to achieve your degree, and learn a thing or two about writing along the way. But Evergreen's theory won't become a reality unless we actively practice it. All these faculty members are waiting to meet you, and your plethora of words, as soon as you seek them out. So get to it! Next quarter looms just around the corner...