

MWP Joins NWP's Technology Liaison Initiative

by Joe Bellino, MWP Tech Liaison and TC '89 • jbellino@towson.edu



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Thanks to a new initiative of the National Writing Project, the MWP now has a new position – a technology liaison.

Two years ago the National Writing Project began a program to encourage writing project sites around the country to select “tech savvy” individuals to help evaluate each site’s computer technology needs and then begin working on critical tech projects identified by the site directors.

Because the NWP knew that sites around the country had varied levels of technological capability, there was no universal job description for the title of tech liaison. Some sites could finally begin the process of creating a presence on the Web. Others with well-developed Web pages could have someone train teachers to make better use of technology in their classrooms. Still others could help busy directors streamline the data collection required for NWP annual reports.

As a teacher of English language learners (known in Maryland as a teacher of ESOL – English for Speakers of Other Languages), I hardly think of myself as a computer expert. However, as the creator of some of the MWP data collection and reporting systems, learning about computer software and hardware has not been especially difficult for me. Because of my experience with computers, the MWP site directors tapped my shoulder and asked me to be the first MWP tech liaison.

My primary charge this past year has been to maintain the MWP Web page. A secondary focus has been to ensure that the various data systems, including the TC database and the Student Writers’ Workshop file, operate smoothly.

As I began taking over the Web pages, I quickly learned that I needed to learn a lot more – and learn it very quickly. And that’s what most of my first year entailed – learning enough about a five-year-old (now considered “ancient”)

Web scripting language so that online applications for the many MWP programs arrived safely in the site directors’ mailboxes. Lucky for me, I found a high school student who knew a lot more about the system than I did. Together we were able to keep the scripting programs working.

Fortunately, the National Writing Project foresaw the need to provide training to tech liaisons. To help both new and old tech liaisons learn skills to benefit their writing project sites, the group held workshops at the annual meeting in November. My personal goal was to learn ways to allow online discussion and publish written work. Unfortunately, the few hours of training I received were just enough to tell me I had a lot more to learn – something that I keep doing, little by little, as time permits.

Now as I begin my second year as tech liaison, my number one goal continues to be keeping the Web page operating smoothly and overseeing its move to a new Web server – one that requires me to learn a new scripting language for the MWP online applications. (And yes, I’m hoping to find another high school student to help me with it.)

I have other goals for the Web pages, too. These include creating ease of navigation while adding a few new sections. Soon, this newsletter you’re reading will also be available on the Web. With the help of interested TCs, I hope to create a page with useful links for writing teachers.

Another goal is to continue learning about online discussion groups and create a project for the Summer Teacher Institute. The National Writing Project is offering the MWP the use of “blogs” – Web pages that can be customized to allow discussion and the sharing of written work. I hope to learn enough about how blogs operate to use them this summer.

Finally, I’m planning to work with the Summer Writers’ Workshop to publish student writing on an end-of-workshop CD. Maybe we can include short audio files of students reading short selections from their work.

I welcome your comments, suggestions and questions. You can contact me at: jbellino@mbhs.edu.

Life is Short

by Diane Curry, TC '99 • dcurry@mail.howard.k12.md.us

The father of one of my seniors called me two weeks before graduation. He was irate to discover that because his son was failing my English class, he would not graduate. Evidently, our parent conference two months before had not been taken seriously. He couldn’t believe that I wouldn’t just pass his son. “What difference would it make to give him a D?” he yelled furiously. “Let’s face it, in the real world your class doesn’t mean anything. Why would you ruin my son’s future like this? What kind of person would allow this to happen?”

“Exactly,” I thought.