

The University Writer

A Major Change for Writing at the U

The Writing Program's new major is already popular with University students

If you weren't paying close attention, you might have missed the big changes happening in the College of Humanities Writing Program. "We've been working on this for years," says Lisa Shaw, the University Writing Program advisor. "We are all very excited."

In July, after several years of hard work, the UWP announced their Literacy Studies minor had undergone a name change—to the *Writing and Rhetoric Studies degree*. Even more important, students now have the opportunity to earn a major (or a second major) in Writing and Rhetoric Studies. While it's clear the UWP's faculty and staff are excited about these changes, the average student may not yet understand what this means for them.

UWP Director, Maureen Mathison, says the new major was a response to the growing needs of students taking classes in multiple disciplines. Associate Professor Jay Jordan agrees and says many students understand the

importance of writing in their studies, but didn't know where to get the training before. The major was created to address that need while also giving students the space and time to double-major if they want to.

A degree in Writing and Rhetoric Studies will improve a student's writing skills while also providing them with a historical and theoretical understanding of the role writing plays in society. "Writing is proliferating across careers, platforms, and devices—we're all inundated with rhetoric," Jordan says. The writing major is intended to enrich

a student's existing course load. "No matter the field of study, a major in Writing and Rhetoric Studies can be invaluable in your career." It may also help students compete in a tough job market, says Shaw "[since] those with the degree are positioning themselves to have better skills than others."

Students who graduate with a major in Writing and Rhetoric Studies will possess a unique quality when they enter the workforce. Although other colleges in Utah offer a writing emphasis, none focus on rhetoric. Jordan explains only 65 writing majors are offered nationally, and Director



Keynote speaker, Marilyn Cooper kicked-off the Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference at the University of Utah in October. Story on page 4.



Mathison adds “writing skills are important, but rhetoric, and the ability to communicate effectively, is what will set our University of Utah students apart from all the others.”

4 Smart Reasons to Minor

To the uninitiated, a writing minor might sound like a degree for aspiring novelists and journalists only—but there’s much more to it than that

“Everyone has to write,” explains advisor Lisa Shaw, “from engineers and doctors to business managers and teachers. And *how well* you write can mean the difference in getting that next promotion or interview.”

The Writing and Rhetoric minor gives students a background in rhetorical theory and provides them with the hands-on experience they’ll need in a variety of writing fields. University students were recently asked to give some of the reasons why they chose the Writing and Rhetoric minor; here’s what they had to say:

1 Furthering your education

Yuka Maratani, a linguistics major, said she started taking writing classes to “improve [her] writing skills,” but soon added the minor because she thought it would give her a leg up on her graduate school applications. According to a recent survey of students and faculty at UCSB, “writing is the most important skill for grad students to develop.” A writing minor can help prepare students for the rigors of graduate study and even help them write better application essays.

2 Building up writing experience for the job market

Film major, Mark Van Wagoner hopes that his Writing and Rhetoric minor will serve “to inform future employers that [he] picked up something more than just film theory in college.” Employers often look for supplementary skills in a job candidate’s profile. Writing skills can help set job candidates apart from the rest of the applicant pool.

Fellow student, Charles Burnett sees writing as his “most marketable skill.” Because the minor is customizable, Burnett has the flexibility to choose courses that

Students interested in the new Writing and Rhetoric Studies major should contact the UWP advisor, Lisa Shaw, at 801-581-7090 or l.shaw@utah.edu.

- Kimberly Newman

support his goals. He focuses on “professional writing and communication to develop the writing skills that will be most attractive in a business setting.” The writing minor is a customizable degree, allowing students to pick from a menu of writing types and training—from professional to scholarly writing, and from technical to grant writing.

3 Writing for research careers

In the article “Survival Skills for Graduate School and Beyond” the authors report that “[m]any students enter a research-oriented field because they are much more comfortable working with objects and data than [people and writing]. Yet communication skills are essential for researchers.” A minor in writing can help prepare students to communicate their research findings effectively to an audience of their peers.

U of U psychology major, Alex Hinerman plans on focusing on research when he graduates. He likens his Writing and Rhetoric minor as “oxygen to a whale” and says the training in writing will help to fuel his research and scientific publishing goals. He encourages students to look at the writing minor: “if your goals involve research of any type, or even lecturing, then this minor may be a good fit for you.”

4 Sharpening your professional communication skills

U of U student, Charles Burnett also sees the minor as a way to refine his business skills. According to the report of the National Commission on Writing, “writing is a ‘threshold skill’ for both employment and promotion....” The survey of 120 major corporations, employing nearly 8 million people, found that “half the responding companies ... take writing into consideration when hiring professional employees.”



“In most cases, writing ability could be your ticket in . . . or it could be your ticket out,” said one respondent.

Students seeking to bolster their professional profile or strengthen valuable workplace skills can customize the Writing and Rhetoric minor to just about any field of study.

- Lindsay Hunsaker

UWP Program Helps West Side Students Build College Pathways

Dreamkeepers continues to inspire students to reach for a University education

Most students at Glendale Middle School live in poverty; 97% qualify for free or reduced lunch, 32% speak limited English, and many do not consider college as a real possibility. But, the UWP’s Dreamkeepers Project is changing that, providing Glendale students with the skills necessary to continue their education.

“Our major goal is to help students see themselves as college-bound and see their stories as valued in college communities,” says director Heather Hirschi, an assistant professor/lecturer at the UWP and founder of Dreamkeepers.

When the Dreamkeepers began in 2012, Hirschi noted the internalized racism and deficit thinking her students faced daily. Students felt disconnected from curriculum that told stories different from their own. “The original perspective of the class was to focus on the students’ stories and guide them through a process of telling those stories through writing and digital narrative,” says Glendale Assistant Principal Jennifer Mayor-Glenn.

Dreamkeepers is a college pathway program with a flexible curriculum. It shows students the value of their identities by teaching them the skills—writing, web design, Photoshop, etc.—to tell their stories. A diverse group of students,

some who’ve been bullied or misunderstood, come together to create projects and friendships that fuel their passion for learning.

The class features guest speakers and field trips that connect students to university environments. After touring the Marriot Library, eighth grader Niran Chetri said enthusiastically, “I do want to go to college now. The U seems so cool and the library is so big.” Hirschi noticed similar reactions among her other students and says after the visit many began talking about college as a real possibility.

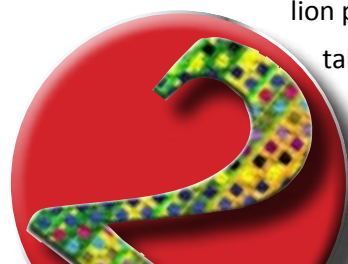
“Ultimately I want Dreamkeepers to be an ongoing program in which students make it to the U and come back to mentor throughout their university experience,” Hirschi says.

Dreamkeepers currently includes a year-long class at Glendale, but the school has big plans for the future. This includes opening a literacy center that will offer college courses to members of the community beginning this spring semester with Under-represented Rhetorics. And while these developments are underway, Hirschi continues to inspire her students to dream, hoping someday she will see all of them make it to a college campus.

- Danielle Beckstrom



Glendale, SLCC’s top performing middle school, is home to the Dreamkeepers, a program that helps students “see themselves as college-bound” says director, Heather Hirschi.





A Showcase for Writing and the U

The U's Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference was one of the most successful yet

For the 17th annual Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference, 110 professors and graduate students from all over North America traveled to the University of Utah for “Material Rhetorics,” a symposium that focused on components of materiality and the role it plays in the rhetorical sphere. The event drew participants from as far away as the Universities of Winnipeg, Florida, South Carolina and Pittsburgh, and generated a great deal of attention for the Writing Program and the University of Utah.

“The response from both panelists and attendees was overwhelmingly positive,” said University Writing Program Director, Maureen Mathison. The Western States Conference is part of a collaborative venture and alternates between locations. Previous locations for the event have included Winnipeg (Can), Tempe (AZ), Las Cruces (NM), and Bozeman (MT). The last time the event was staged in Utah was in 2009. This year, even the weather seemed to cooperate; with crystal blue skies and temperatures in the low ‘60s, a number of first time visitors to the State capitol wanted to know if the weather was always so agreeable.

The conference got underway in the Gould Auditorium of the Marriot Library. Keynote speaker, Marilyn Cooper, Emerita Professor of Humanities at Michigan

Tech and the former editor of the *CCC journal*, officially opened the conference with her talk “Rhetorical Being.” Professor Cooper traced the way meaning is construed physically—through the physical bodies we inhabit and those we perceive around us. Other panels during the two-day event included lectures on the material rhetorics of families, heritage literacies, and pedagogies as well as the identifying the rhetoric in objects and commodities.

The theme for next year’s conference will be Literacies and Rhetorics of Crisis, and will be held in November on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno. More information can be found at: <http://www.public.asu.edu/~petergo/wsrl/2015cfp.htm>

- Audree Steed

