

# NEW GROWTH AT THE CADET WRITING AND READING CENTER

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At any given moment during the academic year, the average student has at least one paper on which he or she is working. At any given moment during the academic year, the average faculty member has at least one paper, article, memo or report on which he or she is working. At any given moment, the average Coast Guard officer has at least one memo or report in the works. Each has to do battle with the written word. While for many, this battle is daunting at best, terrifying and hopeless at worst, nothing could be more important. Effective communication is critical; personal and professional success depends on how well ideas are conveyed on paper.

Because of the importance of writing in our culture, both academic and professional, the Coast Guard Academy invests a great deal of time in teaching writing. Many will find that observation odd based on their experiences as cadets. Some will think, "But I only took one writing class ... two if you count literature." And while cadets still only take one class whose sole purpose is writing, writing has become an integral part of the entire academic experience at CGA.

As writing has become integral to many classes, so the Cadet Writing and Reading Center (CWRC) has become integral for many cadets as they develop as writers. Although the Academy has had a writing center for many years, the CWRC took on new life two years ago under the direction of Dr. Kathleen Jernquist. Hired specifically to run the CWRC, Dr. Jernquist has engaged cadets and faculty alike in rethinking the way we write and the way we teach writing. "Many people who run writing centers are there biding time before

they move on to something else. I want to do this," says Dr. Jernquist.

Gone are the days of cadets sprinting over to the writing center the night before a paper is due for a quick spelling and grammar check (though some still try this approach). Cadets now routinely visit the writing center well ahead of due dates, sometimes multiple times. Total use of the CWRC has tripled since hiring a full-time director. Tutor Allana Allik, who has worked at the CWRC for five years, writes, "It is remarkable how much the writing center has evolved in that time. It is more professional, more organized and busier than ever before, and improvements continue apace. I am excited to be a part of this progress, which has been the result of sound decisions and much dedication." In fall of 2002, cadets visited the writing center for a total of 410 tutorials. By fall of 2004, that number had grown to 1290.

Why has the CWRC grown so much under the direction of Dr. Jernquist? There are really two major reasons. First, the quality of tutoring under her direction has improved. That results in greater success for the cadet writer, which in turn generates more use of the writing center. Cadets who are successful after visiting the writing center are more likely to return and also more likely to encourage others to use the CWRC. Dr. Jernquist provides regular training for the tutors, who represent a wide variety of academic disciplines. This means that the tutors are better able to guide a cadet through the writing process, regardless of the subject and form of the writing assignment.

This also means that the CWRC is not just for remedial writers. Just as most professional writers have their work reviewed and edited, so

even the best writers here at CGA can benefit from having someone look **critically** at their work. Tutors provide a sounding board for cadets at every stage of the writing process, from topic selection and thesis development to final editing.

One recent visit by a 2/c and ORCA major tells the long-term story of the writing center and the writing process. As a 4/c this cadet was, by her own admission, a weak writer who struggled with reading and lacked academic confidence. The draft that she brought to the writing center after a couple of years of engaging in this process with other papers demonstrated increased confidence in her ability to acquire ideas and concepts from complex sources, integrate what she has acquired with concepts covered in class, and articulate those ideas for an academic audience. She feels like she's a better writer because she is a 2/c ORCA major. The logic required in her math classes translates directly into her organization and argumentation in an ethics paper.

Tutors are not proofreaders. Instead, they offer cadets an opportunity to discuss the writing and learn valuable self-assessment tools. In part, tutors achieve this by asking cadets to think about the writing process on three levels. First are the higher-order concerns, like audience, purpose, and thesis. When cadets have clearly defined each of these, they are more likely to find success in conveying their ideas. Second are mid-level issues, such as organization and development. Finally, as cadets move toward finished products, they look at lower-order concerns such as style and diction. Cadet Colleen Perry, a regular user of the CWRC, comments, "[It] is good to talk out your ideas with the people there. They will ask you questions that provoke you to think about your thesis more carefully. They also are good with grammar. So whatever stage you're at in writing your paper, I feel that they can help..." Because cadets are using a common language to talk about the writing process, they can use these skills across disciplines.

The second major reason for the dramatic growth is that the CWRC is now open during the day. In addition to the officers who stand duty at the CWRC during the evenings, Dr. Jernquist has hired civilian tutors, local writers from a variety of backgrounds, to provide tutoring sessions during the day. For the past two years, the funding for these daytime tutors has come from a generous grant from the Hewitt Foundation. (Many readers are probably familiar with the annual Hewitt Writing and Speaking contests, regularly covered in these pages.)

Having tutors on a regular and predictable schedule has also led to cadets developing

*At any given moment, the Cadet Writing and Reading Center is abuzz with activity. A cadet is working with a tutor on a Marine Biology lab report. An International cadet is working to refine his understanding of written English. Another cadet is reviewing a draft of a Morals & Ethics paper. A 4/c is working with a tutor to develop strategies to read history more critically.*

*"This is what I had imagined the Center to be after two years: a vital space for writers to explore and channel their thoughts into the written word with a level of confidence that comes from talking with a tutor. The Cadet Writing and Reading Center is becoming central to the cadet academic experience," Dr. Jernquist mused after she walked through the Center one morning.*

*"Now we can begin the next wave of activity. I hope to extend our work from the 4/c introduction to college reading and writing more fully into both the 3/c courses, where cadets can apply their skills to more demanding material, and into the major courses, where cadets can become professional writers in their academic fields. When cadets reach Naut Sci IV, they can apply all of these skills to become confident, successful Coast Guard communicators.*

*"Over the next two years, I hope to develop the CWRC program to be a leader among peers for its ability to serve the academic and professional communities at the Academy and in the Coast Guard. My goal is to have cadets at all levels and in all majors thrive in a writing-centric academic experience, one that yields a generation of Coast Guard officers undaunted by the writing process and confident in each of the skills they will need to serve the country and humanity."*

ongoing relationships with individual tutors. Some cadets schedule weekly meetings with the same tutor, in order to refine their writing skills, even outside of a particular assignment. These regular meetings also give tutors an opportunity to track the growth of the cadet, sometimes over several years.

The CWRC has grown dramatically, too, in the breadth of its services. Though some think of a writing center as somewhere to take just traditional papers, faculty members are increasingly recommending that cadets take all varieties of written work to the CWRC. And this extends across all of the majors. Marine Biology students take lab reports in for review.

Nautical Science students take in outlines for in-class presentations.

Additionally, Dr. Jernquist spends some portion of every week working with faculty members to incorporate writing into their courses. In particular, she has worked extensively with the Electrical Engineering section, offering strategies for improving the quality of the work in technical writing. LCDR Dave Godfrey, Assistant Professor of Electrical Engineering, describes the work that he has done with Dr. Jernquist and with his students. LCDR Godfrey says, "We are still in the process of creating language that defines good technical writing. What makes good

technical writing different from good writing in a humanities paper, and more importantly what makes them the same?"

The Cadet Writing and Reading Center has been transformed. Under Dr. Jernquist's leadership it has grown from a center that reached barely a quarter of the Corps of Cadets to one that touches every cadet at least once. The cadets are experiencing greater success in their writing, which is bringing them back to the CWRC again. Through a generous grant from the Hewitt Foundation, the CWRC has been able to provide these additional services for the past two years.

## 2006 JOHN & ERNA HEWITT WRITING AND SPEAKING CONTEST RESULTS

Congratulations to the following winners of this year's Hewitt Writing and Speaking Contest! And, thank you to all the coordinators and judges in the who make this contest a valuable capstone experience for our students.

Distinguishing themselves in their various courses from across the curriculum, these students rose to the semi-final and final rounds to represent themselves and CGA through their writing and speaking to distinguished guest judges from outside institutions and from the larger Coast Guard community. Those who attended the dinner in April can attest to how well these cadets did in their delivery of polished and thought provoking topics. Both the speech judges and the paper judges gave the highest praise to the quality of work that our cadets produce from across the curriculum.

This years winners are:

### **1/C Speakers:**

- 1st Place — **Davey Connor's** speech: "Ask, Tell, Serve: Why Gays and Lesbians Should be Allowed into the U.S. Military"
- 2nd Place — **Sarah Morin's** speech: "The Coast Guard's Policy Regarding Homosexual Members"
- 3rd Place — **Ryan James' speech:** "Honor: The Backbone of Coast Guard Cadets"

### **1/C Writers:**

- 1st Place — **Thomas Brittingham's** paper: "The Coast Guard's Need for Mandatory Service-Wide Physical Fitness Exams"
- 2nd Place — **Steven Baldovsky's** paper: "Cadets on A Boarding Team!?"
- 3rd Place — **Jared Cherni's** paper: "Overseas Education: Bolstering the U.S. Coast Guard Officer Corps in a Global World"

### **2/C Speakers:**

- 1st Place — **Tasha Thomas' speech:** "Save Antarctica and Save Biology's Past, Present, and Future"
- 2nd Place — **Rebecca Deakin's** speech: "One Couple, One Child: Solving China's Population Crisis While Sabotaging Its Economic Development"
- 3rd Place — **Andrea Bradbury's** speech: "Devotion to Duty vs. Familial Obligation: Another Look"

### **2/C Writers:**

- 1st Place — **Matthew Zinn's** paper: "Statistics and Less Money in Major League Baseball are a Winning Strategy"
- 2nd Place — **David Thompson's** paper: "Solar Energy and The United States Coast Guard Academy's Child Care Center"
- 3rd Place — **Tara Fuller's** paper: "Protecting Our Barrier Islands"

### **3/C Speakers:**

- 1st Place — **Brian Seekatz's** speech: "Secret Identity."
- 2nd Place — **James Reily's** speech: "Fight Club, American Beauty, and the Road of Self Improvement"
- 3rd Place — **Lisa Myatt's** speech: "Shaping Identity: Writing Your Story"

### **3/C Writers:**

- 1st Place — **David Zukowski's** paper: "The Machine: Raging Against, Working for, and Finding Myself In-Between"
- 2nd Place — **Katie Colella's** paper: "Consciousness and Identity"
- 3rd Place — **Kevin Rogers' paper:** "The Performance of a Lifetime"

### **4/C Speakers:**

- 1st Place — **Caitlyn Raines' speech:** "Ecotourism in Costa Rica"
- 2nd Place — **Theodore Cetrullo's** speech: "Scarcity and the Collapse of the Soviet Bloc"
- 3rd Place — **Brandon Schumann's** speech: "Food, There is Enough"

### **4/C Writers:**

- 1st Place — **McCrae Harrison's** paper: "The Potential Impact of Tourism on American Samoa"
- 2nd Place — **Nicole Brederiol's** paper: "China's One Child Policy: The Price Women Pay"
- 3rd Place — **Samuel Hafensteiner's** paper: "Drilling in Alaska National Wildlife Refuge: Will We Make the Right Choice?"