

# Do Canisius Students

## Know How to Write?

by Carole Allwein

Canisius College, along with other higher educational institutions, is finding that many students are encountering writing difficulties.

Dr. Philip Heffley, Professor of Chemistry, is deeply concerned about the "importance of verbal skills." He described the Chemistry Department's "Keller Plan," in operation for the past two years. Entitled Chemistry 111-2, it is a "personalized system of instruction." During the first year, a "high correlation" appeared between students' final examination scores and SAT Verbal scores. The "trend was reversed slightly" the following year as the SAT Mathematics scores came into view, due to the fact that more mathematics was emphasized. But the Verbal scores "still had a significant correlation with the findings." In viewing his experiences with both the "Keller Plan" and his Chemistry 104 non-science major course, Dr. Heffley found that "a number of students exhibited poor penmanship and lacked compositional skills. As a result of these experiences, I am impressed with the importance of writing skills as they relate to successful academic performance. I support the College's recognition of this problem and its attempt to solve it." (See last paragraph).

Dr. David Gorman, Professor of History, stated that "in high school, there is a tendency to get into literature and to neglect the

foundation of grammar and spelling. . . Learning the rules of grammar and spelling takes time and work. The 'instant generation' does not want to be bothered." He observed that college students fifteen years ago were "better prepared when they came to college. Programs like remedial reading were unnecessary. We are taking students not prepared to read on a college level."

Dr. Stanley Arbeit, Professor of Marketing, believes that students "have not been required to practice the fundamentals of writing . . . the ability to communicate in part differentiates the college-educated from the non-college-educated." For him, students should develop their writing skills "in the Arts and Sciences courses. The faculty in the Business School should not have to train students in these skills. . . . But it is incumbent upon us to demand an adequate level of performance."

Mr. James McGoldrick, who teaches Modern Languages, believes the "problem is that since we are trying to make school activity pleasurable, we are eliminating the essentials in the educational process. Few want to teach grammar. Students find it an arduous task. If we want students to write better, school administrators on all levels will have to insist that students are taught their language more." Mastery of the structure of the English language is vital to Dr. McGoldrick. "Few English-

speaking students master the parts of speech." She stressed foreign language study, saying: "In the past, grammar instruction in grade school was improved upon by study of a foreign language through grammar."

The English Department is now giving its "Writing Lab" to students with writing difficulties. It is staffed by Dr. David Lauerman, Dr. Judith Slater and three graduate students, namely, Charles Fitzgerald, Patricia Frederick, and Kathleen Isker. Dr. Lauerman is enthusiastic about it. "It is a tutorial service for students, especially for those who have trouble with writing. . . . We ask the students to think of themselves as writers with something to say. We get them to start writing and keep writing to the greatest extent possible. . . . We are resource people who help them." He pointed out that grammar is not the main thrust. "Grammar is the last thing. The students do a lot in the way of skills as they work along." As to its outcome, he stated: "We have received a positive response from the Dean, English teachers, and Leroy Mitchell (head of Special Academic Programs). . . . The students like tutorial work." Dr. Lauerman stressed that "we will be here for a long time. . . . Tutorial works." Any students are welcome even if they are "not at the same level," although in these cases individual tutorial service is arranged.