

# Director's Report Fall 2004

by Barbara Bass, T-C '88  
bbass@towson.edu

When I began my term as MWP director in 1998, one of my first priorities was to start an e-mail listserve. This new electronic innovation helps the office to reach all T-Cs subscribed to our network in one fast e-mail message. The listserve has been tweaked several times over the years to meet T-C needs; it's time now for another tweaking. So in the spirit of revision, last June I sent an e-mail posting asking for T-C input about what to add-delete-change about mwpconnect, our official MWP listserve.

The name of the listserve comes from E. M. Forster's exhortation in *Howard's End* to, "Only connect!...live in fragments no longer." Without human connection, Forster believes, "... we are meaningless fragments..." but with that connection, "... love is born and alights on the highest curve, glowing against the gray, sober against the fire."

Well, OK, I'm sure without the MWP listserve, you wouldn't be walking around in fragments, but according to your responses, T-Cs do feel more connected to the Writing Project through the many messages you receive. Because your responses have been so eloquent, I am going to follow good writing advice and SHOW as well as TELL. Your stories help us to see the many sides of mwpconnect.

**Michelle Fromhart, '89**, starts us off by writing, "I have enjoyed receiving the information. It gives me a way to stay connected to MWP and it lets me know about available opportunities. Thanks so much." And **Virginia Labor, '99**, adds, "I find [the postings] helpful, and they keep me connected to the MWP happenings." **Stacey Scheper, '96**, writes, "I have benefited from the listserve. Right now I am really too busy to make time for MWP activities I enjoy, but I still want to stay connected. The mailings are one way of doing that, but the listserve is so alive and current that it provides an ongoing reminder of the people and activities in the Writing Project. It keeps me updated." **Rebecca Rozmiarek, '92**, adds, "I always look forward to your postings. I am not involved in the MWP at this time in a way that I would like to be. But I feel connected on a daily basis and when the time is right, I will be able to jump back in."

Mwpconnect helps remind Stacey and Rebecca, at home with small children, that the MWP is still here, waiting for them to have time once again to participate in some of our many programs and events.

The listserve has also kept us connected to our sister-site on the Eastern Shore. **JoAnne Donovan, '89**, Director of the Summer Institute Eastern Shore Writing Program at Salisbury University writes, "The Eastern Shore Writing Project stays in touch with its cousins via the listserve. It's always interesting to see what the big city people are doing. As we meet T-Cs at the annual conference we can make connections with faces and articles in the publications. Thanks for keeping us informed!"

I am happy to see that the listserve has kept T-Cs connected to the MWP, but I am also delighted to learn that the postings serve to connect T-Cs to other people and events as well.

**Jamie Cooper, '00**, writes, "I definitely think the listserve is a good thing! It gives me information on things about town....

seminars, classes, etc.," and **Laura Gittleson, '03**, adds, "The listserve has informed me of various professional and staff development opportunities that I otherwise would have forgotten about- namely Linda Rief and the Write to Learn Saturday Workshops.

In this day and age I feel that teachers function more effectively via e-mail."



Barbara Bass



Jennifer Ricker Bildman

The listserve does connect T-Cs to the MWP and to professional opportunities, but even more importantly, it connects us, as **Jennifer Ricker Bildman, '99**, reminds us in her posting, "to what is going on in the writing world." Here's a note from **Cheryl Foreman, '02**, about mwpconnect as muse: "I went through my daybook to see if I had anything that referred directly to the listserve and found the DSW shoe story contest (easy to see where my true interests lie), which I entered for the mental exercise. That, in turn, inspired me to write LOVE, LIFE, AND HOME DEPOT. No they weren't soliciting articles -- I just felt the urge. I also discovered information about THE BALTIMORE REVIEW POETRY CONTEST and entered just as I found out about it being in flux but that didn't matter. Again, I see great value in the exercise of writing. I've come to realize that the listserve serves me as a muse. It's there offering thoughts about what I can become involved in or what I want to research. In my work with teachers this year, I've used articles that have appeared first through the listserve to stimulate their thinking about our school's educational community. Also, job opportunities abound and have provided inspiration for all teachers who've thought their box too small. So though I have been dancing on the edge of life, for the past few years, the listserve has tethered me, kept me from floating too far away from learning and writing."

In her note above, Cheryl describes how the listserve has served as a springboard for writing, but she also writes about the connections to the learning community. Here are some more illustrations of how it has helped T-Cs connect to ways to grow as teachers:

**Jennifer Morrison, '03**, writes, "I have to say I have loved having the listserve. As a resource teacher, I have found it to be an invaluable source of writing opportunities available to students and staff development opportunities available for teachers that I have passed on to others. The announcements have also allowed me to participate in various growth opportunities of my own, including the MWP state conference with Linda Rief. Being exposed directly to her theories on writing has affected how I approach writing instruction with the teachers at my school because I have delved deeply into the use of QuickWrites, something with which I was not familiar beforehand. Additionally, the listserve notified me of MSTA's need for a writing presentation at the state teachers' convention. The 'Write to Learn, Learn to Write' theme has been one I have pursued in the last year and has continued to arise in a number of situations recently. The preparation I did to put together a presentation proposal has led

# Director's Report Fall 2004

(continued)

me into research avenues that have been helpful in other aspects of my professional life at this time."

**Cheryl North Coleman, '97**, brings up other benefits from the listserv: not only professional growth, but personal growth as well:

"...the listserv put me on the road to becoming a college professor. Now that I have taught a few college classes, I realize that it isn't that big of a deal. But you are talking about a girl who, at one time, thought an AA degree from Essex Community College was something that only the really smart people at my high school got. This Essex girl would have never thought that she could become a professor. But when you posted a job opening at Howard Community College, I jumped at it. I was kind of stupid for taking it and commuting sixty miles one way just to have a chance at being a professor. But I am glad that I had that experience, especially since Howard had a fantastic Developmental Writing Program. I learned a lot. Then again, the Maryland Writing Project has always opened doors for me."



Helaine Steinberg

**Helaine Steinberg, '85**, adds, "Thanks to the listserv, I took a wonderful Continuing Education course through Baltimore County Public Schools, entitled *The Passion for Teaching*, led by a master teacher and lovely person JoAnna Allen. The course was more like group therapy for frustrated teachers than anything else, but it helped us to come back to a place where we remembered

what it was that had made us want to go into teaching in the first place. In addition, I met some great teachers (including a Spanish teacher who I convinced to come teach at my school), and Joanna and I became good friends. I gained so much personally and professionally from this course, and, not being a Baltimore County Public School teacher, I probably would not have found the course had it not been posted on our list."

**Rebecca Rozmiarek** also writes, "The listserv is wonderful! I read every message. Several are not relevant to me or (unfortunately) I can't take advantage of the event or opportunity because I have a family. I skim those messages and delete them! There have been a few listserv postings that have been very beneficial to our family. Daniel has had the opportunity to teach the 301 writing classes and will participate in a scoring project at Dundalk Community College -"

**Beth Edelstein, '00**, says, "I really like the listserv and have learned many interesting things from it, including my upcoming job grading essays at the community college. I learned of the opportunity to represent MWP at the Center for the Book through the listserv. Keep those messages coming." **Stephanie Leddy, '91**, adds, "I forwarded jobs to a friend whose son was looking for a teaching job. He got the long term sub job at Calvert Hall so the listserv is a WINNER again."



Stephanie Leddy



Barbara Steele

**Barbara Steele, '98**, sums up the professional benefits of the listserv succinctly in the following list:

- "I got my current job at TU teaching for the Early Childhood Dept.
- My husband & I went to Barnes & Noble to hear their series of workshops on getting published.
- I told Kathy Jenkins's son, Taylor, about the

- fact that Del Arnold needs someone to house sit this summer.
- I loved reading about Diane Mitchell's mother.
- I am going to grade papers at Dundalk Community College with Beth E. in a reliability study because I read about the project on the listserv.
- All of that is just in the last six months! I've been on your listserv since '98. I can't remember that far back for specific benefits, but I know they are there. Thank you for having it!!"

The listserv has turned out to be a great marketing tool for the MWP, with our T-Cs passing on items of interest to friends and colleagues. As **Emma Spencer, '97** says, "The best thing about the listserv is the announcements for upcoming events, especially Towson University education lectures and conferences. Also the free Saturday Write-to-Learn Workshop listings - I always copy that stuff and share it with colleagues." **Angela Campbell-Phelps, '03**, writes, "I have thoroughly enjoyed the emails I've received through the MWP listserv. I have been able to spread great information along to others and they have benefited from it greatly. Please keep it up...it's very beneficial."



Emma Spencer

**Tina Watts, '03**, adds, "I was thrilled to receive the lectures on the DaVinci Code through the MWP listserv! I had just read it and had so many questions and the information was very useful! I learned about the Rural Sites Network and the Urban Sites conference in Philadelphia which I shared with our language arts supervisor. She planned to invite a teacher to attend. I also shared a message about a writing contest with a middle school teacher whose class participated."



Tina Watts

**Virginia Labar** also spreads the word: "Recently **Derrick Robinson, '01**, and I took a colleague to a Phi Delta Kappan presentation on arts integration at Towson. Without the MWP e-mail, we would have not known about the event. In addition, I get reminded of the MWP Saturday workshops, and I share that information with my colleagues. I have passed some of the writing contests along to Derrick so that his students could compete."



Susan Helldorfer

**Susan Helldorfer, '02**, writes, "It is interesting to see the events and contests that go through the listserv, most of which I cannot participate in. I did have a positive experience with Del Arnold's house listing. Have two dear friends - she's retired and he's a financial advisor-having their home remodeled living like gypsies. They move from one house sitting to another as they await the end of construction. Now their contractor has taken ill and the July move-in date seems unlikely. I forwarded Del's notice and they are in contact."

The listserv has also been a useful tool for T-Cs asking for help, everything from creating writing centers to using graphic organizers to writing storybooks. **Mary Ann Hartshorn, '94**, says, "The listserv is wonderful! It not only provides ways to hear about job and publishing opportunities, but it let's us ask one another for help. I have answered questionnaires and had people contribute to my questions as well. I don't mind the mail. If I don't want it, I delete it. Please continue. It is a very valuable T-C resource."

(continued on next page)

# Director's Report

(continued)

**Stephanie Leddy, '91**, writes, "This past year I have benefited from the listserv. For a graduate course in reading, I needed input from teachers who had used literature circles in their classes. I put my request on the listserv. The first time I tried, I did not have a catchy title and did not get any responses. I tried again and made clearer what I was seeking and BINGO - I did get 5 people willing to fill in my survey. They were a big help and I appreciate the listserv being there."

The listserv also serves as an essential tool when I have to connect to you. When the funding for the National Writing Project was in danger of not being reauthorized, I sent out an alarm over mwpcconnect. Dozens of you responded by writing letters to your congresspeople. I have used the listserv, too, to help us update our database for our T-C directory, remind you of deadlines for upcoming programs, ask for your ideas in updating our brochures, and find housing for wandering T-Cs. When we've needed T-Cs to staff tables at conventions, represent us at conferences, or teach courses at Towson University, I just write a message, hit enter, and it reaches over 300 of you all at once. We no longer have to depend only on twice-yearly mailings to reach our T-Cs when we need them.

In the past, your suggestions have helped us refine the listserv so it meets more of your needs. **Joe Bellino, '89**, our technology liaison, has been instrumental in putting those suggestions into effect. Here are your comments on changes/improvements to the listserv:

**Stephanie Leddy** says, "Since subject titles have been added, it has made it easier to look at those of interest first. Although I must admit, I cannot bring myself to delete any without looking at them for fear I would miss something wonderful. Thanks for taking the time to do this for us!" **Cheryl North Coleman** and **Susan Helldorfer** mentioned the waves of messages that seem to pile up at times, but as Cheryl writes, "Yes, at one time there were a lot of messages, but it never got on my nerves. It never got to the point where I would just delete them without looking at them." **Judy de Craene, '98**, wonders if we can send out information according to interest area. I'm not sure if that is possible, but I'll pass the suggestion on to Joe. **Virginia Labar** notes, "I especially like the quirky personal requests, though I wouldn't want to see them to grow too numerous. Yes, there are many e-mails, but I just delete the ones that don't apply to my situation. Keep them coming, please."

I knew there were benefits to the listserv, but I had never thought of it as a sort of online therapy. Here are some comments that illustrate its versatility:

**Halaine Steinberg** writes, "I like keeping up with all that is going on with MWP, and I have indulged in some great fantasies about what it would be like to ditch my husband and three kids for the summer and take one of these house-sitting jobs I keep seeing! But alas, reality calls me back . . . :-)"

**Jennifer Ricker Bildman** brings us up-to-date on her life, saying, "I have resigned from teaching, lost my MD teaching credentials, and have birthed two kids, 14 months apart in age (Robert now 6 months and Melissa 20 months). Being on the listserv has kept me in the loop. I enjoy reading what is going on in the writing world and gaze fondly at the screen thinking about my more intellectually driven days (stuff other than diapers, feedings and the best playgrounds) wondering how and when I will ever get back into the real world. I am still journaling, though

infrequently, about the kids and contemplate submitting something to a parenting magazine, some time, one of these days when I can get some time to myself to write - the articles are in my head."

I'd like to end this Director's Report with my mwpcconnect favorite story. The first response below is from **Robyn Jackson, '95**, who found a piano for her sister through the listserv. The one following Robyn's is from my friend, Anita Durel, whose piano is the one Robyn's sister now owns. I sent Robyn's story to Anita because I knew she would love to know how her old piano is faring. I love these stories. Along with all of your welcome responses to my request for feedback on the listserv, they epitomize the value of the connections Forster writes of in Howard's End.

Here is Robyn's story:

"One of the best things that has come out of this listserv is my sister's piano. My sister is a "starving artist" and needed a piano to practice her voice lessons each day. She couldn't afford a piano and we were looking for an inexpensive piano she could use. One day someone mentioned on the listserv that they were giving away a piano to the first person who could come pick it up. The first time I saw the message, I dismissed it, thinking that if they were giving the piano away, then it must be a pretty sad piano. Then it appeared again a few days later and I casually forwarded it to my sister. She called and made arrangements to see it. We weren't expecting much but when she saw it she knew that it was her piano. The couple had another offer but my sister begged them to let her know if that offer fell through and then called them daily to check on her piano. The first offer did indeed fall through and she enlisted my father and uncle to go get what turned out to be the heaviest piano God ever made. They finally were able to get it in the house and it now sits in her bedroom next to her bed. Each day she warms up with her piano and our entire family is grateful for such a tremendous blessing."

And here is Anita's response:

"When I read through your message, being the excellent reader I have always been, I missed the "your" in the old piano. So, as I read the story my jaw dropped. It sure sounded like the story of our piano. So on the second read the "Ah ha" registered. How wonderful. Does Robyn know where it came from? We bought it for \$400 from Andreas and Veronique Paky when they were living in Baltimore. They are back in Switzerland--and wouldn't we love to visit them some day! Andreas played so beautifully that I guess I always hoped that some of his magical skill would be imbued in the piano forever. Although both my sons play guitar and banjo, they rarely touch the "replacement" piano; but that old piano is where they got their start. So this is the story of an encouraging instrument-- like good teachers, and good writers. If Robyn's sister ever ends up in Switzerland, she should contact the music-loving Pakys and fill them in on the genesis of that battered old piano. Perhaps Andreas could play for her, and she could sing a tribute to a mutual friend. Thank you for sharing the story."

If you would like to be a part of mwpcconnect, email me at bbass@towson.edu, or call me at 410-704-4573, and I will happily add your name to the MWP listserv. You, too, can become a part of the story.

MWP-ily yours,  
Barbara



Robyn Jackson



Judy de Craene