

Introduction to Volume 3

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This volume of The York Scholar is published at an important moment. York College of The City University of New York celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, and we are proud to be part of a publication that showcases one aspect of the intellectual life of the College. Three years ago, when we envisioned publishing a journal of students' engagement with scholarship, we imagined a collection of papers representing some of the best work from the College-Wide Writing Program. Our principal aim was to share with the College community the quality of student writing at the College. And we have largely succeeded. Over two volumes we have distributed 1000 copies of The York Scholar to faculty, students, and administrators at York College, and published an electronic version of the journal (<http://www.york.cuny.edu/yorksolar>). Volume 3 continues this emerging tradition.

The York Scholar is a collection of outstanding papers written by students enrolled in the College-Wide Writing Program, an independent program offering 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, personal interests, 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 intellectual interest of the students themselves.

As before, we have selected papers for inclusion based on the quality of research, analysis, synthesis, and writing. It should not surprise anyone to learn that the contents of Volume 3 are representative of the variety of projects students tackle in their Writing 300 courses. This volume of The York Scholar is perhaps most notable for prevalence of papers that take up difficult public health or policy controversies. In the first selection, “High School Start Times,” Latesha Dean brings together research on education and public policy to explore the important societal and learning implications of the typical adolescent’s school day. Dean puts teens’ internal clocks alongside parents’ work schedules, high school sports programs, and the economics of busing as she argues for significant changes to the school day.

Sera Osondu, in “Black Press, White Media, and Black Reporters,” examines the different purposes in mainstream and black-owned publications, reveals many of the difficult compromises African-American reporters make in working for mainstream (white) media, and forces the reader to confront a series of very difficult questions:

The original African-American journals and periodicals were fighting for equality, using their pens as swords. Can we be considered as sell-outs when we work for a white publication where our voices are silenced? What can we do? We can

certainly prove our ability to get hired to work for a white publication, but is it worth it?

Osondu may end on an optimistic note, but she clearly wants her readers to draw their own conclusions. Accept her invitation by reading her paper!

Jennifer Prashad, in “Should the Regulators, Specifically the Financial Accounting Standards Board, Be Blamed for the Enron Debacle,” examines systemic weaknesses in the relationship between those institutions responsible for overseeing the transparency and financial health of the accounting system in the United States. Enron-related papers have become quite common in Writing 303 since the passage of the Sarbanes Oxley Act. Prashad’s treatment is noteworthy in the way it balances attention to detail and a perspective broader than Enron, while it simultaneously makes a very complicated issue accessible to a nonspecialist audience. In the end, Prashad finds that a significant source of the problem at Enron was the dependence of the Financial Accounting Standards Board on both Congress and the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Isabel Rodriguez contributes a paper that takes up another important public policy concern. In “Achieving Universal Health Care in the United States,” she reviews a number of apparent barriers to universal health care. While acknowledging that some of the barriers are in fact real, she argues that none are insurmountable. Rodriguez’s paper is noteworthy in the way that it brings a human rights perspective to bear on the issue of health care for all.

Yisa Rumala, in the sole contribution from Writing 302, the version of Writing 300 for students majoring primarily in the sciences and mathematics, explores the value and potential applications of an emerging laser technology. In “Quantum Cascade Lasers,” Rumala explains how laser technologies work and compares the benefits of Quantum Cascade lasers over other lasers. We hope the reader will notice two important aspects of Rumala’s contribution here. First, he was able to make a very complicated scientific discussion accessible to a nontechnical audience. This ability is a mark of someone who both knows the science and understands how to write for his audience for the paper. Second, this paper is an extension of a broader research agenda pursued by Rumala, as evidenced by his referencing of a 2004 Annual Leadership Alliance Symposium poster presentation that he co-authored.

“The Role of Human Nature in the Bioethics Debate” is a

wonderful balancing of deeply philosophical issues and the new frontier of biological engineering. Michael Suarez, in this contribution, begins with a brief review of what he sees as the “oversimplified” split between technophiles and the religious right. He then moves to a careful examination of two important works on the subject of bioengineering, one by Francis Fukuyama and the other by Bill McKibbin. It is in his treatment of these two thinkers’ ideas, as well as in his own conclusions, that we see Suarez’s mind at work. In the end, he articulates a view that human nature is flawed in ways that technology could never fully remedy.

We believe that interested members of the York College community will find these papers informative, indicative of the kinds of research, thinking, and writing that takes place in the Writing Program, and, most of all, enjoyable to read. If you are a member of the faculty, we hope the selections can be 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. If you are a student, we hope you will find the subject matter of these papers engaging. We encourage you to submit your own Writing 300 paper for possible inclusion in a future volume of the journal. As with the contributions to the first two volumes of The York Scholar, the papers published here appear in essentially the same form that the students’ professors received them. We have lightly copyedited the contributions for publication, but have not altered the writing in any substantive ways. In one instance, we have published a student’s paper with fewer illustrations than appeared in the original.

This publication would not have been possible without the support of the Office of Academic Affairs. The College-Wide Writing Program provided important clerical assistance, while Printing Services handled the physical printing of The York Scholar. 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 2005 and Fall 2005. Without their hard work and joint commitment to learning and writing development there would be no papers to review. Thank you.

After three years with The York Scholar, Cynthia R. Haller is stepping down as co-editor. Beginning in January 2007, she becomes an Acting Associate Dean working in the Office of Academic Affairs at York College. While she will no longer work on The York Scholar, her responsibilities as Associate Dean include oversight of The College-Wide Writing Program and matters related to writing and learning. As she reflected on the place of The York Scholar at the College, she wrote the following words.

After seeing the germ of an idea for a publication of student research come to life in The York Scholar a few years ago, I take great pleasure in the publication of this third volume. Student writing, especially work of sustained intensity such as the research papers composed in the Writing 300 courses, deserves an audience larger than one. Indeed, most writing outside the academy is engaged in not as a solitary enterprise, but as a way of communicating one’s thoughts and ideas in some arena of action, where those ideas can make a difference in people’s beliefs and choices in the world. When writing stays in the classroom, it remains inert; when it goes out into the world, it gains the potential to change things. I trust that York’s students, through their voices in these articles, will expand their readers’ understanding of and opinions regarding the subjects on which they write.

Cynthia R. Haller, Acting Associate Dean