

Introduction to Volume 2

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It was only last year that we published the inaugural volume of The York Scholar, an annual collection of student writing from the College-Wide Writing Program. In Volume 1, a principal aim was to share with the College community the quality of student writing at the College. We distributed nearly 500 copies of The York Scholar to faculty, students, and administrators at York College, and published an electronic version of the journal (available online at <http://www.york.cuny.edu/yorksolar>). As we revisited the contributions to Volume 1 while preparing this volume, we found ourselves impressed by the consistently high caliber of the research and writing of our juniors and seniors. Volume 2 continues this emerging tradition by presenting six new research papers written by students over 2004-2005. At the same time, the process behind Volume 2 marks a significant shift in our thinking about the journal, and actually improves the journal in important ways.

In Volume 1, we handled the entire process, reading the submissions, selecting the finalists, and editing the print and electronic versions of the journal. This year, a committee of six faculty reviewers working in pairs read and discussed over 60 submissions, narrowing the field to just over two-dozen papers before coming together as a group to select the six papers that appear in Volume 2. This review team of Phebe Kirkham, Mallika Henry, Phyllis Kahan, and Sian Killingsworth, who joined us in the review process, undoubtedly helped ensure that the published papers represent a wide range of outstanding student writing in the Writing Program. We firmly believe that the volume you hold in your hands is better due to their insightful discussion of the student work submitted for consideration.

The York Scholar is a collection of outstanding papers written by students enrolled in the College-Wide Writing Program, an independent program, which offers three different versions of the College's required, upper-division introduction to college-level research and academic writing. Generally known as "Writing 300," the Writing Program's course offerings are tailored to the research, documentation, and rhetorical demands and conventions of specific groups of majors.

Writing 301 (Research and Writing for the Major) is designed for students enrolled in the Humanities and Social Sciences; Writing 302 (Research and Writing for the Sciences) is the course for students in the Natural Sciences and Mathematics; and Writing 303 (Research and Writing for Professional Programs) is the course for all other majors and programs.

All three courses provide students with a hands-on introduction to the research process. Students locate and narrow a research question connected in some way to their own disciplines and/or career goals. The rigorous curriculum requires students to bring the reading, writing, and critical thinking skills they have developed in their general education courses to their own research agendas. They learn to locate and selectively read materials from relevant online and print sources, selecting from a range of books, peer-reviewed journals, and web-based publications. Students learn to analyze and synthesize source material to develop their own arguments as they produce drafts of their papers, and they revise their work based on feedback from both their professors and their peers. As their research projects take shape, they determine an organization for their papers that appropriately addresses their questions, and ultimately produce a final paper that conforms to the style conventions of their particular fields. The range of research projects pursued by students in the College-Wide Writing Program is restricted only by the imagination and career goals of the students themselves.

While we selected papers for inclusion based on the quality of research, analysis, synthesis, and writing, the contents of Volume 2 are largely representative of the variety of projects students tackle in their Writing 300 courses. The first selection, "Reading The Forbidden Stories as Feminist Writing," is an outstanding example of both close textual analysis and critical engagement with contemporary feminist theory. It represents a mode of analysis one encounters in literary studies, while demonstrating a way that many humanities disciplines value careful work with text. Carefully reading a work of literature by Sonia Rivera-Valdés, a Cuban émigré, Herranz Brooks takes issue with a number of conventional interpretations of Rivera-Valdés as she develops an argument for the importance of The Forbidden Stories of Marta Veneranda for feminists, mestizas, and New York Latinos. Like Herranz Brooks' essay, Hilary Cohen's critical review of the effectiveness of New York's Rockefeller drug laws was written in Writing 301, Research and Writing for the Major. But that is where the similarities end. Cohen's essay weighs the social, political, and economic costs of New York's approach to the war on drugs against the actual deterrent effect of mandatory minimum sentencing for drug possession. Synthesizing court

cases, statements by judges working in the system, and both historical and contemporary scholarly sources on the subject, Ms. Cohen argues that Rockefeller drug laws persist, at least in large part, because of party politics and the economic benefits of an expanding prison population for upstate New York. Also working within the framework of Writing 301, Cathy Jedruczek brings a deeply personal motivation to her historical examination of the guards who worked in Stalinist-era Gulags.

Jedruczek explores a variety of ways that the guards had little choice but to mistreat their charges before rejecting any claim that the guards were not responsible for their actions. But she is interested in more than an indictment of the guards; although not stated explicitly, Jedruczek seems to demand a public accounting of the horrors of the gulags on par with Germany's reckoning with Nazi-era concentration camps or South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Unlike the first three contributions to this volume, Namita Puran's well-researched paper on Ulysses contracts was written in a section of Writing 303, Research and Writing for the Professional Programs. Puran explores the complex issues surrounding the particular kind of advance directive seen in the care of psychiatric patients by focusing primarily on both conceptions of the self and the centrality of the doctor-patient relationship. While making a strong case for Ulysses contracts, Puran's contribution also examines circumstances in which a patient might rightly refuse treatment even after signing an advance directive. In the process, Puran develops her own perspective while keeping alive the real tensions involved in Ulysses contracts. Fiona Smith's paper is our sole contribution from Writing 302, Research and Writing for the Sciences. Like Puran, Smith brings an impressive body of literature to bear on her research question while managing to avoid merely summarizing sources. Rather than pursue a general question about HIV infection, Smith tackles a very small part of the science behind HIV/AIDS. In working on a seemingly miniscule comparative question about HIV/AIDS treatment options, she exemplifies the way in which scientific advances occur. Although she is not reporting on an empirical study of the issue, Smith's research reveals a number of the central issues involved in determining the relative effectiveness of two treatment options. As the paper unfolds, Smith focuses attention on the side effects and drug interactions. Background research like Smith's amounts to a kind of literature review that is an important early stage in the scientific research process.

Switzer's paper on intersex babies provides another glimpse at the kind of research and writing that happens in Writing 303. "Can Surgery for Intersex Babies be Justified?" is exceptional for a number of

reasons. The argument is clear from the outset; gender assignment for intersex babies cannot be justified. Despite an unwavering position on this issue, Switzer is able to accurately make the argument for gender assignment. In many respects, it is Switzer's ability to represent the case for reassignment that makes her dismantling of that argument with counter-examples and scholarship even more persuasive.

We believe that interested members of the York College community will find these papers informative, enjoyable to read, and indicative of the kinds of research, thinking, and writing in which we want our students engaged. It is our hope that they will help form a starting point for conversations about writing development, and we encourage you to talk with us about the relationship between the kinds of writing valued in your own discipline and the writing in Writing 301, 302, or 303. As with the contributions to Volume 1, the papers published in this volume appear in essentially the same form that the students' professors received them. In one instance, a student revised her contribution for length by removing a section. We have lightly copyedited the contributions for publication, but have not altered the writing in any substantive ways.

This publication would not have been possible without financial assistance from the Auxiliary Enterprises Corporation and the support of the Office of Academic Affairs. The College-Wide Writing Program provided important clerical assistance. Also, a number of instructors in the Writing Program contributed intellectual labor as members of the review committee. Of course, the real work behind the contributions to The York Scholar was completed before we read a single submission. We owe a debt of gratitude to the many faculty and students who labored in Writing 301, 302, and 303 in Spring 2004 and Fall 2004. Without their hard work and joint commitment to learning and writing development there would be no papers to review. Thank you.