

The WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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Once again, among the articles in this month's newsletter are some which focus on tutors. By comparison, general composition journals pay scant attention to training teachers of writing, to considering their development as teachers and writers, or to establishing a comfortable, effective environment in which to teach. Yet these standard issues among writing lab people are all discussed in this month's articles. Clearly, writing lab directors play an important role in training students to teach and/or to work cooperatively in one-to-one situations with others. Most labs do not generate credit hours, but all should be credited as centers for tutors' personal development.

What's your reaction to this role of educating students? Let's hear from you. And keep on sending your articles, reviews, announcements, questions and comments, names of new members, and yearly \$5 donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University, but sent to me) to:

Muriel Harris, editor
Writing Lab Newsletter
Dept. of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

COMMUNITY AND COMMUNICATIONS IN THE WRITING CENTER

The ideal writing center is one that helps writers at various stages in their development by providing a place where they are encouraged to write, can discuss their writing, exchange ideas, interact with other writers, and become part of a community of writers. To build this sense of community within a writing center, it is necessary to begin with the staff, who should not only be competent writers, but should also view

working at the center as an important and pleasant activity.

Although providing a supportive environment may not be a primary goal for a writing center director, who must often worry about many other problems, it is a necessary and an important administrative goal if we want to make our centers more than extensions of classrooms, faculty offices, or clinics to which ailing students are sent for first aid.

Developing a sense of community in a writing center can, however, be difficult, especially with a large peer staff who work only a few hours a week. At our Writing/Reading Center we have been able to develop a sense of community through various forms of written communication. Probably, none of these is unique, but by having six established formats for communicating, the staff have been able to "talk" to each other even though they may not actually see one another.

The first way in which we communicate is through our intra-center mail system. We use a large bulletin board for "mail-slots," which are 4 x 6 index cards attached to the board with four thumbtacks. Each staff member has his or her name printed on one and is thus able to receive Writing/Reading Center "mail." These mail slots create center unity because they affirm the importance of each individual and give him or her a sense of identity. They also enable me to communicate with each staff person on a regular basis. I can distribute printed material, share information, give out time slips, write thank-you notes for jobs well-done, send birthday cards, remind staff of assignments and deadlines, or ask questions that I might otherwise forget. Recently, the staff have also made use of this mail system to write notes to each other. They check their mail-slots each time they work and look forward to getting mail. In fact,

occasionally someone will mention that he or she hasn't received any mail recently.

The second means of communication at our center is an information sheet called UPDATE, which I write approximately every two weeks to let the staff know what is going on. I include items such as policy matters, problems or issues involving a large part of the staff, announcements of events, suggestions for general procedures and tutoring, calls for assistance on special issues, and help in solving problems. In addition, I include a trivia or puzzle type question related to literature or the English language for fun. Distributed through the mail-slots, UPDATE ensures that all staff get the same information, which they take more seriously than if a notice were posted on the bulletin board.

The WRITING/READING CENTER NEWSLETTER, published twice a semester primarily to keep faculty and administrators informed about what we do, is also distributed to our staff. In this newsletter we announce our workshops and special programs, describe our tutor training, interview the tutors, summarize articles of interest from periodicals, tell how to improve a specific writing or reading skill, include items of literary interest and word puzzles, and publish material on current English usage. Although we constantly communicate with our staff about our activities and concerns, it is still difficult to make sure each person is well-informed. The WRITING/READING CENTER NEWSLETTER not only informs those outside of the center, but also reinforces our philosophy and reviews our programs for the staff. The tone of the newsletter is serious, and it suggests that the Center is a place where serious work is done in a pleasant environment. The newsletter also reinforces the concept that we are a community of writers, not just a group of students who need a work-study site or want to earn credits. Although the WRITING/READING CENTER NEWSLETTER is not primarily written for our staff, it has been helpful in communicating to them what we do and how we do it, and they take pride in being part of an organized and important program.

In a somewhat lighter vein, we publish two in-house periodicals. The first is TUTOR TURTLE, written by student staff and issued once or twice a semester. One of our senior tutors is editor and works with a committee of peers, who generate their own ideas. I usually don't see what they are

doing until it is ready to be typed, giving the editor and the committee a great deal of freedom to be creative and making them responsible for the quality of the work and for getting the job done. Each semester TUTOR TURTLE takes on different character, and the material varies as the staff changes. It has included unusual profiles of the staff, reports of workshops and events, puzzles and quizzes, soap operas with Writing/Reading Center staff as characters, staff surveys, and fantasy shopping sprees and trips based on questionnaires to the staff. Through TUTOR TURTLE the staff learn about events at the center and get to know more about each other. In some cases, they learn about people whom they never meet because of differing schedules; in other cases, they learn interesting information about the people with whom they work. Everyone looks forward to the distribution of TUTOR TURTLE, which is carefully read and widely discussed. Although TUTOR TURTLE may appear to be trivial, it is an important factor in developing a sense of community among the staff.

The second in-house publication with a light touch that we issue each semester is the TRASH CAN REVIEW, for which the staff writes bad poetry and prose. Staff contributions vary from run-of-the-mill bad to clever parodies, but all are read with great interest and evoke comments from both authors and readers, fostering interaction among staff and letting them share their creativity. As with TUTOR TURTLE, TRASH CAN REVIEW helps build both communication and community among the staff. Although not everyone contributes to these publications, everyone reads them, discusses them, and comments about them. When they are issued, they are a Writing/Reading Center event that all the staff can share.

The last publication is one that we are just developing--a newsletter for our students, which we hope will help them achieve a greater sense of identity with the center and make it a place they want to come to. Our goal is to have this newsletter do for our students what our other publications have done for our staff. In addition to announcements, we will include writing and study skills tips, relevant puzzles and games, short feature articles about our students and staff, interviews, and contributions by our staff and students. Eventually we hope to get some of our students involved in publishing it. We will

mail this newsletter to the students who use the center, and we hope they will begin to realize that the center can become an important part of their college life rather than a place they turn to as a stopgap measure when they are working on a difficult assignment.

Although these six methods of communication are simple to implement and by no means unique, they perform an important function in our Writing/Reading Center. They ensure that our staff has the necessary information about the center, set the tone of how we operate, help the staff identify strongly with the center, demonstrate the importance of communications, make the experience of working at the Writing/Reading Center an important part of the staff's education, and allow the members of a large staff--who may not see each other--to develop into a cohesive unit. Building this sense of community among the staff of a writing center by using various forms of written communication is an appropriate way to improve the quality of tutoring.

Susan Glassman
Southeastern Massachusetts
University

A READER ASKS- - -

At the beginning of this semester we created an extension of Brigham Young University's on-campus writing center in one of our dorm areas. We've had success in our expansion, but I'm interested in discussing with some of our colleagues the implications of decentralization, ways of streamlining the service, pitfalls, and successful approaches, perhaps even visiting some campuses that have adopted this concept. If you have a similar program, please contact me:

William O. Shakespeare, Manager
Reading-Writing Center
1010A JKHB
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84602
(801)378-3486

A READER RESPONDS

We too had students expecting us to proofread their papers. We discussed the problem, brainstormed some ideas, and came up with the following policy statement for the Writing Process Center at Keene State:

Editing Policy

One of the major purposes of the Writing Process Center is to help students learn how to write using the process of prewriting, writing, revising, editing, and rewriting. Firmly believing, however, that the papers students submit to faculty should be the product of their own work, we will not edit, reword, or rewrite their papers.

Our policy allows us to do the following:

- * Conference rough drafts by having students read them aloud
- * Help students discover their strengths and weaknesses
- * Help students develop specific writing skills
- * Suggest possible ways to strengthen papers (leaving it up to the student to accept or reject those suggestions)
- * Answer specific questions regarding mechanics, wording, usage, or sentence structure, explaining the rule or concept in the process
- * Train and encourage students to use computer editing programs (i.e., spelling checkers, etc.)

In short, we will help or train students to edit their own works.

Vesta Hornbeck
Keene State College
Keene, NH

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

TITLE: Assistant Professor and
Coordinator of Instructional
Technologies

DURATION: Full-time, 12 month tenure track
faculty position

SALARY: Negotiable

POSITION: Serve as lead instructor in a
basic skills learning center which offers
programs in math, reading, study skills and
writing improvement. Coordinate the
development of the center as an
individualized--technology assisted
facility. Supervise a full-time instruc-
tional aide, part-time tutors and provide
scheduling coordination for 7-10 faculty
members. Provide technical assistance to a
campus-wide task force on developing
instructional technologies across the
curriculum and integrating basic skills
instruction into General Education offerings
of the college.

REQUIRED: Master's degree appropriate to
instructional technology and/or basic skills
education at the college level. Minimum of
5 years directly related experience.

Desired background includes knowledge of
computer-assisted instruction in the basic
skills and inter-active learning techno-
logies at the college level. Familiarity
with a small college environment and
interest or background in rural educational
settings is also desired.

APPLICATION: This is an immediate opening.
Applications will be accepted until the
position is filled. To apply, send a letter
which specifically addresses the position
announcement statement of qualifications and
responsibilities, attach a current curri-
culum vita and include the names and phone
numbers of three references. Address
letters and inquiries to:

Chair, Basic Skills Search Committee
Western Montana College
Dillon, MT 59725

Telephone inquiries may be made to Dr. Henry
Worrest, Vice President for Academic
Affairs: 406-683-7300.

CALL FOR PAPERS

New England Writing Centers Association

Spring Conference - 12 April 1986 - Rhode
Island College, Providence, RI

"Moving to the Center:
Organization, Management & Methods"

Persons interested in presenting a
Paper/Workshop should be prepared to speak
for 30 minutes and to lead/participate in
discussion. Sessions will be 60-75 minutes
long.

Proposals are welcome in all areas of
concern to writing centers. The
Conference's thematic areas include such
topics as these:

Organization:

- Publicity
- Accountability
- Relationship to Institution
- Role within Curriculum
- Communication with Faculty
- Image Building

Management:

- Tutor Training
- Budget & Funding
- Ongoing Assessment
- Facilities
- Dean Dealing
- Record Keeping

Methods:

- Tutor Talk
- Theory
- Ethical Issues
- Students' Expectations
- Meeting a Wide Range of
Student Needs (Above
Average, ESL, LD, etc.)

One-page proposals in these and related
areas are due by 18 January 1986. Send
proposals to Mary E. McGann
Rhode Island College
600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908

The Tutor's Corner

INITIAL INTERN OBSERVATIONS OF WRITING CENTER OPERATIONS

As a first semester W398 intern in the University Writing Center, I felt it might be helpful, both for me and others, to take down some of my first thoughts on the operations of the Writing Center and to share some of my observations.

I made the error, some weeks ago, of thinking that a course such as W398 could be likened to "found money;" while ten hours of weekly attendance would be required, actual demands upon me would be minimal so that I could learn some essentials more or less at the expense of the university. Although I would be paying for course hours, it seemed to me that ten hours a week in the Writing Center would give me time for learning things that would benefit me personally: the help I could or would give to other students would be merely incidental.

I first learned about the Writing Center in a Professional Writing class. Having had no experience with the Writing Center, I thought of it as a frivolous "extra" that I actually didn't need, though it was nice to know that the Center existed in case I ever did need writing help. When my professor asked me if I would like to sign up for the W398 course, I was elated with the idea, for like the proverbial teenager, I thought I knew all I needed to know and considered the opportunity beneficial for transcript and selfish reasons.

I know--double shame on me. It occurs to me now, though, that the benefits I am discovering about the Writing Center are doubly surprising when I consider my initial perceptions. I am seeing, a little more every day, that the Writing Center is not attempting to replace the valuable writing processes being taught by classroom teachers. Even more so, I can see more clearly every time I counsel a student on his or her writing that the Writing Center is not a panacea. The handful of ardent people who work here cannot make up for writing problems resulting from a student's not paying attention in high school English classes or a hundred other reasons that cause writing classes every semester to be

riddled with students who need help with very basic writing skills.

There are many things that the Writing Center is not. I suppose that people could look at operations of the Writing Center and conclude that because the Center does not promise a rapid cure for poor writing skills, its purposes and procedures are inadequate. This is not true. The real novelty of the Writing Center, I believe, lies in its function as a "detail bank" for everything from the most basic of grammatical rules to style analysis. Individual student counseling sessions, as well as the Writing Center Hotline, provide answers but most of all help--the kind of help that brings understanding of the complex rules of grammar and complicated writing processes.

The personal touch in education, I believe, creates the most success, both for student and teacher. We expect too much of teachers when we ask them to correct all of the deep-rooted misunderstandings about grammar and writing in the classroom. It just can't be done. The facility with which students and teachers can access the Writing Center's resources is phenomenal. A brief phone call reserves for whoever needs it the time and professional expertise needed for extra help in handling writing problems.

It has been my experience thus far that many students who come for help have a few very basic difficulties in their writing. Usually one type of error such as overuse of passive voice, shift in tense, or comma splices permeates a student's writing and makes it less than it could otherwise be. In the Writing Center, more so than in the classroom, the opportunity exists for thorough discussion of this "type" of error, so that the student can see, through many examples, how he or she makes the error and what can be done to correct it. Once the student learns the method of observation and the applicable principle, the remaining errors are more easily found and corrected. Unfortunately, in the standard appointment allotment of half an hour, the teacher or intern cannot handle thoroughly all problems

in voice, tense, comma placement, modifier placement and word choice. For this reason some people may fault Writing Center operations, seeing only what has not been accomplished, instead of what has. It does not occur to some people that the element of trust, which takes so much precedence in our regular lives, is also essential to establishment of a tutor/student rapport, particularly when it comes to the soul-baring needed in the early personal experience essays of the lower-level writing classes.

As an intern, I have learned something important, the precise reason that I am here. What I am getting for my three hours of paid tuition is not a glorified study hall, with little homework. I am getting pushed, and hard, to think quickly and precisely, to master rules which I have myself forgotten, to be supportive of other students with limited experience and help them find worth and goodness in their efforts. Now that I am on the inside of the fence, I don't regard the Writing Center as a frivolous extra. I see the vital necessity of the Writing Center for some students, the benefits to other students and Hotline callers who need the momentary use of the vast "detail bank," but most of all, (and I'm being selfish again), the benefits to me as a future teacher of English, getting put through my paces in the maze of principles and reasoning that make up our language and our writing.

Paul E. Smethers
Indiana University-Purdue
University at Indianapolis

HELPING STUDENTS WRITE IN
RESPONSE TO LITERATURE:
ONE TUTOR'S APPROACH

Many colleges and universities have recently revised their composition courses to include freshman or sophomore writing in response to literature. If the course is a second-in-a-sequence requirement, following the traditional expository-argumentative writing course, students frequently find themselves in double trouble. Not yet secure in their basic writing skills, they must now understand a literary work, and worse yet in their eyes, write something

about it. As this situation occurs, tutors in our writing centers are faced with not only assisting the student with his written composition, but also initially with helping him achieve an understanding and perspective upon which he can formulate a thesis for his essay. I've found that a few simple steps can prove extremely helpful when these students come to the lab.

First of all, we should try to keep on file the literature texts being used. Copies of texts and course syllabi can oftentimes be obtained from individual instructors. We will, after all, be helping their students.

When that first student arrives requesting help with his response to literature, we may face another dilemma: the student is eager for ideas and approaches while the tutor may not be familiar with the literary piece. There are at least a few ways to work around this little inconvenience. I don't think it's beneficial to assign students to a particular tutor, although there is evidence that such continuing arrangements are productive. The easiest solution in our Center, as this situation arises, is to schedule the student with a peer tutor who's a senior literature major or with a professor/tutor from the English department.

There is another possibility: scheduling a limited, thirty-minute to one-hour, "study" or "brainstorming" session within the Center. What we attempt to do here is to discuss the literary work with a very small group initially, rather than with individual students. A signup sheet can be posted, announcing "Brainstorming session-- Topics for The Grapes of Wrath." We'll run the session with only three or four students, trying to maintain very small groups to provide for individual attention. With a small number, we can encourage all of the students to interact, to offer topics and approaches. Frequently these sessions begin with the students asking for clarification regarding some aspect of the work itself. One item that must be stressed to the students is the absolute necessity for clear, careful reading of the text on their part.

Normally following one of these study sessions, I'll ask the student to sign up for a thirty-minute individual tutoring appointment. During this time, I can continue to help the student arrive at a the-

sis. First of all, this is a good time to check the course syllabus. I'll review the files to see if this student's professor requires a certain approach to literature. Generally speaking, in composition courses responding to literature, I've found that most approaches can be categorized into two methods: 1) the students are asked to compose an impressionistic, personal response to the literary work in which some aspect of their reading is related to their own experiences; or 2) the students are asked to develop a critical approach normally centered around an aspect of new or formalistic criticism, less frequently centered upon a biographical or historical approach. The first category usually results in an original, primary source essay; the second leads the student to the library, secondary sources, and research methods.

In dealing further with the first approach, the personal response, we can initially ask the student to talk about what he's read and his reaction to the work of literature. If the student hasn't been in a study session, I'll try to determine how well he understands what he's read. Probing questions can include among others:

- What's the author trying to say in this work?
- What do you see as his major point? Can you relate to it?
- Can you compare any of your own experiences or observations to the overall work? To a character in the work? To any limited segment of the work?
- Can we focus in on that area and try to build a thesis statement for your response?

This type of questioning will help the student achieve a perspective on which he can construct a personal, impressionistic response. Recent application of these questions led students to the following issues from Steinbeck's Grapes:

- "That chapter on used-car salesmen hit me. They certainly haven't changed much."
- "I know how the Joads felt when they were called 'Okies.' I feel the same way when I hear . . ."

"My Dad is part of a major corporation. From what I see, the company is very concerned for people. It does all sorts of charitable things."

When the student begins to make these types of assessments, we are on our way to helping him with the structure and organization of his personal response. We can now talk with him about the various modes and methods of development which might fit his purpose best. In this type of paper, classification analysis and comparison/contrast are two structures which can be used to express and develop the relationship between his personal experiences and incidents from the story. We can help our writer outline the topic ("Can I show first what the Joads experienced and then move on to show how I lived through the same situation in our family?") and suggest suitable support and development. For the student who is composing the personal, impressionistic response, we're ready to send him off to complete his first full draft, with the invitation to return for its appraisal.

The other student, asked to compose a critical response, will normally require more detailed discussion and explanation about his assignment. Oftentimes, this student's initial problem is that he doesn't understand what he can do with these critical modes. He's heard his professor talk about structure in the novel, character development, irony, symbol, theme, and the author's background. So here he is, in the Center, with a vague idea about a paper which, he asserts, will discuss all those points thoroughly, but he can't seem to get beyond two hundred words! So we begin. Probably the most common critical evaluation for about the last twenty years or so in our classrooms has been this textual or formalistic approach to literature. Yes, the student has heard his professor talk about it. Our writer has probably even learned some of it by the process of osmosis in the classroom. The new twist is that the approach, once restricted to literature courses for those few majors, is now filtering down into the literature-writing composition course. Here we, as tutors, may have to help the student understand and separate aspects of the approach. Common pitfalls experienced by writers in dealing with this type of essay include these: 1) they try to cover too much in a paper (I

really did experience the example cited above); 2) they are so unfamiliar with this type of assignment that they have a complete mental block about starting any topic; and 3) they try to impose personal experiences into this essay where they don't belong. The first problem is typical because it's easier for the student to discuss eight symbols or five characters in his essay than it is for him to restrict the topic. He can compose 50 words on each, rather than 500 on one. The second and third problems can be overcome by drawing the student out in discussion, helping him to see that he knows more than he thinks.

If we can overcome any or all of these three setbacks, we'll find ourselves on more familiar ground: limitation of the topic to a focused thesis. Once the limitation is discussed and achieved, we have to assure the student that he can indeed create and compose an 800-word paper on one character, or the author's use of one symbol. Occasionally two new words will enter the student's life during these tutoring sessions: the library and research. We may have to advise our young scholar in the appropriate means to seek out secondary sources with further suggestions regarding how he might incorporate these sources correctly into a paper. To avoid problems and accusations of plagiarism, we need to stress the accurate use of quotes and paraphrasings with proper footnoting and documentation. If the student has been asked to write about the author's life as it's reflected in the work or the social milieu of the work, we must be certain to correctly advise him on the nature of research as an indispensable tool for the completion of his paper.

It used to be that only literature majors were asked to produce such papers, and as literature majors, they had a grasp on the research methods which they had to follow. Today, the engineering major may be visiting the Center asking how he can possibly produce a paper on Steinbeck's political philosophy in Grapes when he's never written a research paper before. We should be prepared to help him.

My point is that, with thought and planning, we can be prepared to help these students in our centers. Each of us can apply, modify, discard or add to the ideas presented here to fashion the approach for our own needs and capacities. We're moving be-

yond basic skills in this type of tutoring. That's good for our centers and for the indispensibility of our centers to the over-all university.

Michael D. Chiteman
Penn State-Behrend

¹As an aside, we might also keep on our centers' bookshelves titles which will provide introductory aid in applying a critical approach. A good start includes A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature, edited by Guerin, Labor, Morgan, and Willingham, from Harper and Row. Also helpful might be any of Laurence Perrine's literature anthologies; Literature: Structure, Sound and Sense is one example from Harcourt, Brace. Perrine's explanations of components such as character, theme, etc. are useful to students composing this type of essay.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF WRITING CENTER

When English instructors at Florence-Darlington Technical College are asked whether or not our school has a writing center, we answer, "Yes, but--." The reason we qualify our response is that our writing center is not like those found in most other schools; it is not a tutorial center where students with writing problems seek assistance with work they do for various courses. Rather, our writing center is a place in which students take English courses in a self-paced fashion. We prefer that our students take courses in the classroom--there is no substitute for the interaction of a student with an instructor and with other students--but because we are the kind of school that we are, there are times when our classroom offerings will not fit a student's schedule.

Florence-Darlington Technical College is a two-year vocational-technical college, a part of South Carolina's technical education system which has developed over the past twenty-five years or so. Students come to Tec to take one- and two-year programs preparing them for work in a variety of fields ranging from such things as welding and auto-diesel mechanics to nursing and

data processing. Because we are involved in vocational and technical education, our schedules are not organized as most college schedules are, with classes set on Monday-Wednesday-Friday or Tuesday-Thursday at regularly spaced intervals. Auto-diesel mechanics, for instance, does not lend itself to that kind of arrangement. If a student is taking an engine apart, he cannot work at it for an hour or two and then go dashing off to English class. He needs a large chunk of time to devote to the practical skills which are a part of his field of study. Our various curriculums, then, set up schedules for their students which allow them extended periods of hands-on work. They also, of course, fit in time for other needed courses such as English and math and request those departments to schedule these classes at times which mesh with curriculum offerings.

For most students, this system works. A student entering in September as a member of a class of auto-diesel mechanics takes English classes with his classmates at the time scheduled by his curriculum. Occasionally, though, there are students who are out of step. They may fail or drop an English course or simply not register for it when they should. They may enter school at some time other than September and so be out of sequence in all their courses. When work schedules and personal lives interrupt their education, they may drop out for a quarter or more and then reenter. Sometimes these students can schedule classroom courses with no difficulty, but often they cannot. It was to meet the needs of students with scheduling problems that the Writing Center was begun in 1980. The English Department did not have to look far to find a model for its structure. The Math Center had been operating at Tec since 1975 and provided an example of how self-paced study of classroom courses could be organized.

Taking a course in the Writing Center is very much like taking a correspondence course. Students are given a syllabus, directed to purchase textbooks, but left on their own to pursue course requirements. However, taking a course in the Writing Center offers three advantages that correspondence courses lack.

First of all, students in the Writing Center follow an established schedule. They are required to be in attendance in the Writing Center until their course is com-

pleted, just as they are in regular classes. Since they must be present for a certain number of periods each week and since they come into an environment which offers few distractions, they work more diligently than would be likely in a correspondence course and sometimes more diligently than they would in a classroom course, often completing the course before the ten-week quarter is up, at which time they are released from the Writing Center.

The second advantage is that the instructor is available for conferences. Many of the courses, particularly the writing courses, have conferences built into the syllabus. A student may be asked, for example, to talk over the trial draft of a theme before completing the final draft. The instructor working in the Writing Center also has a number of opportunities to offer advice and suggestions as students turn in and collect work. And, of course, students can seek help as they feel the need for it.

The third advantage is that students receive immediate feedback. Tests and essays usually can be evaluated right away. Response to written work is definitely quicker than in a correspondence course and probably quicker than in many classroom courses.

Because students are left on their own to pursue course requirements, not every student works successfully in the Writing Center. Some realize very quickly that they miss the constant presence of an instructor, the interaction of a classroom, or the pressure of deadlines, and choose to drop out, waiting until some later time to take the course they need. Others persist, but fail to meet the only deadline which they find in the Writing Center: the end of the quarter, when all or most work must be completed. For every student who finds that Writing Center methods are not conducive to successful work, there is another who actually prefers the independence of work in the Writing Center. Some students return to the Writing Center repeatedly for their English courses, electing self-paced study over classroom study. The English Department feels some concern about these, since the Writing Center was designed primarily to accommodate students with scheduling problems, and urges that students take courses in the classroom when possible. Most Writing Center students fall in the middle of the two extremes, working productively for the length of the

course they must take there, then returning to the classroom for any further required English courses.

When the Writing Center began in 1980, it operated in the Math Center during its off-hours, keeping its materials in a large closet. Two years later, it acquired its own suite of rooms in the industrial arts building, inherited from the shipping and receiving department, which moved elsewhere. While the English Department looks forward to new quarters for the Writing Center when a building presently being planned is completed, it is for the time being content with the three rooms it occupies.

One disadvantage of the Writing Center's size is also an advantage: no more than eighteen students can be squeezed into the space, making it impossible for anyone to ask at registration, "Well, can't you take just one more?" The answer must be no.

We are glad, of course, that the Writing Center has become so sought after that it must turn some students away. When it was begun, there was question of whether there would be enough students to justify its opening. Now, the fall, winter, and spring quarters usually bring full registration, especially during the daytime hours, and summer registration is sufficiently heavy to warrant the maintenance of the Writing Center's usual hours.

The Writing Center welcomed its first wheelchair student this past year and has served other handicapped students in the past. The facility planned for the future will include accommodations designed more specifically for handicapped students and may become the ideal place for some of these to take English courses, particularly those whose use of their hands makes it difficult to write themes as quickly as classroom courses demand. Such students may require a "carry-forward"--the grade given when work is not completed by the end of the quarter and there is reasonable expectation that it can be completed the following quarter--but they will be able to work at a speed more comfortable for them.

Future plans also include, inevitably, the use of computers. In the meantime, the Writing Center makes use of traditional teaching materials: books, paper, pencils, and, for some courses, filmstrips and tapes. Course syllabuses based on the Competency

Based Instruction course outlines recently developed by the English Department and used for all courses are at the core of the instructional process.

The syllabuses serve as study guides, directing students to read material and to complete assignments. Students in grammar and vocabulary courses are tested at the end of each unit of study, while those in writing courses must complete writing assignments of various kinds. Several courses include both tests and writing assignments. Currently, the Writing Center offers a dozen different courses.

Some courses lend themselves to Writing Center instruction with few problems. English 125, a vocabulary course, for example, always runs smoothly for both instructor and students. Other courses are more difficult to handle. English 102, a composition and literature course, provides many moments of frustration as students struggle with such things as poetry explications. The difficulties may be no worse than those encountered in the classroom, but they cannot usually be resolved by the same methods. Clarification of expectations through the course syllabus is an important means whereby such problems can be worked out before they take hold. For this reason, course syllabuses are revised periodically in response to student needs.

The chairman of the English Department is also the director of the Writing Center, but its instructors carry the responsibility for day-to-day operation. Currently, one of our part-time instructors manages the Writing Center every morning from 8:30 until 12:15, and another on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 6:00 until 11:00. Because there are no lessons to plan and few papers to take home, Writing Center instruction has a particular appeal for part-time instructors, who are paid only for the hours they spend in teaching. However, that is not its only attraction. Writing Center instruction allows instructors and students to get to know each other as individuals in a way that classroom instruction often does not. The fact that the relationship is one-to-one--not one to an entire class--establishes a trust that Writing Center instructors and many students value.

Whether or not Florence-Darlington Technical College's Writing Center is unique, we do not know. We have heard of at least one

other similar facility and suspect there may be others. Unique or not, we do know this: Our Writing Center has become an important service to our students and to our various curriculums. We at Tec would like someday to have that other kind of writing center as well, so that our students who encounter writing problems can seek tutorial assistance. In the meantime, we are sure the Writing Center we have will continue to be an important element in our English Department's instructional offerings.

Holly Westcott
 Florence-Darlington
 Technical College

THE TUTOR TEST: BASIS FOR HIRING

Much is expected of a writing tutor working at Miami University's Writing Center. Therefore, when hiring, our staff seeks applicants who ordinarily set high standards for themselves as a matter of general practice. While each student who applies for a position as a writing tutor usually meets the basic criteria for performance on the tutor test, those who are selected are generally the students who surpass our fundamental requirements.

Eligibility to apply is not limited by set grade point standards; however, we anticipate that to some extent, the student's grades reflect his or her academic success. Because we do not demand that our tutors be English majors, our tutorial staff is composed of a cross-section of majors, allowing us the flexibility to serve a wide variety of students with a broad spectrum of problems.

The tutor testing process is a rigorous one, but it is an effective tool in helping us to assess each applicant's qualifications and level of motivation. Before the actual process begins, the applicant is asked to introduce him- or herself to our staff by submitting a letter of intent. This letter should be a legible, finished copy, free of errors in spelling, sentence structure, diction, and punctuation. It should be written clearly, with unified, logically developed ideas. The applicant is also required to submit two written recommendations from faculty members who are familiar

with his or her writing ability.

Once these preliminary steps are successfully completed, the applicant is presented with a tutor test, which consists of three parts: (I) a short essay, (II) the sample essays, and (III) the fallacious arguments.

In part I of the test, the student is given a list of questions and is asked to write a brief, but coherent, organized, and well developed essay in response to any one of the questions. As with the letter of intent, the essay should be free of gross errors. We further anticipate that the essay will contain no more than three errors in spelling and punctuation. The purpose of this portion of the tutor test is to provide us with an opportunity to evaluate firsthand the applicant's writing skills, sense of organization, and style.

Part II of the test gives the applicant an opportunity to demonstrate his or her ability to evaluate the skills, organizational patterns, and style of others. This portion of the test is composed of three sample essays, which the applicant is asked to mark for errors. The applicant is free to use a dictionary and handbook while marking the papers. Although we ask that the student be able to correct and explain all errors in each essay, we do not expect that the applicant should be able to label correctly each problem. Our concern focuses instead on whether or not he or she can accurately communicate the nature of the error, and the manner in which it should be corrected. (For example, the potential tutor need not be able to label a comma splice as such, but he or she should be able to locate the error and explain that it is incorrect to join two sentences with a comma. Further, the applicant must be able to suggest corrections, such as the insertion of a period or a coordinating conjunction). We expect that the student will miss no more than two errors in spelling, punctuation, diction, and sentence structure in each essay.

In addition to correcting grammatical and mechanical errors, the applicant must be able to make suggestions on how to improve the style and organization of each essay. He or she must also pin-point and explain major errors in logic. Because as a tutor the applicant will often be called upon by clients to help correct errors and improve

style, part II is an integral portion of the tutor test. To thoroughly understand the applicant's intentions in correcting and improving each essay, those in charge of hiring should make an appointment with the student to discuss the marks and changes he or she made. This is the tutor test meeting, which will be described in detail after a discussion of part III of the test.

The third section is a list of nine fallacious arguments. The applicant must be able to explain and correct all errors. As in marking the sample essays, the student need not be concerned with labeling the logic errors. He or she must, however, be able to communicate accurately the weakness of the logic in each argument, as well as how each might be corrected. Part III of the tutor test helps us to assess the applicant's ability to think logically. Since many of our clients' writing problems stem from deficient logic skills, we feel it is imperative that our tutors demonstrate a keen ability in this area. Therefore, we expect each applicant to recognize illogical propositions and statements, and be able to correct them in a clear, logical way.

After the applicant has completed parts I, II, and III, a tutor test meeting is scheduled. The objective of this meeting is to provide the applicant with a chance to explain and expand on his or her markings and corrections on parts II and III of the test. Just before the actual meeting takes place, the applicant is permitted approximately ten minutes to review the test. This is the applicant's last opportunity to add or delete markings and revisions.

During the meeting itself, the staff member questions the applicant on how the style and organization of each essay could be improved. The applicant may respond with a variety of suggestions, such as sentence combining or narrowing the topic. The applicant is also asked to discuss the errors in each paper. Our staff member marks and explains any errors the applicant has missed, which helps both of them to assess together the applicant's level of performance on the test. Likewise, a discussion of part III, where the staff member is again responsible for correcting and explaining any mistakes the applicant may have made, gives both people involved an opportunity to survey the applicant's performance.

The final step of the tutor test is the role play session. Its purpose is to help us evaluate the applicant's communicative abilities, and to determine how well he or she works with various personality types. Because handling different types of clients is something that can be learned with experience as a tutor, an applicant's responses to the characters in the role plays do not hurt him or her in the hiring process. However, if an applicant does an especially commendable job in the role plays, it will reflect favorably upon him or her when hiring decisions are made. Only if the applicant gives incorrect information when playing the role of the tutor can he or she negatively affect his or her position as an applicant.

One role play is executed for each of the three sample essays. We created three standard characters to be used with every applicant. The role play for the first essay involves an argumentative, immature student who challenges the tutor's advice. In the second role play, the staff member portrays an extremely shy, withdrawn and unresponsive student. The applicant's ability to work with an obstinate, disinterested student is challenged in the third role play. When the role play session has been completed, the staff member should write down comments on the applicant's performance. This aids in comparing the work of all the applicants during the selection process.

Though the testing process as a whole may seem rather extensive, it is our most valuable tool in our search for quality tutors. Not only does it provide us with a relatively accurate assessment of each applicant's knowledge of grammar and mechanics, it also helps us to develop a sense of his or her skills as a writer and a communicator. We feel confident that applicants who successfully complete the tutor test can handle the responsibilities of a writing tutor at Miami University's Writing Center.

Elizabeth Moore
Miami University (Ohio)

LETTING YOUR LAB EARN ITS KEEP

A Writing Lab director's job is like that of the adept politician keeping bosses and constituents happy, while staying within precise budgets. One of the greatest responsibilities for the lab director is convincing absolutely everybody that the lab is worthwhile and not an expensive luxury. A lab director's worst nightmare would be a surprise visit from school administrators during that rare split second when everybody is sitting around drinking coffee and reading the school newspaper to recuperate from a hectic morning of tutoring.

If perhaps your lab does have some slack off hours, there are numerous projects your lab can sponsor during lunch time hours, traffic rush hours, and after late afternoon and evening classes to meet not only the needs of the academic community, but the whole surrounding community as well. Try initiating some of these programs to dazzle your administration, to fully utilize your staff, and to ingratiate your lab with your neighbors:

WORKSHOPS

Your lab can offer weekly workshops for students and other community members. Such workshops can include book clubs in which members swap books and ideas. Guest authors can be invited to discuss their works with book club members. Writing workshops or support groups can be formed in which budding authors can find appreciative readers for their works. Computer software and programming workshops can help introduce both children and adults into the world of computers and assist them in becoming computer literate. Neighborhood children can also attend lab sponsored seminars in creative writing and can participate in story telling hours.

ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS

The writing lab can sponsor enrichment programs by the establishment of federally funded centers on campus. These enrichment centers can provide in-service training sessions for educators interested in setting up their own learning labs. Another enrichment program would be a high school partner-

ship agreement in which local high school students would visit the writing lab during the school day or as an after-school program. On-site tours can be conducted and students would experience "hands-on" writing sessions working directly with computer materials. If the partnership program proved successful, then a summer school writing program can be started. An interest questionnaire sent to participating partnership high schools can become the impetus for the development of a summer enrichment writing program. During the summer program, students would be assigned peer tutors to work with them on their individual writing assignments, to train them in the use of computer hardware and software materials, and to instruct them in word processing.

As a final part of the lab's enrichment program, local businesses and government agencies can be recruited to underwrite computer software training programs. For example, local branches of IBM or AT&T can be asked to donate computer equipment and training staff. Local software companies can also loan on approval or for testing purposes some of their new software packages.

SERVICES FOR HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

Handicapped students with special needs are often neglected in the writing lab. Many handicapped students relate well to peer tutors. Peer tutors can read to the visually impaired, take notes for the hearing impaired, aid in library research for the physically handicapped, and can work diligently with the learning disabled. Special equipment can be housed in the lab such as the Visual Tek MBOSS-1 Serial Printer (the Braille reader), a Kurzweil Reading Machine (converts printed material into spoken English), and an Apple IIe 1200 Modem (a receiver which connects the lab with direct library access).

RESEARCH AND TEACHER TRAINING

The writing lab is an ideal setting for an olio of research endeavors. Ranging from pilot studies, master theses, federally funded grants, doctoral dissertations, and

faculty research projects, the lab can become a beehive of activity, thought, and discussion. Case studies, longitudinal and experimental research can be conducted to examine such topics as the writing process, peer tutoring, and computer literacy.

On-site teacher training programs can be scheduled in the writing lab instead of far-reaching off campus locations. Both graduate and undergraduate student teachers in English, reading, and special education can be assigned to a teaching practicum in the writing lab under the joint auspices of the lab director and the school of education. Cutting down on travel time will allow student teachers to meet more often with their faculty advisors.

All of these programs can bring positive support and future financial opportunities to your writing lab. As a result, mutual cooperation between academic, community, and business groups can be planted and nurtured for new projects and expansion.

Mary Deming
and
Maria Valeri-Gold
Georgia State University

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Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
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