



# PRESS RELEASE

## **FSU Program Aims To Enhance Children's Writing Skills**

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**By Connie Harris**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.-- With the increased emphasis on developing children's writing skills nationwide, the Florida State University Writing Project continues its mission to explore and improve the practices associated with writing instruction. The program offers three annual programs aimed at improving the writing skills of elementary and secondary students from throughout the state:

- The Young Writers' Camp, taking place through July 13, is offered for students in the sixth through ninth grades. Interested students must apply and submit an original writing sample. The program accepts 25 to 30 young writers and helps them explore literary genres, sharpen skills and even publish their own pieces. The camp is held on the campus of the Florida State University Schools (Florida High) in Tallahassee; while there, students participate in small and large group workshops and one-on-one sessions with teachers experienced in writing instruction.
- The Summer Writing Institute, taking place through July 14 at Florida High, is open to teachers in any discipline at any K-16 school. Upon completion, participants are eligible to present their own in-service workshops in local schools.
- The Writing Summit, a daylong program held in the fall at Tallahassee Community College, is open to teachers, administrators and supervisors from the surrounding area who are dedicated to promoting quality writing ability and instruction. Attendees participate in group sessions and panel discussions that focus on the teaching of writing. This year's event is scheduled for Oct. 7 and will feature author Julianna Baggott, a faculty member in FSU's creative writing program.

In recent years, both the ACT and SAT college admissions exams have added a writing section to their tests, with many universities requiring the reporting of those scores. A portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) also focuses on writing ability. The FCAT is part of Florida's overall plan to increase student achievement by implementing higher standards; the test is administered to students in grades 3-11.

The FSU Writing Project recently was recognized by Susan Martelli, principal at Florida High, as a key reason why her school was ranked among this year's top 100 Florida high schools for student improvement in the writing portion of the

FCAT.

"Our teachers had the opportunity to participate in the FSU Writing Project during the past three summers," Martelli said. "The rankings show that implementing the writing strategies from this program has certainly worked for our students."

"The beauty of the Summer Institute is that it uses a 'teachers teaching teachers' model, focused on improving writing across disciplines and grades," said Susan Wood, an associate professor in FSU's department of middle and secondary education who also directs the FSU Writing Project.

"This year, for example, we invited 15 enthusiastic professionals - teachers from third grade to community college - who share a deep desire to be better teachers of writing."

The Summer Institute is an intense, four-week study that focuses on three points: demonstrations of best practices, development of personal writing, and knowledge of relevant research. The final week coincides with the weeklong Young Writers' Camp, and the participants from each program are able to interact and share their interests.

"Students (from the Young Writers' Camp) see teachers (from the Summer Institute) in a new role: Not only are they instructors of writing, but they are active writers themselves," said Shari Steadman, an assistant professor in English education at FSU and coordinator of the Young Writers' Camp. "In sharing their work, members from each group experience the opportunity to write and publish - via public readings - for larger and more diverse audiences."

The goals of the Young Writers' Camp are both short term and long term. The program aims to give participants the opportunity to learn new skills and further develop existing ones in a supportive group environment. The long-term goal is to help students continue to develop and explore their interest in writing and develop the practices necessary to recognize and produce strong, effective material.

In addition to working with the students in the Young Writers' Camp, Summer Institute participants are encouraged to continue working with the FSU Writing Project in a number of capacities, including providing support for the Writing Summit. The Writing Summit will feature demonstrations of best practices for teaching writing. Educators wishing to participate in the Writing Summit should register by Sept. 15. Information and registration materials may be obtained by calling Professor Wood at (850) 644-1909.

The FSU Writing Project is an initiative of the National Writing Project and is the project's only site in North Florida. The National Writing Project serves more than 100,000 teachers with programs to help develop their expertise as teachers of writing and their talents as writers.

The FSU Writing Project is a part of the College of Education at Florida State University. More information about the program can be found at [www.fsu.edu/~mse/FSUWP.html](http://www.fsu.edu/~mse/FSUWP.html).

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