TYCA Conferences—Sybil Priebe, Editor of “TYCA to You”

Admittedly, I had not been to a TYCA conference in a few years. The sweet Midwest bunch I hold dear did excuse my absence after my fifth apology and student-like reasons. As much as I detest flying, I knew I had to get my butt to St. Louis this time around. Luckily, I had the funding (even as North Dakota—like many other states—was asking for 85–90% budgets from higher ed for the next biennium) to accompany my consistent excitement and motivation for anything TYCA. To show rather than tell you of my experience, I give you the post I sent into our *Midwest Messenger* editor Jen Richrath:

Therefore, maybe there’s a reason I leave TYCA-MW last, when I do attend. Maybe I am meant to be the non-elected, unofficial refector of the event. Maybe I have become that person because I travel the farthest, typically, to TYCA-MW, being the North Dakota rep and all. Maybe it is because I love to write journal entries about my life anyhow. No matter the reason, here’s my Ode to TYCA (post Midwest conference in St. Louis, 2016).

**Ode to TYCA**

To the nerdy family that exists within TYCA-MW, who welcomed me with open arms in 2009 at the Madison, WI, conference.

To the long-lost “sisters” I’ve found in Jen Richrath, Mary Gruis, Kathy Steffens, Sara Jones, Carrie Finn, Connie Miller, and Michelle Byrne.

To the long-lost “brothers” I’ve found in Rich Peraud, Paul Resnick, Alan Hutchinson, and Brian Harrell.

To the conversations I’ve had with anyone at a TYCA-MW who listened and possibly reframed advice I’d already gotten from my favorite colleagues back home.

To the ideas that congregate collectively in our minds when we are all together, and how they come out of us in articulate, silly, or blasphemous ways.

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*TYCA to You* March 2017
Prepared by Sybil Priebe and the TYCA Regional Representatives

News from the Regionals of the Two-Year College English Association

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To the laughter that pours from liquor-lined mouths when we tell stories about past TYCA’s, about students, and about ourselves.
To the joy I feel when I am around people who are like-minded, yet come in all shapes and colors and backgrounds.
To the happy exhaustion after the conference, trying to figure out what the hell to try in class—what ideas will work in 3 days, 3 weeks, 3 months, or maybe in 3 years?
To the nerd love.
To the cocktails, and toasts to those who’ve come before us and reminded us to remain true to who we are: teachers of writing and lovers of thinking.
To the “small, practical, hands-on conference,” this is and will continue to be (Byrne).

TYCA-West Report from Stephanie Maenhardt

It has been a busy year for the TYCA-West region. October found us meeting together for our annual regional conference on the Charleston Campus of the College of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas, NV. Centered on the theme of “Social Action and Engagement in the English Classroom,” the conference was a robust collaboration of presenters, topics, and ideas, ranging from workshops and roundtable discussions to discussions of innovations in pedagogies, texts, and assignments, all focused on helping both our students and ourselves participate in social action and engagement in our classrooms and outside of them. In her address, keynote speaker Linda Adler-Kassner, Chair for CCCC 2017 and Past Associate Chair for CCCC 2016, focused on the importance of threshold concepts and how they can be vehicles for change and movement.

Program Chair Liz Larakers perfectly summed up the focus and intent of TYCA-West’s 2016 conference by noting, “When we frame information with an eye to current events, when we deliberately ‘edutain’ with popular culture, when we discuss or write about politics and social trends, and when we guide critical thinking on current problems and offer reasoned solutions, we are creating opportunities for engagement and interaction with the world.” Liz finished her note to conference attendees by inviting everyone to join with colleagues to see how we are, in own and varied ways, following the admonition of Plutarch to not just fill a vessel when we teach, but to light a fire. This is exactly what happened at the conference, and presenters and attendees alike left the sessions with many new, engaging, and thought-provoking ideas to carry forward into the next semester’s teaching.

These exciting and active proceedings culminated in the recent postconference election of several new members to the TYCA-West REC. We are pleased to have Justin Jory, Lisa Packer, and Nathan Cole joining our REC as the Chair, Secretary, and Associate Webtender for TYCA-West. They will work together with other members of the REC as we look ahead to our 2017 conference on October 13–14 at Glendale Community College in Glendale, AZ. The conference theme
TYCA-Midwest Report from Suzanne Labadie

TYCA Midwest members were inspired to “Get off [Their] Apathy” at this year’s conference, held in St. Louis, MO. Hosted by a committee of faculty from Southwestern Illinois College, under the leadership of Chantay White-Williams, the conference featured local talent in its keynote sessions, including poet Treasure Williams and Professor Stefan Bradley of St. Louis University. These two voices connected us with the recent racial tension brought forth by the Ferguson, MO, shooting, and explored the work of Fannie Lou Hamer in the civil rights movement. St. Louis is a perfect place to consider our country’s racial history, situated as it is between the north and the south, and these talks and the subsequent discussions attendees enjoyed could not have been more timely.

Below are a few reflections from attendees on their experience at this year’s meetings:

• “The keynote speaker at the TYCA Midwest conference, Stefan Bradley, spoke about working with his students during the Ferguson uprising. He talked about how he didn’t consider himself a protester, or someone who would be in a march, but he got a call at night from his students who were protesting and in danger. He had to go. He had to respond to and support his students. His description of that night and the lessons he learned from it were powerful; he reaffirmed the need for what we do, for teaching about language. What stays with me more, though, is that his students called him. In the middle of the night. He was the person they turned to. He was the one they counted on. The students knew they had someone. That was not meant to be the focus of his talk, but certainly that’s where real teaching begins: Students knowing you are committed to their hopes and dreams and the actions they have to take to see those dreams manifest.” Michelle Byrne, Chair, TYCA-Midwest

• “I appreciated hearing how other colleges across our region are dealing with developmental offerings . . . getting creative with the way we teach/offer developmental reading and writing. It reaffirmed that my college is moving in the same direction as many of our peers around the nation.” Mart Gruis, Ridgewater College, Minnesota

• “One highlight was the Lifetime Achievement Award for Larry McDoniel. He truly loved TYCA and gave many years to our organization. The other highlight was the keynote speaker talking about the Ferguson protests and
how he handled his students and his own responses to the unrest. As usual, the camaraderie and fellowship with each other was amazing.” Paul Resnick, Illinois Central College

Attendees are always appreciative of the opportunity to recharge, refresh their teaching, and connect with other faculty. This year, sessions featured many opportunities to do just that—from round-table discussions on developmental writing, to presentations that featured personal practices for staying plugged in, to hands-on presentations on increasing engagement in online and face-to-face classes. TYCA-Midwest will continue to come together in this way and support its membership. We are excited to meet again next fall in St. Paul, MN, where we’ll explore the theme of “Cultivating Curiosity.”

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TYCA-Southeast Report from Susan Slavicz

The TYCA-SE conference is always held in the spring, so these are the highlights from our 2016 spring conference, “Intentional Teaching Turns the World,” held in Knoxville, TN, home of the 1982 World’s Fair, February 24–27.

Silas House, the NEH chair of Appalachian Literature at Berea College and a member of the fiction faculty at Spalding University’s MFA Creative Writing program, presented a program describing how experiences in Appalachia and his own teachers affected his writing. The author of five novels and Something’s Rising, a 2009 nonfiction piece, House entertained the audience while noting the effects of poverty and the public’s opinions of Appalachian culture. Arthur Golden, the author of Memoirs of a Geisha, was our Friday luncheon speaker. His description of the process of writing the novel highlighted the structural nature of that process. He encouraged English teachers to examine how details in literature serve a practical purpose in the narrative.

The presentations at the conference this year were especially good. In particular, people were talking about linking the visual with the written and engaging students in deeper levels of the text. A presentation linking a discussion of Picasso’s Guernica to Elie Wiesel’s Night demonstrated a great method for getting students to think about using concrete, specific details in their writing. Another presenter shared her unit on Death of a Salesman, which she begins—I kid you not—with a discussion of refrigerators!

Representatives from Chattanooga Community College described a series of chautauquas. These are lectures by various instructors at the university on their “pet” subjects—not necessarily related to their classrooms. We do some of this as part of the authors’ series, and we did something similar last year at our writers’ mini-conference. I thought that the name chautauqua was interesting and the way they organize the programs was different. Instructors volunteer, and they lecture...
on a particular interest. They have five of these scheduled this year, and the sixth one will be a presentation by their guest author—Ron Rash, the author of *Serena*.

As usual, our Southeast conference not only challenged us intellectually but also entertained us. The Southeast is known both for the richness of its conferences and for its parties. The local arrangements committee put on a great dinner party at the Sunsphere, a building constructed for the World’s Fair.

*Susan Slavicz may be reached at sslavicz@fscj.edu.*

**TYCA-Northeast Report from Leigh Jonaitis**

For the first time in 23 years, TYCA-Northeast held its annual conference in Connecticut. “Making Connections: Creative Collaboration for Critical Literacy” took place in Hartford on October 13-15, 2016. Attendees experienced a full three days of invigorating sessions. Keynote speakers included Susan Miller-Cochran and novelist Amy Bloom, as well as National TYCA Chair Eva Payne, who delivered a powerful talk on the state of two-year colleges in our present moment and its impact on faculty and students. In addition to the usual breakout sessions, and for the first time at TYCA-NE, organizers also offered two poster sessions as a way to accommodate as many proposals as possible.

In addition to highlighting over 160 presenters, the local offerings for the conference were rich and varied. Musician and writer Patti Smith spoke at the nearby Mark Twain House and Museum on Thursday night, and a pedagogically focused walking tour of downtown Hartford was offered as a preconference option. Attendees could also select from the other events planned by the local arrangements committee: ghost tours that departed the Mark Twain house on Friday, the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, and the Wadsworth Atheneum. Local productions of *The Piano Lesson* and *Relativity* starring Richard Dreyfus were also options for attendees.

With over 220 registrants, the conference was undoubtedly a success. Many thanks to conference organizers Liz Keefe (Program Chair), Daniela Ragusa (Local Arrangements Chair), and Susan Monroe (Registration Chair), all of whom will now continue to serve in elected or appointed positions on the Regional Executive Committee of TYCA-Northeast.

TYCA-Northeast’s next conference will be held in Delaware for the first time in its 51-year history. TYCA-NE 2017, aptly named “In the Middle of It All: Moving English from the Margins of Higher Education,” will take place October 26–28 in Wilmington, DE. Proposals will be due June 1.

*Leigh Jonaitis may be reached at ljonaitis@bergen.edu.*
TYCA-Pacific Coast Report from Sravani Banerjee

TYCA Pacific Coast did not host a regional conference in fall 2016. The representative submitted the following report on Assessment and Placement Changes at California’s Community Colleges.

Major changes are taking place in the assessment and placement of students at the California community colleges. At Evergreen Valley College (EVC), our Assessment Task Force is charged with implementing major changes in the way EVC assesses incoming students and places them in English, reading, ESL, and math courses. Use of cumulative high school GPA for placement began in October 2016. The new statewide Common Assessment exams will come online later during 2017. The Assessment Task Force is committed to bringing about research-based changes to the implementation of multiple assessment measures.

Evergreen Valley College has become a member of the Multiple Measures Assessment Project (MMAP), a California consortium of forty community colleges, and growing. Building on the pioneering work begun at Long Beach City College in 2011, the MMAP has developed a set of decision rules using students’ cumulative high school grade point average (HS GPA). These rules, or cut scores, will help place new students into English, reading, ESL, and math courses. They are called decision rules because the methodology is empirical, based on careful statistical analysis of the HS GPA of nearly 400,000 students taking community college classes.

Within two years, all California community colleges will be using the new Common Assessment exams. Along with the use of HS GPA, the new assessment exams will correct a documented underplacement of students that has gone on for many years using the soon-to-be-defunct Compass exam. The new exams have content validity. The competencies that the exam questions measure have been mapped by EVC faculty to EVC courses. HS GPA cut scores are based on a 70% passing rate for each course.

Many of our colleagues have doubts about the rigor of high schools and the utility of grades that students receive there. However, results from a retrospective analysis of EVC students show that the mean HS GPA of these students was 2.44, while the statewide mean was 2.38, a negligible difference. The standard deviation for EVC students was .76, while statewide it was .79. The data analysis confirms that there is no more (and no less) high school grade inflation among EVC students than there is at community colleges around the state. EVC is now in a position to use existing statewide validation studies of HS GPA as an assessment tool.

Belfield & Crosta’s 2012 study reported, “Alone, HS GPA was a better predictor of college performance than all other measures put together.” For that reason, colleges and universities are making SAT scores optional and using HS GPA instead for admission purposes. When we stop to think about it, which would we think is better: a two-hour test or four years of school classes and grades? One additional advantage of HS GPA is that it measures so-called noncognitive variables as well.
According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, high proportions of students start out at a remedial level of math and English, with one out of every three students in the California community colleges enrolling in a basic skills course. Only time and research will show how successful the new Multiple Measures Assessment Project will be in placing students at the appropriate levels of math and English.

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TYCA-Pacific Northwest Report from Teresa Thonney

On October 21–22, 2016, TYCA-PNW joined with the Pacific Northwest Writing Centers Association for their sixth consecutive joint conference, held at Oregon State University in Corvallis. Conference chairs Dennis Bennett and Michelle Marie, from Oregon State University, along with members of the planning committee, hosted the conference, attended by more than 120 composition instructors, writing center directors, and tutors.

The keynote address was delivered by Tim Jensen, director of writing, School of Writing, Literature and Film at Oregon State University. The title of his address, “Beyond Good Intentions and toward the How of Habit,” alludes to Nancy Grimm’s call (in Good Intentions: Writing Center Work for Postmodern Times) for “relentless reflection” about our practices in classrooms and writing centers. Rather than making curriculum decisions based solely on tradition and assumptions about what our students need, Jensen suggests we listen—with curiosity and empathy—to what students have to say.

At Oregon State University, they have been doing just that, by soliciting feedback from first-year writing students about where they think writing is most important: in college, in career, in personal relationships, or for mental health and wellness. The more than 7,000 students who have responded so far have ranked college first, career second, mental health and wellness third, and personal relationships fourth. Comments reveal that students understand the value of writing—not just for their jobs or in college but for mental health and stress relief. Overwhelmingly, students believe their writing will improve over the course of the term and recognize that what they need to do to improve their writing is to write more and start writing earlier. Jensen challenges us to learn what good intentions our students bring to our classes and to motivate students by meeting them where they are.

The conference featured a program of 22 sessions, many of which also challenged our assumptions and good intentions. Many sessions focused on classroom issues, including recognizing the reasons for plagiarism, using technology in the classroom, responding to students who disclose drug or alcohol addiction, challenging students to consider other worldviews, and engaging students with social justice.

Other sessions focused on writing centers, including training tutors to work with students from diverse language, cultural, and social class backgrounds; with
students with learning challenges; and with English language learners. Still other sessions focused on larger campus concerns, including Common Core, program reform, and student activism.

Another highlight of the conference was the luncheon awards ceremony, where Jeffrey Klausman received the Lisa Ede Excellence in Teaching Award, given each year to recognize innovation and creativity in the teaching of English. Klausman was honored for his contributions to the field of two-year college teaching, in general, for his decades of service and leadership at Whatcom Community College, and for his work within TYCA and CCCC.

_Teresa Thonney may be reached at tthonney@columbiabasin.edu._

**TYCA-Southwest Report from Erin O’Neill Armendarez**

TYCA-Southwest members convened October 27–29, 2016, in the Drury Plaza Hotel in San Antonio, TX. The conference theme was “Educating Lives: Sharing Our Culture and Heritage.” From the opening reception on Thursday evening to the eight available breakout sessions, participants had many opportunities to meet members from other campuses around the region and to discuss a wide range of teaching-related topics. In particular, several sessions featured innovative ways to include student reflection on and experience with culture and heritage into classroom conversations, activities, and assignments.

The conference opened on Thursday evening with TYCA-SW’s traditional welcome reception followed by literary readings and performances from conference participants. After the business meeting and Friday morning breakout sessions, registrants attended a luncheon where Cheryl Hogue Smith, TYCA Secretary and professor of English at Kingsborough Community College (CUNY), gave a brief update on trends and issues common to all regional affiliates. Immediately after, featured speaker Dr. Enrique Alemán Jr. from the University of Texas at San Antonio delivered a thought-provoking keynote presentation on a famous school discrimination court case, _Hernandez et al. v. Driscoll CISD_. Dr. Alemán’s own mother had been one of eight children to testify in the case, and in his keynote address Dr. Alemán blended family memoir with research to enlighten participants on the relationships between race and educational inequity. After the luncheon, Friday breakout sessions extended to early evening.

On Saturday morning, breakouts resumed at 9:00 a.m. Duane Roen, professor of writing at Arizona State University, delivered the featured luncheon presentation on researching and preserving his own family’s history and on engaging students with assignments and activities related to personal, familial, and communal records and lore. After Professor Roen spoke, fortunate attendees received signed copies of the third edition of _The McGraw-Hill Guide: Writing for College, Writing for Life_ (Roen, Glau, and Maid).
During the conference, around 30 presenters shared teaching strategies, assignments, and activities on a broad range of topics, everything from the mundane comma to Native American pedagogy to translingual practices in writing classrooms. In addition, several publishers displayed new books and products and generously offered snacks, sample books, catalogs, and conference bags to conference goers.

All were encouraged to attend TYCA-SW’s 2017 conference, which is scheduled to take place October 19–21, 2017, in Loveland, CO. Cochairs Erin Beaver (Colorado Mountain College) and Rebecca Sailor (Aims Community College) were introduced, and the theme of the conference, “Convergence,” was described in the handy save-the-date bookmarks they distributed along with postcards displaying scenic Colorado landscapes.

As the TYCA-SW 2016 fall conference adjourned, the autumn weather was ideal for wandering the colorful San Antonio riverwalk and for outdoor meetings with colleagues, where in-depth discussions on conference topics could be continued at a variety of local coffee shops, restaurants, and historical sites. Participants left with fresh ideas and hopes of reconvening in 2017 for further collegial exchange. Erin O’Neill Armendarez may be reached at eoneill@nmsu.edu.
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