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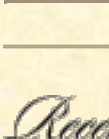
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Essaying CCCC--A Chair's Blog

A blog kept by Doug Hesse, current chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the nation's largest association of college writing professors.

About Me



NAME: DOUG HESSE

I'm 2005 chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and teach at Illinois State University, where I direct the Honors Program.

[View my complete profile](#)

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Archives

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2005

Farewell

A last entry from a fast-former chair.

News. To honor and remember deceased Chairs, the CCCC Executive Committee approved four \$750 scholarships for fulltime graduate students to attend the annual convention. The application deadline for Chicago is February 1, 2006. Complete information is <http://www.ncte.org/groups/cccc/highlights/123300.htm>. The CCCC session at MLA is #600, at 7:15 p.m., December 29, in the Kennedy Room of the Marriott. Our timely topic this year is "The State of American Writing: Perspectives Popular and Professional," with speakers Peter Mortensen, Sue McLeod, and Ann Wysocki, and chair Doug Hesse. Afterwards, some folks may want to attend the annual WPA party.

My annual report to the membership and my Chair's address are in the December issues of CCC, recently mailed. You can view the contents and, if you have a membership, link to full text at <http://www.ncte.org/pubs/journals/ccc/contents/117785.htm>.

The Professional Equity Project, which awards \$250 worth of support to non tenure line faculty to attend the convention, has been enormously successful this year. We will make 100 grants for the Chicago meeting. I'd challenge anyone to identify a professional organization that provides such support to so many people.

Views. Blogs start bravely, and some writers stick to them. I'm clearly not one. Among the things that have surprised me this year is the sheer volume of correspondence going that happens between the Chair and all the many people doing all the great work of the organization. I fancy that thirty years ago, pre-email, this happened at the pace of the post and the occasional phone call. Whether would be better or worse is beside the point; there's no going back.

As chair you learn a lot more about the highways and back roads of our profession than you'd really thought existed, even if you thought you'd been paying attention. There's a lot of creeks and draws in the leaping fields between rhetoric and composition. There are places where people are still speaking the modes of discourse, and there are places that speak Greek, Latin, and French, though less this last now than a few years ago. There are places that speak Drupal and Wiki, sometimes through the voice of podcasting. If there's any personal disappointment over the past year, it's that I haven't helped the organization move nearly as far as it needs to in terms of shaping the spheres beyond our own. We're caught generally in a responsive mode, as, for example in the recent release of the [National Assessment of Adult Literacy](#).

I'm not naive about how much or little CCCC can shape the national discourse on writing and literacy. Still, I worry that we're too comfortable in the role of outside critics; it's easier to say smart things to each other about how stupid or malicious this or that report, bill, or speaker is than it is to find ways to make public to popular audiences what we know about writing. The very blog you're reading is an ironic instance.

I just worry a little about our motives. In [his farewell address](#), Dwight Eisenhower famously worried about the emerged military industrial complex, in which perpetuating a certain state of affairs for the economic benefit of some supplanted concerns for the broader health of the country and its citizens. Though it's melodramatically pretentious to imagine myself as Ike-plus-50, I wonder what drives writing teachers today and that includes me. Or maybe it's just me.

Properly, we worry about the state of the profession and our status in academic culture, and we want CCCC to advance both. But to the extent we regard teaching writing, reading, and literacy as mere pretexts for bulking our collective identity as a profession, becoming ever more enthralled with analyzing our own profession-ness, we drift paradoxically further from our calling and mission. These are musty terms, I admit, hardly suited to current political realities, except through a kind of fundamentalist rhetoric that surely scares me. But my own challenge is to see CCCC clearly alive, at least in part, through the lens of our students' best-imagined literate lives.

Yours Truly,

Doug

posted by Doug Hesse | [2:03 PM](#) | [4 comments](#)

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2005

#10 CCCC Pittsburgh News and to Chicago

News. The CCCC Officers and Executive Committee met in Pittsburgh, November 19-21, 2005. Several aspects of those meetings should interest CCCC members, and I'll recount a few of them here.

CCCC in Chicago, March 2006. Duku Anokye has put together a stellar program that will include such celebrated outside speakers as Patricia Williams and Deborah Tannen. People should register and reserve hotel rooms as soon as possible, especially because Chicago will be bustling in March. CCCC has reserved a block of 1200 rooms at the Palmer House, the convention hotel. However, as of November 21st, this registration block hadn't yet been opened. Jaqui Joseph-Biddle, NCTE Convention Manager, anticipates the block of rooms will be made available in early December. Now, some CCCC members have tried contacting the Palmer House, been told there are no rooms, and, quite understandably, panicked. Rest assured: the block of 1200 rooms just isn't open for reservation yet. On the other hand, a few CCCC members have been able to reserve rooms at the Palmer House: this is a function of pure serendipity and a reservations operator who flattered guidelines: congrats to those who got rooms this way, but their success shouldn't make others of us nervous. My recommendation: reserve Palmer House rooms in December, after they're made available. Either Duku or I will let you know as soon as that happens. Also: a large medical convention was moved from New Orleans to Chicago during the week of CCCC; therefore, room is going to be tight, especially at the large convention hotels, so everyone will do well to making housing arrangements early.

CCCC Research. The Executive Committee voted to allocate up to \$25,000 for a research study on the kinds of writing students are being assigned in high schools and in colleges. We'll provide a full call for proposals soon. Also, we convened a two-day meeting about the future of research in CCCC. Attending were C's officers Jay Wootton, Duku Anokye, Carol Rutz, Kahi Yancey, Doug Hesse, and several invited members of the research and research initiative committees, including Chuck Bazerman, Neal Learner, Beatrice Quarshie Smith, Mary Juzwick, Kip Strasna, Christina Haas, Brian Huot, Bill Condon, and Anne Herrington. We'll keep you updated on the several good ideas emerging from this discussion.

CCCC Basic Data Project. The EC approved a recommendation to study what kinds of basic data CCCC might regularly gather on behalf of the organization and the profession. As rhetoric, composition, and writing studies have matured, scholars, teachers, and administrators increasingly need certain kinds of basic data about aspects of our profession. Examples might include a roster of Majors and Certificate programs in rhetoric/composition (picking up on good work of the CCCC Majors Committee); the number of PhD programs and graduates in rhetoric/composition; the average teaching loads (most importantly, number of students) for writing teachers, by institutional type; and so on.

Next Generation Project Enhancement. The EC approved my proposal that we do two things to foster mentoring relationships within CCCC. First, we should systematically 1) contact every current member who has belonged to CCCC more than seven years; 2) invite them to serve as a mentor or consultant in one or more categories: preparing research, grant proposals; responding to job search materials (reading letters of application, CV's), etc.; reading a draft of a manuscript; or other capacities to be determined; 3) invite them to provide brief demographic information (institutional type, teaching assignments, etc.) and a sentence or two of introductory information to the help the chair match mentors/consultants to requests received. Second, we should create a mentorship archive for the profession. That is, CCCC should invite members to submit short pieces of writing (100-500 words) in which they describe someone in the profession who has served as a mentor to them. Most likely, these profiles are best collected via a website and made available there, to members. This project will serve at least two important purposes. First, it will enhance organizational memory or provide a research source. Second, it will provide a means for every member to make a contribution, however modest, to CCCC.

Editor of Forum. The EC appointed Evelyn Beck as the new Editor of Forum, the newsletter on nontenure-track faculty perspectives regularly publish in CCC and TETYC.

Special Interest Groups discussion. The EC had an extended discussion of how best to treat caucuses, coalitions, forums, SIGs, and other Special Interest Groups to meet both the needs and interests of those groups and their members and the larger needs and interests of CCCC. This discussion will be ongoing.

Chairs Memorialization Project. The EC voted to create up to 4 graduate student fellowships to attend CCCC, as a way of memorializing CCCC chairs who have passed away.

CCCC Issue Groups. Jay Wootton, incoming chair, led a spirited retreat on possible issues that the EC might pursue during the next year. Jay is exploring dividing the EC into small groups, each of them working extensively on a single strategic issue; the process will be adapted from used by the NCTE EC. The C's officers will analyze all the excellent ideas generated during the retreat and the meeting, and will develop issue groups during its January 2006 retreat.

We accomplished a good deal more during our Pittsburgh meetings, but I wanted here simply to highlight a few items.

Yours truly,

Doug

posted by Doug Hesse | [11:44 AM](#) | [0 comments](#)

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 08, 2005

Katrina and CCCC, One Week Later

News and Views. In response to my last blog entry, which I sent as an email to the entire membership of CCCC, I received dozens of emails with suggestions for what the organization should do in response to Hurricane Katrina, and with the input of the officers and executive committee, I've distilled them into a few initiatives. Most immediately, CCCC and NCTE have created a bulletin board at <http://www.ncte.org/announcements/20050908.htm> on which members and their students affected by the disaster can post their needs and their news, and members who want to offer materials or expertise can do so.

Second, in the near term, I'll ask the CCCC leadership to explore whether we might subsidize participation in the organization by affected members, perhaps helping some attend the convention in Chicago. I'm very sensitive that offering free conference registrations or travel assistance at this point, when people have lost everything including lives, seems positively Marie Antoinettish. However, I'm not so sure that in a few months, some reconnection to their colleagues mightn't be something those members really appreciate.

We already have an example of this kind of foresight via Susan Bernstein and Kathleen Baca, Co-Chairs of the Conference on Basic Writing, who sent me the following message on behalf of the CBW board: "We are pleased to inform you that the Conference on Basic Writing will dedicate the 2006 CBW Fellowship to a Basic Writing educator who has been displaced by Hurricane Katrina and/or who teaches Basic Writing to displaced students. The CBW Fellowship provides \$500 to subsidize travel to CCCC in Chicago in March and to participate in the Conference on Basic Writing Pre-Conference Wednesday Workshop. The full text of the announcement can be found at <http://www.asu.edu/cbas/english/composition/cbw/Fellowship.htm>

I deeply appreciate the commitment of the Conference on Basic Writing.

Finally, several members have suggested that we gather the stories of those who have been affected by the Hurricane and its aftermath. This strikes me as a singularly good thing to do. I'm well aware that, when people need bread and water and roofs, to ask for their stories seems like an inefficient, even insulting gesture. But I hope we might benefit not only the storm survivors but others--and all of us--by making sure that the "official record" of this disaster, is tempered by the truths of those who experienced it.

Yours truly,

Doug

posted by Doug Hesse | [2:52 PM](#) | [0 comments](#)

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31, 2005

CCCC, Katrina, Our Colleges, The Future

Dear CCCC Colleagues,
We've all followed the unspeakable hurricane devastation. Clearly, right now, all of us who can should donate generously to broad relief organizations. Choose your favorite or <http://www.redcross.org/>. Sometime soon, our CCCC colleagues in the smitten area will be able to identify specific professional needs. The CCCC leadership is considering how this organization might help meet those needs when that time comes.

We have several ideas, but I welcome your suggestions. If you're a CCCC member in the Gulf Coast area and are able to receive this message, please know that thousands of your colleagues across the country have you in our thoughts and hearts. We will put you in our actions, too.

Yours truly,

Doug

posted by Doug Hesse | [12:39 PM](#) | [1 comments](#)

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22, 2005

On the passing of John Lovas

Reflection. As did many others, I received the sad news this morning that night of The Alamo, a forgettable movie starring Billy Bob Thornton, Dennis Quaid, et al. I asked Sanchez about his take as a Mexican-American on everything before us. He looked at me and smiled a deep wise silent smile that suggested what I knew as soon as the words were out of my mouth: what a silly thing to ask. The next morning, the San Antonio news reported crowds of around 6000 lining the streets to watch the premier festivities; in another story, some 10,000 had taken part in the Cesar Chavez Day of Service and Learning, that same Saturday afternoon.

Sanchez and I were walking just after a CCCC featured session in which he'd presented a generous narrative about his work reporting on education for NPR. I've recalled that day this morning because, just yesterday, Sanchez had a thoughtful story about the new SAT writing exam on "All Things Considered." You can, in fact, [hear the story](#). His point was that, especially for disadvantaged students, the new writing exam was a new hurdle. My point might have been that a 25-minute sample is a reductive way to assess writing for anyone (besides, writing via the SAT will still be determined 2/3 through a multiple choice test).

Supporters contend that the new test will lever schools into raising standards and doing a better job teaching writing. I'm all for assessment and for teaching more writing and more effectively. We just can't accomplish these without being really serious about what doing so will entail. The writing test comes in the umbra of various national pushes to ratchet up high school. Consider the nation's governors' efforts through [Achieve.org](#).

In the rural Iowa town where I grew up, we had a saying: "You don't make a cow fatter just by weighing it." In these new calls for rigor, so far I'm seeing lots more scales than grain.

News. Next week, of course, is the CCCC meeting in San Francisco. Especially if you've been driving distance of the Bay, it's not too late to join us. Information, including the complete program, remains online at <http://www.ncte.org/profdex/cony/cccc>.

Yours truly,

Doug

posted by Doug Hesse | [9:57 AM](#) | [0 comments](#)