What do you read, my lord?” Polonius asks Hamlet, and the Danish prince replies, “words, words, words.” As an English professor, a Shakespeare scholar, and, the new Director of Mercer’s Writing Program, mine is a life suffused with words.

Words that I read evoke the words that I write: Shakespeare’s words, the words of scholars and critics who came before me and those writing now, the words of my students as they encounter, perhaps for the first time, words, which “like to the lark at break of day arising” beckon their reason and their imagination to take flight.

It is, if we pause to consider, a miraculous process. As Carl Sagan suggests, “writing is perhaps the greatest of human inventions, binding together people who never knew each other, citizens of distant epochs.”

As we begin the new academic year, this sense of binding and communion, born out of the act of writing, seems well worth remembering. Writing instruction, like the act of writing itself, can feel like a solitary undertaking. So it’s important to talk with one another when we can and to remember that through this greatest of human inventions, we are bound together, as faculty and preceptors, in our commitment to helping our students find their own way in this world of “words, words, words.”

Welcome, and a heartfelt thanks for being a part of Mercer’s Writing Program.

~Dr. Deneen Senasi

In April 2015, Advanced Writing Preceptors in WRT 491 shared results from their research project, “Precepting in the Disciplines” as a poster presentation at Mercer’s Annual Bear Day.

The images to the right feature Advanced Preceptors, Sarah Ugan, Savanna Moody, Micheline Antoine Dieu-Juste, and Andrew Smith. Other participants include Christina Honey, Lexis Momon, and Tabita Strimbu.

The project has now been accepted for presentation at The 2015 National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, November 5 – 8, 2015. This year, preceptors will begin a project exploring their role as writing tutors in the INT and Great Books classroom.
PRECEPTOR SERVICES: SKILL SETS & DROP-IN-DAYS

This year, the Preceptor Program is again offering individual tutorials for all students enrolled in writing instruction courses in our periodic Drop-in-Days. Preceptors assist students as they develop and organize their ideas, make progress on a rough draft or revision, or work on recurring issues in their academic writing.

Now in their third year, Drop-In-Days are also instrumental in advancing the preceptors’ own understanding of their training course readings and their practical application. Preceptors’ confidence have been strengthened by this kind of experiential learning, and the students they help benefit from their engagement and commitment.

This year, the Program will also offer several Skill Sets practice sessions in basic writing skills. Writing Director, Dr. Deneen Senasi, will review selected writing skills and mechanics, and students will then work on one or in small groups with Preceptors to practice those skills.

For a complete schedule of Preceptor Services, please see the Calendar on the Writing Program website at: http://departments.mercer.edu/english/writing/

PRECEPTOR SERVICES: LUNCH & LISTEN OPEN CLASSES

Members of the faculty are invited to join us for a series of open classes in WRT 490 and 491. In these open classes, preceptors discuss and model some of the compositional strategies and skills they are being trained to share with students in writing instruction courses.

Since our classes meet at noon, faculty are invited to bring their lunch, take a seat at the back, and listen in to get a glimpse of some of the ways Writing Program Preceptors are learning to facilitate in-class writing instruction.

This is the second year the Writing Program will offer Lunch & Listen Open Classes. Last year’s offerings included: “Effective Annotation: How to Take Reading & Discussion Notes that Facilitate Writing” and “How to Make a Claim: From Brainstorming Ideas to the Working Thesis Statement.” Those topics will be supplemented this year with discussions on strategies from Graff and Birkenstein’s They Say/I Say and other readings.

Even if you’re not working with a preceptor this semester, these classes will provide helpful ideas and practical strategies you may wish to incorporate into writing instruction for your course.

Since our classes meet at noon, faculty are invited to bring their lunch, take a seat at the back, and listen in to get a glimpse of some of the ways Writing Program Preceptors are learning to facilitate in-class writing instruction.

FACULTY RESEARCH & WRITING COLLOQUIUM

This year, The Writing Program will partner with The University’s Center for Teaching and Learning to co-sponsor a Faculty Research and Writing Colloquium.

The Colloquium will foster intellectual exchange across a wide range of research interests and methods. The group will host presentations of academic research, while also supporting faculty as they continue to develop as scholars and writers.

Our first speaker will be Dr. Sarah Gardner, Professor of History and Director of the Southern Studies Program. Winner of prestigious fellowships from The Newberry Library, The Huntingdon, and other major archives, Dr. Gardner will discuss her current book project on the reading habits of soldiers and civilians during the Civil War.

For more information, please contact Deneen Senasi, Writing Program Director, or Susan Codone, Director of The Center for Teaching and Learning at Mercer University.
Writing Preceptors are advanced undergraduates trained to support and facilitate writing instruction as part of the Mercer General Education experience.

The Preceptor Program allows participants to apply what they are learning in real-life situations and to serve as role models for the next generation of Merceri-ans.

Preceptors often describe themselves as mediators, whose status as peer-tutors allows them to bridge the gap between students’ uncertainty and their desire to succeed.

Those who choose to fill this role exemplify Mercer’s ethos of academic excellence and service, as they train and work to help others find their voice.

**RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PRECEPTORS**

* Become familiar with the course syllabus and its major writing assignments and deadlines.

* Actively read course materials and engage with in-class instruction and activities as a means of ensuring a clear understanding of the writing assignments students will be asked to complete.

* Serve as a facilitator and coach to assist students in the initial stages of generating, developing, and organizing ideas for writing assignments and in the subsequent processes of reflection and revision.

* Read and respond to students’ writing at each stage of the development process, from drafting through revision.

* Meet with students at the request of the instructor to provide additional practice in areas of concern.

* Listen, read, and speak with an open mind, treating students and their writing with sensitivity and respect.

* Register for and complete training in WRT 490/491. Students may audit either of these courses.

* Converse regularly with the instructor about the needs of the student writers in the course.

**RESPONSIBILITIES FOR INSTRUCTORS**

* Meet with your Preceptor during the Faculty-Preceptor Mixer and regularly throughout the semester.

* Schedule mutually convenient times to discuss questions or concerns your Preceptor may have and to make use of the unique perspective on the course this position provides.

* Solicit insights from your Preceptor about students’ concerns, anxieties, and out of class issues.

* Through their one-on-one work with students, Preceptors are in a unique position to become aware of and communicate some of the specific challenges that individual students are struggling with in improving their writing for the course.

* Talk with your class about your Preceptor’s role early in the course (preferably beginning in the first class meeting) and whenever appropriate incorporate him or her into in-class instruction or writing practice activities throughout the semester.

* Include your Preceptor directly in writing instruction activities, such as group work focusing on generating ideas, developing and refining thesis statements, and determining organizational strategies.

* Utilize what your Preceptor has learned in the Preceptor training courses. Instructors, particularly those who have less experience in writing instruction, may find these strategies and techniques beneficial.
FACULTY-PRECEPTOR DISCUSSIONS

Below are some suggested topics for faculty-preceptor discussions. Space for taking notes is provided at the bottom of this page.

A few Suggested Topics:

* The preceptor’s role in class discussion and the day-to-day operation of the class.

* Access to course readings for the preceptor.

* Establishing boundaries for out-of-class consultations held by the preceptor.

* The instructor’s goals for specific writing assignments or for the course’s overall writing instruction components.

* Any particular rules for or aspects of academic writing that will be of particular significance or will be emphasized throughout the course.

* Discuss, and if possible, establish target dates for periodic meetings to discuss the preceptor’s work with students.

* Get to know each other as professor and student. For preceptors: talk about your own background as an academic writer. What do you see as your strengths and weaknesses? For instructors: describe your approach to writing instruction in general and what your hopes for this course in particular are.

NOTES . . .

The Mercer Writing Program website has been redesigned! Please visit us for more information about the Program at: http://departments.mercer.edu/english/writing/index.html

FACULTY-PRECEPTOR TEA

Please join us for the Mercer Writing Program’s annual beginning of term gathering of faculty and preceptors, this year in the form of high tea!

Monday, 17, August from 11:00 — 12:15 in Connell Conference Room 2.