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° ° °   ACADEMIC WRITING PROGRAMS VS. BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY ° ° °

A major stimulus for computerizing academic writing programs is the example of technical documentation being set in business, industry, and government.   Colleges still clinging to pencil-and-typewriter technology as modes of production are awakening to the fact that real-world writing has changed.   For many writing professors, the real-world is no longer simply "out there"; their own administrative offices have become automated, and a growing number of students are submitting papers composed on word pro-cessors or text editors.

When even the smallest firms have begun using word-processing and graphics for production of written documents, can academic writing programs afford to lag behind?   Will their graduates be passed over in favor of those whose communication skills better reflect the realities of the electronic marketplace?   Many now believe that the marriage of high technology with academic writing will revitalize the discipline, allowing for quantitative insights into parts of the writing process hitherto only vaguely perceived.

° ° ° ° ° BUSINESS LETTER-GENERATING SOFTWARE AVAILABLE ° ° ° °

Businesses have probably always used a catalog of form letters to facilitate routine communications, but the word processor is now opening new levels of sophistication.   Dictronics Publishing of New York has announced the "Prentice-Hall Letter Pac," a semiautomatic program for generating business letters based upon Prentice-Hall's Executive's and Director's Letter Book.

Harnessing the concept of tone adjustment through synonym choice, the program allows routine letters to be written in four levels of formality: from urbane politeness to downright threatening language.   Up to eight different patterns of the same letter is

available; customized formats and other variables can easily be set against familiar constants. New letters can also be formulated and saved, again utilizing the prompting resources built into the program.

Researchers at the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology are exploring programs which will reinforce the student's sense of "variable overlay" in writing samples whose content remains more or less constant while variables--such as tone, audience awareness, and readability level--can be graphically manipulated and illustrated.

° ° ° ° ° ° WESTERN EDUCATIONAL COMPUTING CONFERENCE ° ° ° ° ° °

Sponsored by the California Educational Computing Consortium, "The Impact of Computing Technology on Education" will be the theme of the seventh annual 1983 Western Educational Computing Conference" set for San Francisco, November 17 and 18. Papers will deal with a broad spectrum of computer-assisted instruction and administration. Papers on word processing in composition programs include Bradford Morgan on "The Future of Word Processing in Academic Writing Programs" and Louis B. Queary on "Comprocessing: Teaching Composition on a Microcomputer Word Processor." Published conference proceedings (with 63 papers) are available for $27.00. Further information can be obtained from Fred Ostapik, WECC, 160 Manor Drive, San Francisco, CA 94127.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° CALL FOR PAPERS ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

The Ohio Instructional Computing Conference is soliciting paper proposals for a December conference to be held in Parma, Ohio. Contact Mary A. Fitz, Office of Systems and Computer Services, Cuyahoga Community College, 2900 Community College Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44115.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° BIBLIOGRAPHY UPDATE ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

The following entries reflect papers presented at the annual meeting of the Professional Communication Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, October 19-21, 1983. A collaboration between technical writers in industry and professors in higher education, the IEEE PCS is establishing itself as a major resource for the application of word processing to academic writing programs. Individual copies of the entire conference proceedings can be obtained from the IEEE Service Center, 445 Hoes Lane, Piscataway, NJ 08854.

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Gibson, Jane Whitney. "Distortion in Organization Communication: Causes, Effects, and Remedies." Conference Record: The Many Facets of Computer Communications. IEEE Professional Communication Society. Atlanta, Georgia (October 19-21, 1983) pp. 121-126.

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Gleason, Jim. "Manual Dexterity--What Makes Instructional Manuals Usable." Conference Record: The Many Facets of Computer Communications. IEEE Professional Communication Society. Atlanta, Georgia (October 19-21, 1983) pp. 142-144.

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° ° ° QUARTERLY COMPUTERS AND COMPOSITION NEWSLETTER BEGINS ° °

Computers and Composition is a new quarterly newsletter focusing on computer applications in composition and writing theory. New Software packages will be evaluated, and computer applications and research in composition programs will be reported on. Editor Cynthia L. Selfe (Humanities Department, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI 49931) will handle the $5.00 annual subscription. And editor Kate Kiefer (Department of English,

Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523) is receiving short article submissions of 1,000 words or less. The first issue of the quarterly will be available in November, 1983.

° ° ° ° ° "INTEGRATING COMPUTERS AND WRITING PROJECT" ° ° ° ° °

The Program in Composition and Communication at the University of Minnesota is making available several of the papers issuing from its FIPSE-sponsored project "Integrating Computers and Writing Project." The project also generates "Word/Writing Process News," a newsletter dealing with announcements about forthcoming conferences and publications relating to computers in composition. A sixteen-item bibliography with payment information can be obtained from the project directors, Donald Ross and Lillian Bridwell: 209 Lind Hall, 207 Church Street S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° HARDWARE/SOFTWARE BLUES ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

Your college has spent a tidy sum for word-processing equipment; procedural and pedagogical concerns have been addressed and implemented; and students and faculty are demanding more on-line hours for the "word processing and composition" lab. As the overseer of the project, things couldn't be better, right?

Not necessarily, says Dr. Alan J. Fridlund--a clinical psychophysiologist at the Martinez Veterans Administration Medical Center in Martinez, California. In his article "Information Toxicity" (PC World, Nov. '83, pp. 17-18), Fridlund makes some interesting and potentially frightening points about computer users who "are consumed by their machines."

A number of factors contribute to the "Infotox" syndrome, but one that is of particular interest to composition teachers could be the students' mistaken "equation of information with knowledge," elaborates Fridlund:

> A common complaint among teachers these days is that
> students digest information but do not learn. By using
> computers, students are able to do much more schoolwork
> and homework, but are they learning to integrate and
> evaluate date? Clearly, knowledge is not knowing
> little bits of data...but rather organizing these bits
> meaningfully.

While students writing compositions on word processors may find text-formatting variables more accessible, "learning to integrate and evaluate" context in the light of intelligent, concise content remains the principal challenge to "meaningful" communications.

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