

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in
one-to-one teaching of writing

Volume 14, Number 2

October, 1989

...from the editor...

At the top of your mailing label, on the back page of this month's newsletter, you'll notice something new- an expiration date. Thanks to the miracles of computer data sorting programs (and a husband willing, at weird late night hours, to bail me out of my own errors and confusions in setting up the program), you'll find this not-so-gentle reminder each month that your donation is needed to keep the newsletter afloat.

The same data sorting program will also have the nasty capacity to delete names with past due expiration dates. But we still don't have any bills or invoices to send out. So, if you have a business office willing to foot the bill for your donation, request 'pre-payment.' Even then, their slow response time may mean that several months elapse and that your issues cease to arrive in your mailbox for awhile. Start early!

Please, don't let our leap into automation cause us to lose contact with you. Feed the computer program its donations.

-Muriel Harris, editor

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**The Write Staff:
Identifying and Training
Tutor-Candidates**

The Flagler College Writing Lab opened in 1974 with a staff of 1. 5 tutors (me- its "director"- and an adjunct who expressed an interest), serving 20 clients in a dark, remodeled closet stocked with six desks, two packs of pencils, scads of old memos for scrap paper, and one row of writing texts pirated from the shelves of English department members. In Spring, 1988, our lab was staffed by approximately 15-20 trained tutors, supervised by rime (the Director), serving nearly 120 clients in a modern, bright, open seminar room designed to house a Writing Lab, stocked with comfortable tables, chairs, desks, lamps and the like, scads of old memos for scrap paper (old habits die hard), file cabinets stuffed with study guides and exercise sheets developed over the years, and cases of texts systematically pirated from the shelves of the entire faculty. (CAI is coming, and we're still working on a pencil sharpener.)

Very few features distinguished our lab's development from other labs that have been reported on in this and other publications. We measured the recipe of success with familiar ingredients: heaping scoops of unabashed begging, seasoned with a dash of success stories and a pinch of political tactics when appropriate. However, one ingredient stands out as something that to my knowledge has been included only at Flagler: a thorough, systematic and cost-effective method for identifying, selecting, screening, and training tutors, a method that guarantees our lab a minimum of 15-20 trained tutors at any given time.

During the 70's, our tutors came to us in fairly traditional fashion: they applied for open positions through our work-study program, and after testing and interviews, those few capable people selected were trained briefly before being thrown into the frying pan. While we were serving 40-50 clients per year, this procedure met our needs adequately, but when Nagler reached its optimum enrollment of 1050 students in 1979 (a success story in its own right), and the Lab's clientele swelled to nearly 100 students, we decided that there must be a better way to select and train candidates with the appropriate verbal and social skills necessary for successful tutoring. The method also had to be cost-effective. Oversimplifying the number of meetings, compromises and proposal drafts needed to implement the program, it was decided that the students with the highest potential of becoming successful tutors would be identified and selected prior to enrollment in their freshman year, screened during the first week of classes, and enrolled in a credit-bearing writing; rhetoric course, ENG 191-Honors English I, wherein a semester-long training program would take place. Then, for credit in ENG 192- Honors English II, the students would staff the Writing Lab as a large part of course requirements. In short, we hand-pick our candidates and pay them with academic credit for taking courses that fit integrally into our composition sequence. The individual components of our program, identifying, selecting, screening, and training candidates, are worth some elaboration.

Identifying and Selecting Candidates

During the summer prior to enrollment, our Admissions Office compiles a profile of incoming students including information such

as standardized test scores, high school CPA's, majors, and advisors' names. We use ACT, SAT, and Test of Standard Written English (TSWE) scores as indicators of verbal and writing abilities. After a statistical profile of each test is run, the names of students whose scores fall near or above one standard deviation above the mean on all tests are entered on an initial list. These students are identified as having consistently demonstrated their verbal skills. Then, the high school CPA's are scanned as indicators of overall academic ability; the names of those students whose CPA's are inconsistent with test scores are deleted from the list.

After the statistical infrastructure is complete, the list is discussed with the Admissions staff, if possible with the officers responsible for the admission of individual candidates. We look for social skills, usually in terms of each student's extracurricular activities and recommendation letters. For instance, the names of students with a variety of memberships or leadership roles in high school organizations are retained on the list. Obviously, anyone with tutoring experience is kept on the list. (Anyone with extensive foreign language training is also kept on the list.) Generally, students who have demonstrated the ability to move and interact within and among peer groups are retained, the others deleted.

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Editor: Muriel Harris, Dept. of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907 (317-494-3723)

Donations: The newsletter is an informal publication with no billing procedures. Yearly donations of \$7.50 (U.S. \$12.50 in Canada) are requested to cover costs of duplicating and mailing. Please make all checks payable to Purdue University and send to the editor. Prepayment is requested from business offices.

Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is eight to twelve double-spaced typed pages, three to four pages for reviews, and one to two pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose self-addressed envelopes with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g., Aug. 15 for the Oct. issue).

Please send all articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly donations to the editor.

Finally, the selected majors are scanned. We have found that Education, English, Math, and Psychology majors have been the most successful tutors. (And no, I don't know why-haven't had the time to find out.) Although the major selection has never singularly determined success in the lab, the names of students with marginal qualifications who have selected a major area other than those previously mentioned are deleted from the list. The remaining students are provisionally entered on the ENG 191 enrollment list. (Incidentally, our provisional Basic Writing enrollment lists are compiled in the same fashion, identifying students whose scores fall near or below one standard deviation below the mean on all tests and placing them provisionally in ENG 010-Baste Writing.)

Screening

All students enrolled at all levels of composition, including ENG 191, take five diagnostic tests during the first week of classes for two purposes: one, to verify placement, and two, to identify general and individual strengths/weaknesses for syllabi modification each semester. The five tests: 1) a second administration of TSWE, 2) a sentence-combining passage; 3) an in-house, objective, surface-sentence-level editing subtest; 4) and 5) two writing samples, one prepared and one impromptu, both scored holistically.

One determinant of the ENG 191 students' enrollment is verification that their scores fall near or above one standard deviation above the mean on all tests. Additionally, the provisional enrollees in the 191 class are introduced to the program, the requirements of 191 and 192, tutorial responsibilities, and the temporality of their placement. Any student who wants out is granted his/her wish immediately. Each student is asked to introduce him; herself to the class and is informally interviewed about such matters as the number and kind of past writing experiences, personal goals, and initial interests in or reservations about enrolling in the honors program. Also, students enrolled in other comp courses with abilities that the statistical selection process may have blindsided are referred to me by their classroom instructors for interviewing and possible placement in 191. Generally, what we end up with in ENG 191 are people with demonstrated strong verbal skills and social acuity, people who have written a great deal, people who, It is deemed in

the final analysis, would benefit more from learning about and tutoring writing than from the structured writing activities offered in regular comp courses, and people who are willing to help other less-seasoned writers, with some training and experience.

Training

Revised from a course in advanced lit aimed at honors freshman English majors, the syllabus of ENG 191 was restructured to offer a study of classical and more modern interpretations of rhetorical theory. Generally, the course investigates the relationships between elements of the rhetorical triangle (writer, reader, text, reality), centered around three very broad questions: What is writing? How is writing learned? How is writing taught?

The first component begins with definitions of writing, generated from the class, which resolve into separate but related meanings dependent upon the persuasive, expressive, poetic and referential aims of discourse. Initially, there is a decidedly Kinneavean bent. Within an historical framework, we discuss classical views, and, in reference to cognitive theories of writing, reading, speaking-writing relationships, and language development, the class becomes sensitized to the complexities of establishing static meanings for "writer," "reader," "text," and "reality" outside of a rhetorical (and social) context. The first component concludes with discussions and analyses of texts that vary the relationships between the elements. This introductory material is in-tended to demonstrate that as the meanings of and relationships between the elements are manipulated, quite different pieces of writing result.

In the second component, the students manipulate relationships themselves. They write daily in their effort to produce persuasive, expressive, poetic and referential discourse, but they do so from the inside out, so to speak. One assignment, for instance, invites them to consider and construct a draft with a strong voice, intended to have a specific effect on a specific reader. Another invites them to present a very strong sense of reality within a formally-structured text, a piece that even a chimpanzee could understand. And so forth. Group and one-on-one evaluations offer the students a brief introduction to the large variety of possible responses to texts about which both tutors and

writers must be aware, Three revised pieces are submitted for evaluation and grading.

The third component of the course consists of group reports on rhetorical activities in actual writing classes. At the beginning of the term, each student is assigned to observe and to participate in one composition instructor's classroom activities. The students observe to validate the various rhetorical perspectives evident in the classes, and they participate by joining classroom workshops, responding to writing assignments, evaluating papers, and/or tutoring individual students. The reports serve two purposes: one, to demonstrate the ways in which rhetorical theory works in action; and two, to present the idiosyncrasies of individual instructors, a great help toward providing these prospective tutors a "way into" tutorial situations. They begin to understand, for instance, why different audiences can respond to the same piece of writing in different ways. The reports offer the candidates a rich supply of tutorial strategies and heuristic devices to apply to their own writing as well as with their future clientele.

At the end of ENG 191, final evaluations- by me and the composition Instructors- and individual conferences determine whether each student will be permitted to enroll in ENG 192 and staff the Lab. Once again, any student who wants out is granted his/her wish.

Staffing

In ENG 192, the survivors receive academic credit for tutoring and for working on what I like to refer to as "Opus I," a piece of discourse that each student has always wanted to produce, one that develops and grows through supervised workshop sessions. (Several of these have been submitted for publication.) The class meets one hour per week, and each student is required to stair the Lab for one hour per week.

Flagler's writing program requires any student who receives a grade of C- or lower in a comp course to attend the Writing Lab. These students are assigned to tutors for regularly scheduled meetings. Other students come to the Lab as self-referrals, or they may be referred from any course in the College. In any case, our program allows ample tutorial services for all students who either need or want help.

In subsequent semesters, our cadre of trained tutors remain available for volunteer services, and we ask for their help whenever the need arises. For instance, if a client needs specialized help of any kind (an EST, or MID student), if a client requests an upperclass tutor, or if an instructor needs some assistance in a workshop unit, over the past six years we have always been able to match the need with a volunteer tutor.

Conclusion

Of course, there have been problems with this approach. Our lab services are meagre during Fall semesters but quite strong in the Spring; currently, we have no systematic method of tapping and "paying for" our volunteers' services; some of the tutor-candidates complain that no amount of academic credit is fair payment for the amount of required work: to some extent, the Honors courses require too much learning about writing at the expense of writing activities themselves: most tutors perform well, but, even with the extensive controls, some fail miserably. Given what I've read about other labs, however, I would say that our program fares no worse than others, and, with respect to the amount of time and attention given to finding and training candidates who seem natural for the requirements of the job, it is far superior. Some critics may suggest that such an enterprise can be at-tempted only at a small school. I disagree, The small-school attitude of and motivation for finding and training the best people for the job can be replicated anywhere.

While we have only begun a long-tern evaluation of our program, the initial results have been encouraging. Over the past five years. 81 trained tutors have served 675 clients, 364 on a return basis. A questionnaire administered to clients over the past two years shows that our tutors are perceived as strongly helpful and well-prepared, and the clients reported strong increases in confidence and in their abilities to plan, draft, focus and organize their prose.

So far, so good.

Vincent D. Puma
Hagler College St.
Augustine, FL

Varieties of Apathetic Experience

One of the most frustrating situations writing center tutors face is trying to work with apathetic students. Surprisingly, very little has been written about this problem. Perhaps the most direct confrontation of the issue is Mary Croft's "I Would Prefer Not To": A Consideration of the Reluctant Student? Croft suggests five questions that writing center personnel should ask themselves:

1. How are we meeting the reluctant student?
2. How are we offering information?
3. Are we leading our students to value the new information?
4. Are we offering opportunities to practice?
5. Are we preparing our students to continue working in the pattern of improved writing skills?

In addressing these questions, Croft suggests specific strategies to help reluctant students become more productive: self-assessments, autobiographies, protocols, journals, brainstorming, freerwriting, questions. What Croft fails to acknowledge, though, is that there are many reasons for student apathy and many categories of apathetic or reluctant students; and while her suggestions may work well for some categories, they are less appropriate for others.

We took up the question of how to deal with apathetic students at one of our weekly tutor training seminars. Our discussion uncovered twelve varieties of apathetic experience as well as several diagnostic questions designed to help get an idea of which variety a given student may be manifesting. To begin discovering the underlying reasons for a tutee's reluctance or apathy, the following kinds of questions can be asked:

1. How are your classes going? How are you doing in this class?
2. How do you feel about being here?
3. Why don't we seem to be getting anywhere?
What do you think the role of a tutor is?
5. Where or to whom do you usually go when you need help?

6. How much time have you spent, on this assignment?

What follows are brief descriptions of our "varieties of apathetic experience" and suggested strategies for dealing with the different kinds of apathy.

1,The student who has been as-signed to the writing center but who doesn't want to be there.

What the tutor perceives as apathy is really anger or resentment. The tutee sees coming to the center as extra work.

Strategies: Stress that although conferencing does take time, it can result in greater efficiency. Emphasize that being able to talk one-to-one with someone about a piece of writing is a luxury, one that students will have to pay dearly for once they get out of school. Get tutees to talk about why they are in school, and show them how their work in the center can help them increase their academic success.

2.The student who is by temperament shy and withdrawn,

Some people are naturally quiet. They may be very good independent workers and they may in fact have much to say, but in group or face-to-face encounters their observations go unexpressed.

Some of these people may be afraid that what they say will sound 'dumb'?

Strategies: Don't be afraid of silence, Shy people often need more time to formulate responses. Resist the temptation to fill in gaps in conversation or to finish students' sentences for them. Assume that your tutees are intelligent, that they know more than they are revealing. Applaud any good in-sights they do make, and reinforce their status as active learners.

3. The student whose cultural and/or family background predisposes her to be passive and deferential in relationships with strangers, especially if those strangers are perceived as superiors.

What the tutor perceives as apathy may in fact be a form of respect. Unfortunately, it is respect that can threaten mutuality and dialogue.

Strategies: Be patient. You may never achieve egalitarianism with this tutee, but in time more mutuality may result. Reinforce your role as a student: talk about your own writing problems. Ask the tutee to set the agenda for the conference. Focus attention on the paper, not on each other.

4. The student whose consistent tack of academic success has made him fearful of any school-related experience, especially a face-to face one.

The expression "shell shock" describes a reaction of soldiers to the trauma of battle. For some students, school has been a series of battles, most of which they have lost. Their apathy may simply be a defense mechanism.

Strategies: Be especially encouraging and supportive. Go out of your way to find things to praise. Give, these students permission to talk about their battles, even if those experiences do not seem directly or immediately related to the task at hand. Emphasize the connections between school and "real life"; point out how acquiring certain academic skills is good preparation for other life pursuits.

5. The student who misunderstands the tutorial role and either denies or is ignorant of her responsibility for her own learning.

Tutors are not primarily teachers, but they do have a teaching function. One of the most important things tutors teach is alternatives to the passive, empty-vessel

Strategies: Confront students with the message that they are responsible for their own learning. Give them specific, manageable, task-related activities to work on during the tutorial.

6. The student who resists suggestions or even the opportunity to discuss a finished piece of writing because she doesn't want to put any more work into it.

One of the most difficult questions to answer about a piece of writing is, "when is it done?" Your tutees may answer this question differently than you do. A student who has decided that a particular project is mostly finished will naturally resist your attempts to do anything of substance with that project.

Strategies: Point out that, for a variety of reasons, we may decide to call something done, but that really the writing process is potentially endless. Have some anecdotes ready about famous writers who loved to keep tinkering with their work. Say, "This is good the way you have it, but it could be greed" or "I'd really like to see this again."

7. The student for whom writing is so difficult and painful that anything connected with the writing process is distasteful.

Anyone who enjoys a particular activity tends to find it difficult to understand why other people don't enjoy it as well. Tutors don't necessarily all like to write, but we do tend to be people who at least enjoy talking about writing, and in that respect we may be quite different from our tutees.

Strategies: Be honest in expressing your own antipathy for various parts of the writing process. Admitting that something is especially difficult for you may make it easier for your tutees to confront their own difficulties. For students who seem to have trouble with the act of writing itself, suggest that they start with a tape

recorder, or volunteer to serve as transcriber for them, capturing their oral fluency on paper,

B, The student who may be responsive during the tutorial itself but who is consistently unprepared for her conferences.

Remember what your class used to do when nobody had finished the home-work? You tried to get the teacher talking about something else. Or you professed ignorance or lack of preparation in the hopes that he would go through the assignment in class, and then you wouldn't have to do it.

Strategies: Don't mistake loquaciousness for interest or commitment. Confront students with their need to be prepared. Refuse to compensate for lack of preparation by doing all the work during the tutorial. Walk away for ten minutes while the tutee does something she should have had done when she came. Make it apparent exactly what she has (or hasn't) done by saying, "This is what you have shown me."

9. The student who is SO exhausted or burned out that he has no energy to bring to the tutorial.

One truth that teachers need to be reminded of constantly is that their students have other things going on in their lives besides their work in this particular class. Your tutees are like you; they are wearing a variety of hats and are trying to keep several balls in the air. And, like you, they have had days.

Strategies: Recognize and allow for human variability. Don't assume: that the student who is unresponsive today is chronically apathetic. Give tutees permission to talk (appropriately and in moderation) about some of the things that are diverting their attention or energy from the task at hand. Your purpose here is not to discuss or address students' personal prob-

lems, but to acknowledge them and then move on to the real purpose of the tutorial. Exude energy; it is often contagious.

8. The student who feels she doesn't need any help.

Successful students may be content with their current level of achievement. Successful writers may also question whether "another student" can help them improve.

Strategies: Remind tutees that many successful writers regularly confer with and solicit suggestions from other writers- their peers. Don't "one-down" yourself. Express observations confidently and unapologetically.

11. The student who is genuinely baffled by the assignment.

Most of us go to great lengths to hide our ignorance. The easiest way to avoid making a mistake is simply to avoid trying or saying anything.

Strategies. Instead of asking, "Do you understand the assignment?" say, "Why don't you explain the assignment to me."
"

12. The student who just plain doesn't give a *\$#%0.

Some manifestations of apathy defy categorization and treatment. "Why are you so apathetic?"
I don't know. Who cares?"

Strategies: Remember that as tutors, we are not ultimately responsible for our tutees' success. They are. We should try to be resourceful, versatile, encouraging, and patient. We should not try to be superhuman, nor should we assume responsibility for other people's learning. Mary Croft's article invokes Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener" and concludes with a reminder of the narrator's long-suffering. Croft's challenge to those of

centers is to be long-suffering too, not to give up on the students we work with. That is an appropriate challenge: however, we must also remember that the story of

Bartleby ends with the scrivener's death. Despite his superior's best and most patient intentions, he never reaches Bartleby. One of the greatest challenges of tutoring is to sense when further efforts would be wasted and to move on to new challenges.

Dave Healy Univ
ersity of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN

Work Cited

Croft, Mary K. "I Would Prefer Not to: A Consideration of the Reluctant Student." In *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*, edited by Gary A. Olson, 170-181. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1984.

Call for Manuscripts

Writing Center Journal'

10th Anniversary Issue

The editors of The Writing Center Journal are circulating a call for a special issue to be published fall/Winter 1990. We are interested in seeing manuscripts that reflect or look back on writing center beginnings. Topics might include the professionalization/politicization of writing centers and administrators, the writing center movement in the context of other movements (e.g., National Writing Project), the growth of technology in writing centers, the changing perceptions of peer tutoring, as well as research and scholarship trends. Essays that address the future of writing centers are also welcome in this special issue on "Where Are We Going? Where Have We Been?" In addition, photos may be submitted.

Manuscripts should be sent by March 30, 1990, to Jeanette Harris, Department of English, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409.

A reader asks....

I have many questions, but have boiled them down to the three most pressing:

1. What is the best way to assess how successful a student's experience with the writing lab has been? How can we know if we have benefitted that student?
2. What is the best way to evaluate the effectiveness of a writing lab?
3. What is the best software for a writing lab that operates on a referral and walk-in basis?

Susan Azar Porterfield
English Dept.
Rockford College
5050 East State Street
Rockford, Illinois
61108-2393

A reader comments....

I have found the articles in your newsletter useful in my attempts to develop a writing center. Each issue challenges me to assess the direction my center is taking and to modify it in order to better meet the needs of my students.

David G. Hodgdon
Pembroke Academy
Pembroke, NH

NOTE Offers Achievement Awards in Writing to High School Students

To encourage high school students in their writing and to recognize publicly some of the best student writers in the nation, the National Council of Teachers of English will give achievement awards in writing to over 800 students who will graduate from high school in 1991. Nomination forms and information on the awards and procedures can be obtained from Achievement Awards in Writing, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801. Deadline for nominations is January 23, 1990.

Tutors' Column

Late night at the writing center: Service station or oasis?

It was one of those quiet late evening hours when he waltzed into the Writing Center without an appointment and announced that his paper was due the next day, protesting that he didn't need help but just wanted to use the computers. Oh, and by the way, would I please do him a favor and write out his bibliography for him in the proper format while he typed?

At first the request really angered me; however, it also made me think. Why do students always want the magic book of answers? Why do they search for the easy "A" which may make a transcript look nice, but if nothing is learned, becomes ultimately worthless? Why don't students care about learning for its own sake? What happened to the noble quest for knowledge? After some soul searching I found the answer to these questions. Or at least, my answer.

During their initial visits to the writing center, many students expect the tutorial to simply mirror the average classroom, where they sit at desks and take notes; and even though their eyes may be open, their minds are closed. If the professor asks a question, it's usually in vain, for he is teaching robots programmed not to think for themselves or to respond. These "robot-students" will stare straight ahead until the answer is supplied for them. And when they come to a tutoring session they expect the same treatment. If I try to involve one of these student-hots in the tutoring session by asking questions. I'm very likely met with silence at first. Or perhaps he/ she/it will say something to the effect of, "I don't know. Tell me the answer."

A touchy situation. If I do the work for the tutee, I'm not doing my job. But I won't play authority-figure either. As a peer tutor I have the power that a professor lacks to involve a fellow student in the class work, for the tutee and I are on the same level- we think alike. By playing adult, I risk breaking that tie. But how can I interest the tutee in learning and yet stay within the bounds of my role as a peer?

One reason students often don't bother to learn is society's insistence on success. In ex-change for a good job, society demands a good

grade point average as well as a degree. So, many students are too busy trying to find the magic path to a 4.0 to stop and actually try to learn what they're studying. They find themselves on an academic assembly-line, and the result is often apathy: students who don't care about learning, robots whose only concern is good grades and living up to society's expectations. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that when some students knock on the writing center's door they don't want to learn how to write. They want to get an "A" on their paper, and they want us tutors to show them how. This is the main myth about writing centers: that we are a service station for papers. Bring in your assignment and we'll tune'er right up.

Wrong.

As a peer tutor free not just a mechanic in the conveyer-belt world of academia. I'm more than an educational repairman, the perfect cross between a professor and a friend. someone who can teach them the subject and lend them the homework- even if it is just a properly formatted bibliography. But how can a peer tutor get tutees off the conveyer belt and encourage them to respond. to think, to learn?

When I tutor, I try to show the student that being involved with the material on a personal level, truly learning it, is the first step off the assembly line and toward the 4.0. Many students don't realize that their papers don't have to be a regurgitation of their reading or lecture notes. Encouraging students to think independently when they write is the most important part of tutoring for me. So I ask questions, lots of them. I want students to generate their own ideas, to possess their own insights, to take pride in their writing. My questions and my assurance that their ideas are important and valid are my way of getting the tutee off the academic assembly line and functioning as a thinking individual, not a machine. When that happens, the writing center stops being a service station for student-robots and becomes an oasis- of learning.

Cheryl Krapohl
Moravian College
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Call for Papers
12th Annual Conference
of the
East Central Writing Center
Association

April 20-21, 1990
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, Indiana

Proposals are invited which will address not only the standard concerns of writing centers but also the positions of centers within the schools, and the special mission writing centers have to help students. We will strongly consider proposals which are formulated as interactive workshops. Persons interested in participating should submit a substantive one-page proposal (plus three copies) by **December 15, 1989**.

In addition, writing centers and labs are invited to display their materials and services at the Materials Exchange Tables. If you plan to participate in the Materials Exchange, please send us, by March 1, 1990, a brief description of the types of materials you wish to submit and the amount of space you will need to display these materials.

Please send all proposals, requests for display space, and inquiries regarding registration to: Corky Dahl or Brenda Ameter, The Writing Center, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809.

Call for Proposals
NCTE Mid-Atlantic Regional
Conference

April 26-28, 1990
Pittsburgh, PA

This is the first regional conference for the NCTE Affiliates in the Mid-Atlantic Region. Preconference workshops, which will be full-day presentations, will be held on April 26, 1990, and conference presentations will be on April 27-28, 1990. Proposals must be sent by November 1, 1989 to Regional Conference Proposal, WPCTE, 611 Field Club Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15238.

Call for Proposals

CUNY Writing Centers Association
City University of New York

"The Power of Diversity: Writing
in the Center"

February 24, 1990
Borough of Manhattan
Community College

The Second Annual Writing Center Conference is issuing a call for proposals for papers, workshops and panels to be presented on Saturday, February 24, 1990, at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, New York City. Dr. Muriel Harris, (Purdue University) will be the keynote speaker. Roundtable discussions and forums are planned with maximum participation. Abstracts for proposed sessions should be limited to 300 words, should include a 50-word abstract and, if a panel, should include the names and titles of each panel member. Tutor participation is encouraged and welcomed. Possible topics include tutor training, multicultural diversity, basic writing, ESL, standard written English as a second dialect, interdepartmental collaboration, writing across the curriculum, high school-college collaboration, research, computer-assisted instruction, assessment and evaluation, tutoring techniques, learning disabilities, issues of gender, race and class, and writing center administration. Please specify equipment needs. Send proposals by December 1, 1989, to Dr. Myra Kogen, Director, Writing Center, Brooklyn College, Bedford Ave. and Ave. H, 0239 Boylan, Brooklyn, New York 11201.

A reader asks...

I would like to see an article on graduate programs in composition. I am beginning to look for a good program now. Any help would be appreciated.

Therese Gyauch
P.O. Box 3605
Davidson, NC 28036

Process and Processing in a Middle School Writing Lab

Crestwood Community Middle School is located in central Palm Beach County, Florida, in the village of Royal Palm Beach. The school, opened in 1982, contains about 1,040 students in grades five through eight. It was the first Palm Beach County middle school to offer a "writing lab program." This year, it maintained a vanguard position by offering word processing capabilities to its students.

We see our program as one in which students are trained in using all aspects of the writing process, and using them without fear. They and their pieces walk through the steps from prewriting to publishing with the help of peers and the lab teacher, receiving along the way exposure to practical writing strategies- the nuts-and-bolts writing tips a language arts class passes over.

The "Writing Lab" began in 1986 at a county-offered summer inservice course in the teaching of rhetoric. From there, a "starter" nine-week program was written into the 1987-83 schedule. I was chosen as the lab teacher because of my conviction that writing was the single most important discipline that could be taught to any student anytime, anywhere. I also brought to the program the skills and attitudes I was learning from my own writing.

In its first year the writing lab took a "modes of rhetoric" approach. Students developed their own topics from a broad range of expository choices and presented their ideas as personal narratives, process essays, comparison/contrast papers, descriptive essays, and cause-and-effect pieces. Rough drafts were teacher-edited, discussed in student conferences and class lessons, revised, and final-copied. We graded holistically for content and mechanics.

The results were encouraging, particularly the students' application of critical thinking skills to writing. Other benefits we saw: a consistent use of prewriting techniques like clustering and charting; a concern for imparting ideas clearly to readers; an ability to revise content for better organization; and an increased willingness to edit mechanical errors for the final copy,

This year our writing lab offers a course for sixth and seventh grade students (four sections, two per grade). Each lab class follows a pattern of group editing practice, a writing mini-lesson, a "status check," writing time with conferencing, and group share (reading posted pieces; writers at Crestwood shy from reading aloud). Students generate their own ideas for pieces and work at an individual pace, moving through an eight-step process of prewriting, drafting, peer response, revision, self-editing, teacher-editing, conferences with the lab teacher, and final copy publishing.

Students' choices for pieces are left entirely to them, although certain forms such as narrative and comparison are among the pieces required. As a class, we often work on finding ideas, making it the subject of many of our mini-lessons. Ideas are planned out using standard prewriting techniques, and students often talk out their ideas to members of their writing group (two to four students). I encourage rough drafts to be rough: students cross out, draw arrows, cut and paste. I make no demands regarding length of pieces.

When the first draft is completed, students read their work out loud to a class-mate and ask for suggestions. Listeners offer what help they can and ask questions if they have them. In some mini-lessons we practice good ways to respond- middle schoolers have limited experience in peer response.

Students do often read to several peers to get useful opinions for revising. But even armed with good responses they are cursory revisers. I continually encourage writers to look at their pieces from a reader's angle and see what's been left out, what needs to be reorganized. Normal revision in the lab produces a draft-and-a-half; occasionally a second draft; once in a great while a third.

When students decide the content of their pieces is set, they self edit. Ways to edit, and things to look for when editing, are popular topics for mini-lessons because the ability to edit ranges within a class from highly developed to nonexistent. Students enlist each other's help here too, and when they finish self-

editing, they leave their pieces with me for teacher editing.

The lab provides two kinds of conferencing: the first takes place during the writing time and is extremely brief. I move around the room and ask students how their pieces are going. If they are having any problems, what stage they are on now, they answer me, and I move on if there's no dialogue required. The second type comes after teacher editing. Before students make their final copies I go to them and discuss one or two of the corrections (either in content or mechanics) they need to concentrate on. For often-repeated errors we use proofreading symbols which are prominently posted. In students' writing folders I keep a record of each conference I have with them.

From this point, students work on making the published copy of their pieces. They post their work on the boards and walls of the lab, and spend the last few minutes of each class moving around the room reading the published pieces.

Some of the rough drafts, and many of the final drafts, are "word-processed." We have six Brother WP-55 dedicated word processors in the lab. Students are very anxious to work on the processors, but I ask that rough drafts be handwritten in class and that the processors be used for final copies. Students receive basic processor training through one of our mini-lessons and then are ready to begin. They put their final copies on screen, have the processor check their spelling, edit as needed with my help or another student's, and print several copies of their work. One copy is posted; others are given to friends or taken home. Some are given to me for publication in the school newspaper.

Many students write longer pieces which can be saved on disk and finished over a period of time. In any teaching day I have three classes. During the three other periods--the "free" periods-- students come in to work on their pieces when their other teachers allow them. Giving students this extra time keeps the waiting list to use the processors fairly short.

And that's where our program stands. We're seeing students moving away from a "fear

of writing" attitude to the opinion that writing is a process they can handle. We encourage a journey from fluency through form to correctness for student pieces-- a journey that is becoming easier for more students more often. Some of our students produce two or three short pieces a class: some work on a fifty- or eighty-page story over a nine-week period. All make an effort to produce a good final copy they can post: all are avid readers of each other's work. In the future we'd like to find ways to inspire the students-- three or four in every class--who are half-committed or uncommitted to writing or the writing process.

Perhaps the best thing to come out of the writing lab program is the awareness, among our faculty and among other middle schools who have observed our lab, that a school can do nothing more important than. give its students a time, and a place, and a process to write, From the skill of writing, all other skills follow.

Kim Grinder

Crestwood Community Middle School Royal Palm
Beach, FL

Summer institute on Developmental Education Accepting Applications

The Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators will hold its 1990 Institute from June 30 through July 27 on the campus of Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. The 1990 Kellogg Institute will train faculty, counselors, and administrators from developmental and learning assistance programs in the most current techniques for promoting learning improvement.

For information on application procedures and scholarships, contact Elaine Bing-ham, National Center for Developmental Education, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608 (704-262-3057).

Who Will Staff the Center

Stretching seems a common exercise for those who run writing centers these days: pushing in as many directions as we can, working with students from so many different disciplines, scrambling to find money and other resources to keep the center going. It is this last enterprise that keeps us in excellent shape, as the routine seems almost endless: identify the need and how much money will satisfy it, and then maintain breathing regularly in the face of multiple "No's" or "I'm sorry, but it's a lean budget year, you know." In one particular area writing center directors may collectively qualify for an Olympic medal: in their ongoing attempt to acquire adequate staff to run their centers successfully. At the same time that many are simply trying to make ends meet with meagre resources, they also face considerable pressure to "upgrade" and expand their centers to offer more help to even greater numbers of students. When the struggle to support even a minimally run center is already difficult enough, how can a director hope to expand a center's services and reach out to the many students and faculty who are anxious to receive the help the center offers? Where will the sniff come from?

The answer is that writing center directors must stretch yet again, in yet a new direction. They must look in places they had not previously looked for the support they need. When it appears that the traditional sources of support are drying up, or that higher administrators are constantly "out to lunch" when the writing center director comes calling for money, they should turn to other departments or colleges on campus-and may be surprised to find there an enthusiastic willingness to help.

Like many writing centers, our center at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, tradition-ally has been funded through the English department, and employs English graduate teaching assistants ("TA's), who either receive one course off per term to work in the Center or work part-time for an hourly wage. As yet there is no major (non-English Department) source of permanent, steady funding to allow us to expand from the small operation we started with to the more comprehensive, campus-wide service we and others would like us to be. So we have begun to draw the funds for staff from new areas within the

University, by tapping non-English Department bases of support, and, in one case, exploring the use of a previously unused pool of staff within the English Department. All of these arrangements depend, of course, on the circumstances and programs on our campus, but the general principle demonstrated about acquiring support from new places may be instructive to writing center directors anywhere. The liaisons that result serve not only as stop-gap measures but also as means of attracting the higher-level administration support any writing center needs. At the same time, they also provide direct benefits to the units funding the additional staff.

English Department Support

One group of English graduate students that we traditionally have not used as a pool for staff is the Graduate Assistants {GA.'s), those students who are just entering graduate school and are required to go through a training year before they become T.A.'s with the responsibility of teaching their own classes. In our department these people serve as assistants to experienced teachers and become acquainted with classroom teaching at the college level. They are expected to develop their abilities to teach, grade papers, and work with students in the freshman writing courses in this year. Because they do not yet teach, they are not paid at the same rate as the T.A.'s. We are looking into the possibility of using them as writing center tutors, then, which would ease some of the burden on the English Department budget, because they are not paid as much as F.A.S. They would work part of their time in the Writing Center, and part of their time interning in the regular classroom, Under such a joint arrangement they would receive training in both classroom teaching and one-to-one tutoring.

Their role in the Writing Center would be similar to their role as assistants to the experienced teachers: they would begin a period of apprenticeship in their first year, trying out the role of tutor slowly, with the advice and help of an experienced tutor. This means that much of their time would be spent in training, but it also means that at some point (luring the year they would be ready to begin as full-fledged tutors in the center, thus adding to the total number of tutors on the staff.

Because it adds to the first-year teacher-training effort, this program appears attractive to the English Department.. The G.A.'s would get classroom exposure and practice and, in the Writing Center, a good first-hand feel for the kinds of writing problems students have and on-the-job training in how to help solve these problems. In addition to offering teacher training, the employment of G.A.'s in the Writing Center would provide benefits to the graduate students them-selves. They would have a chance to meet other graduate students and instructors and thus gain a sense of community that is often difficult to achieve in the first year. The social interaction and the sharing of ideas and problems about their studies and teaching would be stimulating and nurturing at the same time. Also, working in the Writing Center would offer an immediate opportunity for professional development, something which usually does not appear so early in the graduate career. The new graduate students could devise research projects and subjects for articles, and thus get a start on the professional publication so necessary in this field.

While this source of new staff is promising and should be relatively easy to implement, it does not address one of the central issues that any expanding writing center has to deal with, which is that a growing writing-across-the-curriculum effort, or even just the increased awareness on the part of students and faculty that writing is important, brings more students into the writing center and thus creates the need for more staff than one single department, operating within the usual budgetary constraints, can support. A Task Force on our campus is working on a plan to change the source of our Center's funding, to give it its own line in the annual University budget rather than in the English Department (which cannot supply the necessary support for expansion on its own). However, such a plan will take time to go through channels and be approved at the higher levels, so the immediate problem remains. If the English Department cannot pay for all the tutors needed, who will?

Writing Center Assistantships

One very promising solution is to ask others to sponsor Writing Center Assistantships: another department or campus unit pays for a tutor to work in the writing center with the students from the sponsoring department, Under our arrangements, the sponsoring department pays the English Department the equivalent of teaching one course, plus the regular

tuition and fee waiver TA's ordinarily receive. In return, the T.A. (the tutor) will be available in the Writing Center to work with the students from that department on the particular problems and assignments encountered in their courses. While this set-up obviously benefits the sponsoring department and actually pays for the tutor's time, the English Department and the Writing Center do all the selection, training, and supervision, so that those who are knowledgeable about teaching writing ensure the quality of the tutoring being offered. (While it is not true that only English Department people can teach writing, at present we have not recruited graduate students from other departments. Perhaps soon another round of "stretching" is due on this point.)

An attractive feature of this arrangement from a writing center's perspective is that when no students from the sponsoring department are present, the tutor works with the other students who have come for help. Also, because it is possible to target the major users of the center from past attendance records, those departments or programs whose students frequent the center can be asked to sponsor the Assistantships, thus allowing the center to obtain the necessary staff for the students coming in.

Finally, the sponsoring departments are also asked to contribute to a Writing Center fund, which puts a little money in the Center's budget to help defray overhead costs and pay for administrative work in selecting, training, and supervising the tutors in the programs beyond what the Director's job already covers. The amount contributed varies according to the service being supplied, but it all helps a great deal to make the programs work smoothly and to make possible the continued expansion of the Center's services.

The following are examples of the Assistantships we have set up so far:

- 1. The Athletic Department.** Students who are also athletes encounter a number of problems in their classes, and in particular, the freshman composition courses often prove quite difficult to first-year athletes. In the past, the Athletic Department has independently employed English graduate students to tutor the athletes, hoping that this would help them pass the composition courses. However, such tutoring is expensive, difficult to monitor, and its effectiveness difficult to evaluate. So, the Athletic Department has agreed to pay for one Writing Center Assis-

taut ship, The T.A. chosen for this position works (for a set number of hours each week) with the Athletic Department students. They meet in the Writing Center, which provides an advantage over the previous tutoring system, because the Center has more resources available, and the students come to know that the Center is there not just for their English courses but also for the other courses in which they have to write papers. The tutor is trained to work with the kinds of writing problems these students often have—basic grammar and punctuation, dialect problems, and so on. Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* and Emily Meyer and Louise Z. Smith's *The Practical Tutor* are among the texts the tutor reads to become familiar with the basic problems the students have. Such training is undoubtedly better than what was previously offered by the rather loosely structured Athletic Department tutoring program, and the supervision automatically provided by the Writing Center Director ensures some "duality control that previously was difficult to achieve.

2. **Educational Advancement Program.** The Assistantship set up for this Program is similar to the one for the Athletic Department. The E.A.P. students are a diverse group, but all are either economically or physically "disadvantaged" and thus qualify for special assistance from the University. As with the Athletic Department arrangement, the tutor works one-to-one with E. A.P. students, focusing most often on their writing for the freshman composition courses. Again, since these are people we were seeing in the Center anyway, this setup places the responsibility for paying for the help the students are receiving in the hands of the program the students are connected to, and thus eases the financial burden on the English Department.
3. **College of Law.** This arrangement differs somewhat from the other two, but again illustrates the basic point that writing centers can create programs to serve the needs of students across a campus, and by doing so gain the additional financial support they need to expand.

The College of Law has become more interested in addressing the issue of quality in its students' writing, and thus has increased the

emphasis on evaluating writing skills in its "Legal Process I" course for first-year students. The Writing Center Assistantships for the College of Law, then, are designed to help the students in this particular course. Four "Writing Assistants" serve as tutors for the Legal Process students, one for each section of the course. After the Law students receive an assignment and write a draft, they meet with the Writing Assistant for their section to confer on a one-to-one basis about their work. The Writing Assistant answers questions, offers strategies for revision, and works with the students on any writing problems they have. They are committed to spending a certain number of hours per week doing this, but when there aren't any Law students to work with, they tutor in the Writing Center). After consulting with the tutor and revising their work, the Law students then hand in the papers, with their first drafts, to the Law professor for evaluation and grading. This arrangement is useful to the Law students because they have a very efficient, direct way of receiving help with their writing, which they know is being evaluated carefully by their professors. While the arrangement does not exempt the Law professors from evaluating the students' writing, it does offer them some assurance that students are attending to the quality of their writing and that they are doing so with the help of trained writing tutors. The program is attractive to the College of Law because it offers a means of producing graduates who are good writers.

A somewhat more specific training period is required for this program than for the others already described. The tutors for the other Assistantships are generally already acquainted with the kinds of writing problems their students have, but the Law students are more experienced writers with more specialized concerns. Working with them presents some field-specific conventions with which the tutors must become familiar. We've worked with some legal writing texts such as Brand and White, *Legal Writing: The Strategy of Persuasion*, and Charrow and Erhardt, *Clear and Effective Legal Writing*. In addition, the Law professors provided assignments and samples of student papers with their comments on them so that the Writing Assistants could get an idea of the teachers' standards.

Non-Credit Writing Workshops

We are exploring one additional way of increasing the Writing Center staff. Our University has a "non-Credit Program" which offers a

selection of courses not only to University students but also to the general public. People pay a set fee to receive instruction in any of a wide variety of subjects. We are thinking of offering a Non-Credit Writing Workshop, for which people will pay to work one-on-one with Writing Center tutors. The number of people who regularly request such a course is already quite high, so we can be reasonably sure that there will be enough people registering to pay for the tutor's time in the Center. Presumably, too, some of the people who come to us for help already would be interested in making their tutoring arrangement more formal, so that by offering a course we would be paid for some of the service we already provide for free. Thus the Department's burden would be some-what reduced. By an arrangement like this, we again would be gathering outside support to pay for the staff, and add to our ability to serve more people.

Because of making these arrangements our Center has received increased attention from the campus community and other kinds of support. The Provost has given me some time off from teaching to develop these programs, and, because we have presented strong evidence of our expansion and have gotten others to fund this

effort, money for a brochure and advertising was supplied by the higher administration. Such expressions of support only increase our ability to grow and to serve the students and faculty who want our assistance.

In general, these have been the most promising and truly beneficial changes in the direction of expanding our Writing Center's operation. Acquiring the support of other campus units has proved to be very influential in making the case for deserving additional support from higher levels, and, most importantly, we are more effectively serving the students and faculty in their efforts to improve student writing. Other writing centers that face the same problem of limited funding may find that arrangements like these should help them, too. We have been quite surprised by the overwhelmingly positive response the other departments have had to our suggestions about setting up these programs, and have concluded that they see them as meeting strong needs of their own. Whatever the reason, they are willing, enthusiastic, and, they write the checks.

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WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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