

The

# WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Member of the NWCA:NCTE  
Information Exchange Agreement

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## ....from the editor....

In this month's newsletter you'll find a particularly rich mix of information about conferences, materials, job openings, and news of the National Writing Centers Association. While this helps us all keep informed about matters of interest, it does mean that some articles are temporarily crowded out until the next issue of the newsletter. That raises a question everyone needs to answer. What do *you* find most useful in the newsletter? I have never done anything as elegant as an interest survey of members of our newsletter group, and thus I thread my way through the announcements of conferences, job openings, etc. that arrive in my mailbox. I try to choose those which seem to be the most relevant. But, I'd be able to make better choices if I hear from you.

So, please send your comments, suggestions, and ideas, along with articles, names of new members, and yearly donations of \$7.50 (in checks made payable to Purdue University) to:

Muriel Harris, editor  
*Writing Lab Newsletter*  
Department of English  
Purdue University  
West Lafayette, IN 47907

## ESTABLISHING WRITING CENTERS THROUGHOUT A SCHOOL DISTRICT: A CASE STUDY IN DEFEATING YEAHBUTS AND IFONLYS

Every voice raised in favor of a new idea in education faces being drowned out by that infamous chorus known as the Yeahbuts. So it is with the idea of establishing writing centers in schools throughout a district. No sooner are a few converts and a little headway made when the Yeahbuts begin their familiar refrains:

"Yeahbut how are we going to staff a writing center?"

"Yeahbut where are we going to put a writing center?"

"Yeahbut who's going to use a writing center anyway?"

"Yeahbut then those teachers will have one more prep hour?"

"Yeahbut where's the money going to come from?"

"Yeahbut the master contract says. . . ."

And so it goes.

Unfortunately, too often the Yeahbuts have their way. Good ideas such as writing centers are abandoned, and good people eventually stop offering new proposals.

The story I want to share with you, however, is of how one district managed to answer the Yeahbuts and implemented writing centers in every school in the district. The district is New London a small city (population 6600) in central Wisconsin. In many ways New London can be described as average. The district has about 2400 students K-12. It includes a 10-12 senior high school of 675 students, 7-9 junior high school of

595 students, and four elementary schools with about 1200 students K-6. It is the 69th largest district of the 432 public school districts in Wisconsin. The district prides itself on delivering quality education at a reasonable cost. In fact, of the 432 districts, New London is 44th from the bottom in per pupil expenditures.

Their plan for implementing writing centers throughout the district, however, was not average by any stretch of the imagination. It required finding not one right way, but finding many workable ways. If one path was shut off because of budget or staffing, another path was found. Creative persistence finally carried the day against the chorus of Yeahbuts.

The story actually begins at least as far back as 1981 when the district undertook a review of its K-12 English/language arts program. You're probably familiar with such reviews. They tend to go in one of two directions. They either tell you that you've got a model school district, one of the top ten in the northern part of the southeastern section of the central region of the state, or they start revealing the warts, at which point the administration thanks the evaluation team for their time, sends them on their way, and buries the report beneath a forty-year pile of attendance slips.

New London chose to take a third direction. The news in the report about the district's writing instruction was not good. The instructional practices and the curriculum were not consistent with the findings of recent research and theory in writing. The district, to its credit, took the report and its recommendations seriously and began systematically to work for change. Among the many changes recommended in the report were better communication, a revision of the curriculum guide, integration and balance of the various strands of the language arts curriculum, and the establishment of writing centers as a way of helping students become better writers.

But the key recommendation centered on professional training. With a highly tenured staff with many years of experience, it was necessary to make an all-out push for staff development if instruction in writing was going to be improved. And the commitment was for the long term, not just a semester or a year. Teachers were given inservices in small groups, by grade-level. Writing across the curriculum inservices were held. Professional development funds were used to send

teachers to conventions and workshops. University courses were brought to the school for three semesters, and the administration worked hard to encourage teachers to enroll. Teachers attended the Central Wisconsin Writing Project, an affiliate site of the National Writing Project. Principals and other administrators attended inservice sessions with teachers. The Director of Curriculum committed his considerable expertise and enthusiasm to seeing that change was brought about and that teachers themselves were the centerpiece of that change.

Along with the professional development programs, in 1982 the district began a writing assessment. The assessment was designed to get a profile of the writing abilities of students in the district and to establish a baseline against which to measure the impact, if any, of the curricular and instructional changes they were undertaking. The results of this first assessment were not encouraging. Using locally developed norms, nearly 60% of the 3rd, 6th, 9th, and 12th grade students sampled were found to be writing below grade level expectations. Almost 15% of these students showed need for remediation in writing.

With the need for improving writing clearly evident, the district began its review of the language arts curriculum, and it took its first steps toward setting up writing centers. The junior high was the first school to get a writing center for the simple reason that one of the teachers there was enthusiastic about the idea. Of course, there was no place to put a writing lab, no funds to staff it, and not a little resistance to the idea from the Yeahbuts.

The district solved the question of where to put it by putting a wall across the back of the teacher's classroom, creating a triangular shaped room. A few tables and chairs and carrels were scrounged, and the district invested in three personal computers and some software. The entire cost to create the first writing lab, including building the separating wall, lowering the ceiling, and buying furnishings and computers was \$1800. The lab was constructed during the summer of 1983 and opened that fall under the name of The Rough Copy. Funding was provided by a Chapter 2 grant, which included staffing for the first year. The district picked up funds for staffing beginning in 1984. The lab is staffed three hours during the day by three teachers who are paid over and above regular contract. The district's cost for staffing is \$10,800. The lab is also kept open other hours as the teacher to whose room it is attached watches

over it, and other faculty volunteer to spend their prep hours in the lab helping students.

The lab has been a hit practically from the day it opened. Students come in during their study hall periods, or they may sign out of other classes. Some of the better students have informally begun to tutor others who need help when a teacher is not available. It's a rare time during the day when students are not in the lab, and some even make arrangements with teachers to meet before or after school for help.

Based on the success of *The Rough Copy*, the New London school district next turned to establishing labs in the four elementary schools. Put simply, money was not available to pay teachers to assume these extra duties, nor was there much aid time available for staffing. The answer to the staffing dilemma was to involve parents.

In 1984, the first lab was piloted in Readfield, one of the two rural elementary schools in the district. Readfield is K-5, with an enrollment of about 200. The PTO was approached with the idea, and though many of the parents were apprehensive, twelve showed up for the first orientation training session. Using staff from the Central Wisconsin Writing Project, two three-hour training sessions for parents were held. During these sessions, parents wrote and responded to each other's writing, looked at and discussed samples of children's writing from various grade and ability levels, and received an overview of writing process theory. Readfield began staffing its writing center with two parents one afternoon a week.

In 1985, the two city schools, Parkview and Lincoln, both K-6 schools with about 400 students each, opened their writing labs, again using parent volunteers who received two half-day training sessions. In 1986, the other rural school, Sugarbush, with about 200 students K-6, opened its lab.

All labs now operate at least one afternoon a week, some more frequently. The response of parents, teachers, and students has been excellent. The labs operate in the schools' learning resource centers; the parents occupy various corners for fifteen-minute meetings with students. Students sign-up on a schedule, some for a one-time visit, others for regular help. The labs see students of all ability levels, from those who love to write to those struggling to get a few words on the page.

The cost to the district is minimal. The two training sessions for the parents and a year-end recognition reception total about \$600 per year. The district has figured out that if they hired support staff at the lowest rate, (slightly more than five dollars per hour) to staff the labs, the cost to the district would be over \$30,000. Not only has the district saved money by using parent volunteers, they have also found an unexpected pay-off in an outpouring of parent support for the labs at all the schools—a fact not lost on the district's school board members at budget time.

The senior high school writing lab opened the fall of 1985 under the name of *The Refinery*. As with the junior high school lab, *The Refinery* was created on a low budget out of what was formerly a small office and storage space. Temporary walls were removed, carpeting was put down, and painting was done, all at a cost of about \$1800. Additionally, \$3000 was spent on two personal computers. The first year, *The Refinery* was staffed three hours by English faculty, each paid for one hour per day above contract, at a cost to the district of about \$11,000. The original plan was to continue to have faculty staff the lab and gradually add a peer tutoring program. This plan was unexpectedly accelerated by staffing problems the second year. There simply was neither money nor staff to supervise the lab. Instead of closing it, though, the district moved up its plans to provide peer staffing.

Beginning in 1986-87, the lab is staffed by students who tutor for credit. They receive one-half credit per semester in a course called *Writing Tutor*. The course may be taken twice as an elective; it does not count toward the four credits of English required for graduation, even though students have reported that they do more work and learn more from their *Writing Tutor* class than in many of their other courses. Course requirements include keeping a tutoring journal, writing one paper a week, and tutoring other students during their hours in the lab.

The student-tutors are selected by the English faculty and given the same kind of training afforded the parent volunteers in the elementary schools. Additionally, the students come to the Academic Achievement Center at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to meet with college peer tutors in the writing lab. Under this arrangement, each peer tutor is assigned to an English faculty member who is paid an additional \$100 for supervising what is essentially an independent study course. Therefore the cost to the

district is only a few hundred dollars a year.

The lab has an added benefit. When enrollments decline, the writing lab works as a kind of "personal shock absorber." Instead of reducing contacts, more time is assigned to staff the writing lab, an agreement both the administration and the teacher's union has found to be an advantage in providing some predictability of positions.

The senior high lab has been slower to catch on when compared to the junior high; use of the lab tends to run in streaks, and the heaviest users are students in English courses referred to the lab by their teachers. But The Refinery appears to be getting a more positive reception from both faculty and students, and the district will be able to build upon the expectations of the students entering the high school from the junior high who have more familiarity with what the lab is and how it can help them. The district is committed to the writing lab concept, and with the commitment and the success of the other labs, it seems likely the future for the senior high lab is bright.

Have the New London writing labs been successful? If student use is a measure of success, the answer is yes. If faculty interest is a measure of success, the answer is yes. If administrative support is a measure of success, the answer is yes. If parental involvement is a measure of success, the answer is yes. And finally, if the district's writing assessment is a measure of success, the answer is yes. In the 1985 assessment, the first year in which comparable populations were sampled (i.e., the 1982 third graders were now 6th graders in the 1985 assessment and so on), the results were significantly better than in the 1982 assessment. Whereas in 1982 only 43.9% of the students sampled at 3rd, 6th, 9th, and 12th grades scored at grade level, in 1985 57.7% scored at grade level or better. The percentage of samples scored as remedial was 14.6% in 1982, and only 5.8% in 1985.

The results of the 1987 assessment provide even more evidence of the effectiveness of the program New London has undertaken. The percentage of students scoring at or above grade level was 73% in 1987, up from 43.9% in the 1982 baseline year. The percentage of students scoring at the remedial level was 5.3% in 1987 as compared to 14.6% in 1982. The district has also been tracking the writing apprehension of students as measured by the Daly-Miller Survey of Writing

Apprehension. The 1987 writing apprehension scores were the lowest yet, and the scores have shown a steady decline from year to year. Students are becoming less apprehensive about writing, and they are performing better on the assessment.

Granted, the writing labs were not the only changes the district undertook in the intervening years. The K-12 language arts curriculum guide was rewritten to make it a readable, user-friendly document; many hours of professional training were given to teachers; the language arts texts were allowed to fade away and in their place each teacher was given an allotment to buy books and materials for classroom use or a professional library; writing throughout the district was given more visibility through publishing student writing and promoting writing in all subject areas.

In short, the writing labs have been but one component in an all-out effort to change the approach in the district toward writing. The emphasis on writing created a situation in which the labs could be established and grow; their growth in turn contributes to the "writing atmosphere," keeping writing front and center in the English/language arts curriculum.

The path New London chose, and continues to pursue, is not the easiest available. Just as the Yeahbuts object to every new idea, so another group of people, the Ifonlys usually have a simple solution for every complex problem. Ifonlys offer such refrains as

"Ifonly we had just ten students in a class, then we could teach writing."

"Ifonly we had more money for computers and software."

"Ifonly we would buy this new set of textbooks."

Regarding this last, the Ifonlys are often textbook representatives who proclaim loudly to administrative ears: "Ifonly you buy this text, all of your teachers will be excellent and your students will soon be above average." The problem, of course, is that the real world isn't Lake Woebegon, that good teachers do not need programmed texts to teach writing, and that the best of the structured texts will not turn a poor teacher into an excellent or even an average one.

New London is showing that the Yeahbuts

and ifonlys can be defeated. Good ideas such as writing centers can be made to work, provided a district has enough people who care, provided an effort is made to involve many teachers and members of the community, provided there is a commitment on the part of the administration to making an emphasis on writing a long-term priority, and provided that professional staff development is seen as crucial in establishing the foundation for change. It is all of these things that have made the New London writing centers successful. Such success is not done by wizards, but rather it is accomplished by caring professionals with the will, the ingenuity and the persistence to stand up to the Yeahbuts and Ifonlys of the world.

Richard Behm  
University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point

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### NEW FROM SIU PRESS

*Toward a Grammar of Passages* by Richard M. Coe is described by the publisher as a system of grammar "which uses a simple graphic instrument to analyze the meaningful relationships among sentences in a passage and to clarify the function of structure in discourse. Working in the tradition of Francis Christensen's generative rhetoric, Coe has developed a practical instrument for textual analysis, a two-dimensional graphic matrix that effectively analyzes the logical semantic relations among statements by mapping coordinate, subordinate, and superordinate relationships.

"Working with a number of contributing researchers, Coe demonstrates the power of his discourse matrix by applying it to a variety of significant problems, e.g., how to demonstrate discourse differences between cultures (especially between Chinese and English), how to explain precisely what is 'bad' about the structure of passages that do not work, how best to teach paragraphing, and how to help students grasp the structures of specialized discourses, such as 'technical' writing."

This book offers tutors a new perspective on tutorial instruction, and the graphic approach can be a particularly effective instructional approach. *Toward a Grammar of Passages* (140 pp., \$8.50) is available from Southern Illinois University Press, P.O. Box 3697, Carbondale, IL 62907.

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## MINUTES: EXECUTIVE BOARD OF THE NATIONAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

November 21, 1987  
Los Angeles, CA  
NCTE Convention

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BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Elizabeth Ackley, Lissette Carpenter, Irene Lurkis Clark, Pam Farrell, Jeanette Harris, Jay Jacoby, Joyce Kinkead, Richard Leahy, Julie Neff, Dave Roberts, Mildred Steele, Bonnie Sunstein

The meeting was called to order by Jay Jacoby, President, at 5:45 p.m., and the minutes of the last meeting were approved (Roberts; Neff). Jacoby presented to Kinkead a plaque for "Outstanding Service," delayed from the Spring presentation due to her Fulbright in Sweden. Joyce Kinkead, Executive Secretary, provided a handout on the financial status of NWCA, reporting assets of \$1832.65 and a membership total of 677.

In Old Business, Jacoby presented the NCTE Resolution on the professional status of Writing Center Personnel. NCTE revised the resolution, and it passed during the NCTE Business Meeting. The Board will consider drafting a similar position statement for public school writing centers. Sunstein reported a conversation with Charles Suhor and received the NCTE policy on "Approval for Publication of Short Documents" (maximum 1000 words); Suhor noted that such pamphlets have limited readership and recommended instead publishing the document or articles in the section journals. Since *English Journal* has a readership of 33,000, Ackley and Farrell volunteered to write an article focusing on "What is a High School Writing Center." *EJ* featured a roundtable on Secondary Writing Centers in its November 1987 issue. Participants at the all-day NWCA workshop on Monday will fill out a questionnaire to provide information for a position statement for high schools. Steele will investigate publishing the resolution in the *WPA Journal* (editor: William E. Smith). Harris mentioned that Diana George spoke at an ADE meeting on "What is a Writing Center," an essay that will be published in *The Writing Center Journal*.

The NWCA "Starter Kits" have been popular, Kinkead noting that she has sent 138 kits since their inception a year ago; however, multiple requests are a problem since each kit costs NWCA

approximately \$2.50. Roberts moved (Harris seconded) that individual requests for starter kits be filled without charge and that requests for multiple copies be billed at \$3 each. Kinkead will include an announcement about the kits in *WCJ* and *Writing Lab Newsletter* and the NWCA brochure.

The Board considered applications for graduate student scholarships (\$200) and voted to award May Killmer (St. Cloud State University, MN) the grant for her thesis, "Writing Centers and Content-Area Courses."

The Board narrowed the list of nominations for professional scholarship on writing centers to the following in the article division: John Trimbur, "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" (*WCJ* 7.2); Daniel Lochman, "Play and Games: Implications for the Writing Center" (*WCJ* 7.1); William Shakespeare, "Orienting the Student and Setting the Agenda in a Drop-in Writing Center" (*WLN* May). The following were nominated in the book division: Muriel Harris, *Teaching One-to-One: The Writing Conference* (NCTE); Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith, *The Practical Tutor* (Oxford). The Board agreed to make the decision annually on the categories for the awards with Roberts moving to continue the book and article divisions for the 1987 award. In a discussion about whether to change to a cash award, it was decided to retain the plaque. Winners will receive plaques at CCCC and letters of commendation from the Executive Secretary— in addition to press releases to campus Information Services. The Board will receive ballots for the the voting. Future awards may focus on articles focusing on secondary school writing centers and articles written by tutors.

In *New Business*, Harris noted that *The Writing Center Journal* is receiving so many manuscripts that standards for acceptance will rise. Although Harris and Kinkead— editors of the journal— have considered increasing the number of issues, they have decided instead to enlarge each of the two issues. David Chapman (Texas Tech) was recently appointed Managing Editor; moreover both Utah State University and Texas Tech University have agreed to fund the journal for another 3-year term (1988-91); funding amounts to \$6100 from the sponsoring institutions. Sunstein praised the Fall 1987 special issue on computers and suggested that NCTE be approached on including it in its catalog (Kinkead has sent the request to Director of Publications).

To establish role descriptions for the NWCA officers, the current officers will delineate their duties and supply those lists to the Executive Secretary before the March Board meeting.

The election of the Vice-President resulted in two people holding the slot: Bonnie Sunstein will chair the NCTE session (1988; St. Louis), and Julie Neff will chair the CCCC session (1989; Seattle). Neff will chair Materials Exchange at the 1988 CCCC in St. Louis. Elizabeth Ackley will submit a proposal for a panel session for the 1988 NCTE.

The 1987 NWCA Summer Workshop, held in Logan, Utah, June 15-19, netted a profit of \$604.55, according to Kinkead, who provided a cost breakdown on hosting a summer workshop. Pat Stoddart and Florence White, consultants for the 1987 workshop, have agreed to again host the workshop for 1988 as no one else has volunteered. The workshop will again focus on computers and the writing center. The Board is looking for volunteers to host 1989 and future summer workshops.

Announcements were made about the New England WCA (April 15-16 at Merrimack College) and Tele-Nade Placement Network (P.O. Box 60227, Chicago, IL 60660). Kinkead noted that NWCA stationery is available for Board members. Also, a list of Board members and the dates of their terms is included at the back of each issue of *The Writing Center Journal*.

The next meeting of the Board will be in St. Louis during CCCC (March 17-19, 1988). After Jacoby transferred the gavel to Irene Clark, incoming President, the meeting was adjourned at 7:15.

Submitted by,  
Joyce Kinkead, Executive Secretary

Note: Elizabeth Ackley, Robert Child, and Pamela Farrell join the Board for a three-year term (1987-90) as a result of fall balloting.

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# Tutor's Column

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## FOILING YOUR TUTOR: A PROCESS ANALYSIS FOR TUTEES

Don't worry about the time you have been assigned to spend in the Wright State University Writing Center. Just because you are going to be working with a tutor for an hour each week doesn't mean that you have to become a great writer. If you put your mind to it and follow these directions, you can probably seriously damage your current writing skills. But it's hard work.

First, carefully plan what materials you should "conveniently" forget to bring to a tutoring session. Before entering the Writing Center, empty your bookbag of all pens, pencils, textbooks, notebooks, and—if you are lucky enough to wear them—your glasses. Never take any of these items to your tutoring session. Also, remember to empty your mind of your teacher's name, your name, and the class you're taking. And oh, if possible, forget your tutor's name, too. This is crucial. Now, since you've forgotten to bring everything, tutors will have no choice but to supply all those things for you—books, paper, and writing implements. Why, they may even be able to inform you of your name. But don't despair; you can still bring up the fact that you can't function without your glasses. Ha! There's nothing he or she can do to solve this problem, so you're home free.

Equally important as forgetting things is coming to the tutoring session late—and I mean late. You really need to develop a good sense of timing here. We're not talking about an unimpressive 12 or 20 minutes late, but an honest-to-goodness, healthy 45 to 50 minutes. Obviously, tardiness automatically shortens the time that you'd have to spend thinking of other stalling tactics. Also, when you come in late, be sure to have excuses ready—ones that will take a long time to explain. These excuses can include anything from being hijacked by blood-thirsty, maniacal terrorists on the highway to helping the local vice squad break up a five-year drug ring (fresh bullet wounds would greatly increase your chances with this one). And for goodness sake be sure to give your story a lot of long-winded details. (Tutors love details.) Remember—you are trying to waste time.

Next, if everything has failed and your tutor actually suggests working on something, quickly invent a distraction. You know, talk about your educational goals, your spiritual existence in the cosmos, your latest wild weekend, or your troubled love life. If all else fails, just flat out refuse to do the exercise. Tell the tutor that you don't need to do exercises. You can claim that they won't help you because when you did them in high school, they completely destroyed your mind.

Now, if your instructor should foil your whole strategy by leaving some work for you with the tutor, you will need an alternate plan. Try blaming your errors on someone else; that usually works. How about this one: the instructor hates you and grades your work unfairly. Another good one is telling the tutor that your family just immigrated from a foreign country and that you can't speak a word of English. If your tutor is still unconvinced, explain that your mother or your roommates helped you with your paper and even though you knew they were giving you bad advice, you just couldn't bring yourself to hurt their feelings. After all, if the mistakes aren't your fault, your tutor can't expect you to work on correcting them. Right? Right!

Finally, about 15 minutes before the session ends, start acting distracted. Look around the room, drum your fingers on the desk, or shuffle papers. Whistling also works well here. The idea is to find an excuse to leave early. How about something like your hamster is giving birth and she needs your emotional support, or you're about to "lose" the cabbage you had for lunch? (No one likes cabbage.) Although threatening to get sick does quite nicely in these situations, a little serious gagging would certainly speed things along. When you see your tutor turn pale and flinch, quickly promise to bring in an essay draft next week and head for the door.

Now you know how to survive tutoring sessions without drastically changing your life or improving your writing. As a bonus, you have the extra satisfaction of knowing that your unfortunate tutor is probably considering changing ca-

reers immediately—possibly to law enforcement or abnormal psychology.

Nancy Zimmerman  
Peer Tutor  
Wright State University  
Dayton, OH

as in cross-disciplinary courses or composition courses.

Proposals of 250 words must be post-marked no later than June 18, 1988 and sent to the Conference Chair: Evan Rivers, English Department, Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY 12866, (518-584-5000 ext. 2728)

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## CALL FOR PROPOSALS

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Fifth Annual Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing  
"Tutoring Writers Throughout the Disciplines"

October 28-30, 1988  
Skidmore College  
Saratoga Springs, NY

The Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing is a national gathering where peer tutors, professional tutors, and faculty share their insights and concerns about tutoring writing. We welcome the following kinds of proposals:

**Workshops:** A small group of presenters share their research and/or experiences and involve the conference participants in activities and discussions. 75 minutes.

**Round Table Discussions:** A small group of speakers (from different schools or different programs within the same school) share their experiences and then open the discussion. 75 minutes.

**Paper Presentations:** One speaker— a peer tutor or faculty member— presents the findings of her/his research and/or experience. *Maximum 20 minutes.*

We especially encourage proposals from undergraduate tutors to lead and to speak in workshops and discussions, and we prefer sessions that will actively involve the conference participants. Proposals on all aspects of tutoring writing will be considered, but we are especially interested in proposals related to the conference theme, tutoring to help writers understand and fulfill the expectations for their writing in various disciplinary contexts, such as biology, psychology, literature, art history, and business, as well

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## WRITING CENTER'S INFORMATION EXCHANGE AT CCCC

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If you want to participate, please bring 50-100 copies of any writing center handout, brochure, or other materials to the Writing Centers Special Interest Session meeting at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in St. Louis, in March. A materials table will be set up in the back of the room to accommodate whatever you bring for the exchange. Julie Neff, University of Puget Sound, is in charge of the table. Questions? Call Julie at (206) 756-3413.

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## CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

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1988 Wyoming Conference on English

June 20-24, Laramie

"Future Studies in Language and Literature  
Inside or Outside English Departments?"

Invited Speakers:

Janet Emig    Dan Kirby    William Labov  
Mary Louise Prat    Renato Rosaldo  
Jane Tompkins

Write Tilly Warnock, English Department, University of Wyoming, Box 3353 University Station, Laramie, WY 82071 for further information. Proposals for papers are due March 15.



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## THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT CONNECTION

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Although business was booming at our Writing Center, we knew that many students who needed help were not using our services, particularly those taking English 100 (basic English review). To solve this problem, we thought of requiring them to come to the Center for tutoring one hour a week, but our limited resources would not allow us to schedule two hundred people for individual appointments. Realizing we could work with these students only in groups, we experimented with two models, neither of which was successful.

First, we set up a "lab" structure in which students were assigned programmed activities, such as grammar exercises, needing to interact with tutors only when they were stuck. This did not work because completing exercises was not beneficial to students' writing skills, they rarely asked for help, they hardly ever got to know the tutors, and it was virtually impossible to establish continuity and keep track of the students.

In a later model, we scheduled students to come to the Center in groups made up of people from several classes, making it difficult to work on individual assignments. Consequently, the paragraphs we asked them to write were not directly related to what they were doing in class. Although we thought the extra writing was beneficial, students did not share our view. They felt sessions were a waste of time because they were not explicitly geared to class work. Furthermore, because we needed many tutors to "cover" these groups, we used both experienced and novice tutors, often creating difficult situations for beginners. Faculty also thought the experience would be more beneficial if tutors could help students with problems related to class assignments.

After these unsuccessful attempts, we finally developed an effective model, which solves most of the previous problems and has been well-received by faculty, students, and tutors. It allows us to work with students in groups, to help them with classroom writing, and to make sure they are getting the assistance they need. The objectives of this program are to use a team approach—student, instructor, and tutor—to prepare students for college writing, to monitor their progress in English classes, to ensure they are getting enough help, and to encourage them to become responsible for their academic progress. In other words,

we don't want struggling students to fall through the cracks of the academic system; we want them to know that becoming a competent writer and achieving academic success will happen only with much effort on their parts.

We call this program, which is relatively simple to administer, the CO-OP Program to emphasize cooperation among the student, the tutor, and the instructor. To ensure students in English 100 classes (and English 101 in the spring semester) will receive the help they need, each class is assigned a tutor, who is available five hours a week. During the second week of the semester, instructors bring their classes to the Writing Center for an orientation, to fill out necessary forms, and to sign up for permanent appointments with the class tutor for small group work. A maximum of five people is assigned to a group, and they are required by their instructors to meet their tutors weekly. Instructors receive weekly attendance sheets, as well as monthly progress reports, from the tutors.

Each instructor decides what his or her students should do at the Writing Center. Usually, tutors help with assignments and with skills students need to be successful in the course. Much of the time is spent on revisions. The tutors decide how to work with their groups and often split sessions between group work, such as group critiquing, and giving students individual attention. Faculty write instructions to the tutor directly on the students' papers.

In addition to helping with writing skills, tutors can also assist with academic advising and registration, provide general academic support, tutor in related areas, and make referrals. How the group operates depends to some extent on the tutor, the individuals in the group, and the work the instructor assigns, which is why we do not prescribe specific activities. But we do encourage the tutors to use the group for collaborative learning.

We suggest to instructors that students be required to attend tutoring sessions since they will benefit by sharing their writing with peers in an informal setting, becoming aware of their audience, and getting informal feedback. Although the tutors encourage students to keep appointments, the final authority for enforcing attendance at the

Writing Center is the instructor. Faculty are asked to include the attendance policy on their syllabuses, to discuss it with their students, and to make them realize that working with the tutor is an important part of the class. However, if there are reasons for excusing a student from attending regular tutoring, the instructor may do so. Students who need more than one hour a week of help can sign up for additional tutoring.

Implementing this program gives a great deal of responsibility to the tutors. Besides the regular demands of tutoring, they have to learn how to work with groups. They are responsible for their students' work in the Writing Center, coordinate their other appointments when needed, advise them academically, and monitor their progress. They are required to inform the instructors of students' progress, meeting with them regularly, and they are encouraged to attend the classes occasionally.

Although this program requires our staff to do additional work, we feel the benefits to students make it worthwhile. First, tutors assigned to the CO-OP Program are the most experienced and the best. Second, students work with a tutor who is familiar with the class. Third, they have continuity in tutoring and get the help they need. Fourth, they get regular feedback on their progress both from their instructor and their tutor. And finally, they have a peer who is looking out for them, concerned about them, and available to help them both with their writing problems and with other difficulties they encounter at the university.

For the most part, tutors enjoy participating in this program. They like having students from only one class, getting to know a faculty member, and monitoring the progress of students, plus the continuity of the tutoring and the challenge of working with groups. However, tutors do find the job difficult, sometimes becoming frustrated when students don't show up, when they don't seem to make progress, and when the group approach is difficult to establish. In addition, tutors feel limited working only with basic writers.

As we begin our third year of the CO-OP Program, we are planning to make changes. First, we will require and pay tutors to attend and assist in their CO-OP class for one hour a week, making sure their schedules allow them to do so. By attending classes, tutors will have firsthand knowledge of assignments and requirements, and the importance of the tutoring component of the

class will be reinforced for the students. Second, we will have weekly meetings for CO-OP tutors during which we will discuss such issues as motivation, working with groups, methods for group critiquing, suggestions for sessions when students don't bring work, and problems that tutors encounter. Through these meetings, the tutors will learn how to use group processes effectively and minimize problems. Third, we will offer CO-OP tutors two additional hours of individualized tutoring with other students to allow them to have variety in their work. By giving tutors more support, making sure they have adequate information, and providing them with a broader range of experience, we expect the students, tutors and faculty will continue to find the CO-OP Program beneficial.

Susan Glassman  
Southeastern Massachusetts University

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## **PENN STATE CONFERENCE ON RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION**

James Berlin (Purdue), Richard Enos (Carnegie-Mellon), Jeanne Fahnestock (Maryland), Anne Herrington (Massachusetts), Carolyn Miller (North Carolina State), Marlene Scardamalia (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), Robert Scholes (Brown), and James Sledd (Texas) will be among the Featured Speakers at the seventh Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition next July 6-9 at State College, Pennsylvania.

Those interested in participating are invited to present papers, demonstrations, or workshops on topics related to rhetoric or the teaching of writing—on composition, rhetorical theory and history, basic writing, technical and business communication, advanced composition, writing across the curriculum, and so forth. One-page proposals will be accepted through April 15.

If you wish to submit a proposal or volunteer to chair a session, or if you are interested in more information about attending or participating in the conference, write to Professor Jack Selzer, Department of English, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802.

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## JOB OPENINGS

### University of Cincinnati

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The OMI College of Applied Science, the college of engineering technology of the University of Cincinnati, announces two openings in its Department of English, Humanities, and Social Science. The Department, a multi-discipline academic department, has a growing emphasis in the area of technical communications.

**Department Head**, tenure track, beginning September 1, 1988. Minimum qualifications: M.A. in English or related discipline, three years of administrative experience, and five years of college level teaching experience including technical communications. Preferred qualifications: Ph.D., professional experience in technical communications, and computer applications. Nominations and applications (including a letter of application, resume, transcripts, and three letters of recommendation) to Patricia Lloyd at the address below. Application Deadline: March 22, 1988.

**Assistant Professor of English**, tenure track, beginning September 1, 1988. Responsibilities include: administration of the freshman English program, teaching of composition, literature and related communications courses. Minimum qualifications: M.A. in English, two years of college level teaching, and some administrative experience. Preferred qualifications: Ph.D. in English, background in technical communications. Send letter of application, resume, and three letters of reference to Patricia Lloyd at the address below. Deadline: March 22, 1988. Minor applicants are strongly encouraged to apply. Clearly indicate for *which position* you are applying. Send to: Patricia Lloyd, Asst. Dean, U. of Cincinnati, OMI College of Applied Science, 100 E. Central Parkway, Cincinnati, Ohio 45210.

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## JOB OPENING

### Director of the Writing Center Mary Washington College

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The Writing Center was created this year to support the school's Writing Intensive Program, a writing-across-the-curriculum program that requires every student to take one Writing Intensive course per year. Students seeking help in the center come from courses in almost every department and range from good writers to poor ones.

The Director will supervise the Writing Center, help recruit and train undergraduate tutors, tutor, conduct workshops for students, and teach one or two courses per semester. We prefer someone with a Ph.D., several years experience in teaching writing, and tutoring and administrative experience in a writing center. The position is for nine months and is renewable. Salary will be determined by qualifications and experience.

Mary Washington College is a state-supported institution with a selective admissions policy and an enrollment of 3200 men and women. It is located in a small historical city an hour's drive from both Washington, D.C., and Richmond.

Complete applications should include a curriculum vitae, graduate school transcripts, and three letters of reference. Minorities are encouraged to apply. Applications must be sent by February 29 to Carol S. Manning, Search Committee for Writing Center Director, Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, VA 22401. Mary Washington College is an equal opportunity employer.

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## REVIEW MATERIALS FOR THE GED AVAILABLE

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If your writing lab helps students who are preparing for the new GED Tests, you will find the new *Official Teacher's Guide to the Tests of General Educational Development* to be a valuable resource. The book, written by the GED Testing Service in Washington, D. C. provides extensive information on the newly revised GED Tests which now include an essay component in the writing skills section. Included is information on what the tests will cover, what passing scores are, how to help students develop needed critical thinking skills, how to judge your students' composition skills, and which mathematical and problem-solving strategies will be most effective on the new GED. Included also are some teaching tips (including a list of frequently misspelled words); sample test items with analyses; and sample papers, with the scoring scale and commentary, for the essay. To obtain copies (\$4.75/each) contact Wendy Harris, Contemporary Books, Inc., 180 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60601, (312) 782-9181.