⟨The⟩ WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

....from the editor....

If you follow the job market at all, it's not particularly news-worthy to comment on the many college positions being adver tised which ask for an interest in the teaching of writing. What is new, commented a member of our newsletter group in a recent letter, is the frequent request for "writing lab experience" in these announcements.

On a more personal note, I should mention that as the mother of a newly announced bride-to-be, I'll be somewhat distracted by preparations from now until June. I will try, if at all possible, to keep newsletter issues reasonably coherent so that page four will not be some-where after page nine, titles may even match the appropriate articles, and the table of con-tents will overlap somewhat with the articles actually included.

After all, writing lab directors are used to having seventeen things on their agenda to do (usually at the same time). Adding an eighteenth doesn't seem too impossible-yet.

-Muriel Harris, editor

Using Videotapes to Train Tutors

"O wad some Power the Wile gie us
To see oursels as tthers see us!"

Two years ago the Illinois State University Center for Learning Assistance staff decided that a video camera would be the ideal training tool for tutors. We had all watched ourselves on videotape and knew the dreadful truths the camera had to tell. However, knowing that we wanted to use videotapes was not the same as knowing how to use a video camera to train tutors. More importantly, we had to learn what useful contribution videotapes could make to tutor training.

Shopping for the camera was a relatively simple job. The Associate Director consulted with a staff member in the university's television production area. The staff member suggested a Panasonic VHS Re-porter, priced at about $1500 including a color TV monitor. The camera is light weight,

driven by a rechargeable battery, and takes standard VHS tapes. It connects directly to the monitor for playback, thus operating in place of a VCR

When the camera arrived, we wanted to use it immediately. Role playing had always worked well as a method of evoking discussion among tutors and giving them a chance to talk about one another's tutoring techniques. Our first effort, then, was to videotape a role playing situation in front of the entire staff of tutors. The Director and Associate Director played roles first, the Director being a shy writer and the Associate Director playing a rude and condescending tutor. The roles worked well since the two had been on camera before and felt at ease. The scene ended with the tutor scolding the student for lax proofreading and the student shambling hopelessly out the door. If not realistic, the scene provided comic relief and a visual picture of what not to do. We still use it as an ice-breaker for staff meetings early in the semester.

When tutors tried the same activity, however, the results were not funny. A few tutors refused to be videotaped under any circumstances. Those who agreed to act taught us about the need for planning and preparation. One peer tutor played the role of a student who had a midterm exam in a week and had not read the book for her course. The young woman playing the role showed more shock than concern and pounced on the ill-prepared student with forceful ire. The camera showed how stiff tutors appear in role playing situations, revealed some startling truths about the style and method of the person playing the tutor, and told us that we must plan our scripts more carefully. Expecting tutors to put themselves on public display without preparation can lead to embarrassment and unexpected results.

We decided to proceed more carefully, asking tutors to spend time scripting their videotapes, then giving them a chance to record in privacy before putting the finished product on display for a staff meeting. As paper assignments for our tutor training course, groups of tutors work together on scripts and videotapes, basing the scripts on real tutoring situations they have experienced and working for special effects and points they want to make to the audience. For example, tutors worked on a videotape in which an economics student comes to the Center wanting to work on charts and

graphs but insisting that he just has never beer able to understand visual information. The tutor works through the negative attitude and separates the student's anxiety from the learning issues. The scene takes around ten minutes, works effectively, and can be shown in its edited version to staff meetings early in the semester to show new staff members how to deal with such problems.

Not all videotaping need be "canned" because tutors work in many actual situations in which seeing themselves on videotape can help them improve. Catching a tutor on tape in a real working situation can explain failure and success far better than verbal feedback. All Center tutors learn on day one that nonverbal signals dictate the tone of initial contacts and may affect all future tutoring. Yet we often spot a tutor seated across a table from a student who is leaning expectantly forward, twisting to see what the book or paper on the other side of the table says. Or a tutor will lean back in the chair or steeple hands while explaining a concept. The videotape tells the tutor immediately that such body language interferes with communication.

The video camera will also show the loquacious tutor that talking too much is the cardinal sin of tutoring. This all-too-common tutor failing is somehow hard for all of us to

monitor when we have the floor and another person seems to need our advice. A tutor listening to his or her own voice can easily miss the cues of knitted brows or wandering eyes on the face of the student. When the tutor sees the videotape, however, the missed connection is easy to spot. The same <u>dynamic</u> appears to operate as in sports. After a person has seen a videotape, it seems easier to body image appropriate kinetic and verbal behavior.

The use of the video camera to give tutors feedback on their personal presence in tutoring contexts works in small or large group situations as well. When viewing videotapes of themselves In front of groups, leaders learn to spot many types of behavior that can be improved, They can see themselves in dominant postures, asking leading questions or close-ended questions, making too forceful responses, or indulging in any other behavior that interferes with successful group interaction.

Tutors need direction in learning to spot good and bad performance on videotape. A list of questions that the staff can use while viewing a role play video or a set of self-evaluation questions for the tutor to follow while viewing a private session helps immensely, especially at first. For example, for the videotape described above, in which the Director and Associate Director acted out a disastrous first tutoring encounter, the following list of questions is appropriate:

1. What body language did the tutor use? What effect did it have on the exchange?

2. What verbal cues did the tutor give the student? Comments? Tone of voice? Turn-taking in conversation?

3. How did he treat the student? That is, in what ways did he help her or hinder her from feeling comfortable in the tutoring situation?

4. What "first three minute rules" did he follow or break?

5. How did he treat the rest of the staff?

These questions trigger discussion and lead new tutors to see what the videotape may be telling them about their own actions or about ways to avoid pitfalls.

Self-evaluation questions for private viewing of personal tutoring sessions with a supervisor follow the same pattern.

1. How did you begin the session?

2. Who did the most talking?

3. What was your physical movement and position?

4. How would you change what you see?

Such questions help direct discussion about the videotaping and show the tutor how to profit from successful experiences and how to spot methods and manners that need improvement. Most tutors see themselves imitating teachers and other tutors whom they admire so that the experience reinforces good behavior and gives explanation for feelings of success and achievement. The videotape can answer the question: what did I do right and how can I help someone else to be a better tutor?

Role playing videotapes to be used in staff meetings for discussions take a more critical eye. They sometimes must be shot more than once, and even then parts may end up on the cutting room floor. Tutors who are working on scripts find it difficult to cut a great idea, like a silly hat or a strange accent, but the camera will tell quickly what works and what does not. Tutors writing and planning these scripts have to be willing to ask themselves a set of critical questions, too. Here are some sample questions for assessing videotapes.

1. Are the tutorial strategies which are used appropriate to the situation?

2. Is it too long? Should we trim it to make our point? On the other hand, is the scenario detailed enough to be informative and interesting?

3. Will the audience understand the points we are trying to make?

4. Do the "actors" look like the parts they are Player.

5. Does the videotape script demonstrate tutorial do's and don't?

Evaluating the Writing Conference:
A Comparison of Tutor and Student Responses

Evaluations of writing centers tend to fall into two categories. The first, and most common, form of writing center evaluation is quantitative: how many students visited, how long were the tutorials, how many visits did they make, etc. The second, and less common, form of evaluation attempts to assess the qualitative aspects of the tutorial. How effective is the conference approach in improving student writing? Does the writing center have long-term effects on student writing ability? The first form of evaluation and record keeping is essential for ensuring administrative support of the writing center and for planning the allocation of resources. Some of these records have also been the basis for research in writing. In a survey report of writing center evaluation, Janice Neuleib noted the political significance of this research:

> The main thrust of these articles has been to count everything and get involved in many kinds of tutoring, then report the results to as many important people on and off campus as possible. We have been very good at showing that we are busy, not a hard task given the nature of our work. (1)

Despite the practical importance of these quantitative studies, they do not address the questions that are most critical in the training and evaluation of tutors and in comparing the results of various tutoring styles. Ultimately, we must not only count the number of students we tutor, but we must account for what occurs in the tutoring process. We are still open to the indictment made by Stephen North in 1984:

> Assuming that even half the 1,500 or so writing centers in America will support this assertion [that the ideal situation for teaching and learning writing is the tutorial] , it is all the more remarkable that in all the writing center literature to date, there is not a single published study of what happens in writing center tutorials [author's emphasis] .

Perhaps the best way to understand the interaction between tutor and tutee would be to have each write a description of the conference. In the context of a busy writing center, how- ever, the time necessary to complete such a task would be prohibitive, even If tutors and students were willing to participate. As an alternative to a written description of a conference, we devised questionnaires to be filled out by the student and the tutor after a conference that we hoped would provide some indication of the factors related to a successful conference.

Description of the Writing Center

The Writing Center at Texas Tech University was started In 1981. The center is staffed by a director and five English graduate students, all of whom receive a course load reduction for this duty. Approximately 400 students visit the Writing Center each semester. Although most of these students are taking a required course in freshman composition, the Center is open to any student on campus. Freshmen are normally required to take two courses in composition, English 1301 and 1302. Students who do not demonstrate competency in writing are required to take English 1300. Attendance at the Writing Center is not a requirement for students in English 1300.

Teachers may refer students to the Writing Center, but most students come volitionally. The Center is open twenty hours a week, and students are not asked to make appointments. Tutors provide help with specific skills, but grammatical problems are usually treated within the context of the student's own writing.

Procedure for the Survey

Before the tutorial, students were asked to complete the front of the survey form. In addition to questions about age, sex, race, etc., students were asked about their reason for coming to the Writing Center, their attitude

toward writing, etc. These questions were asked before the interview because we wanted to see if student expectations and preparation were related to successful conferences.

At the conclusion of the tutorial, students were asked to complete the back of the survey form. They responded to four questions. Was the tutorial helpful? Would they revise their papers as a result of the tutorial? Was the tutor friendly? Would they be likely to come again?

Most of the questions on the form were scaled responses. For instance, students were asked to check the appropriate blank on this question:

As a result of this tutorial I will:
--make significant changes in my paper
--make minor changes in my paper
-- make no changes in my paper

Although open-ended questions might have yielded some interesting, unanticipated responses, we felt the number of questions we were asking made objectively scored responses more practical.

We attached a note to each of the forms, assuring students that they were not required to respond to the survey in order to receive help in the writing center and making clear that they need not answer all the questions. When the figures in our results do not total 100, it is because the respondent either neglected to answer a question or chose to ignore it. None of the surveys were signed by the students, but we did keep track of which tutor was giving the tutorial.

The results of the survey were analyzed using the SPSSX program. We obtained frequencies for all twenty-six variables. We also analyzed the frequencies according to the tutor assessment of the success of the conference.

Results

One of the most obvious results of our survey was that our tutors tend to be much harsher critics of their conferences than our students are (see Table 1). Students rated 76 of the 100 conferences as "Very helpful" and 14 conferences as "Somewhat helpful." None of the conferences were found by students to be unhelpful. The tutors, on the other hand, rated only 41 of the conferences as "Very productive." The majority of the conferences (55%) were considered "somewhat productive," and 4 conferences were Pronounced "Unproductive."

After the tutorial the tutors also completed a survey form, Many of the questions on the tutor survey corresponded to the student questions. For instance, the tutors were also asked to assess the students' attitude toward writing and writing ability, In addition, they were asked to rate the success of the conference from their perspective. By comparing student and tutor responses to similar questions, we felt we would be able to draw some conclusions about how differences in perception affected the success of the tutorials.

One hundred students filled out the surveys during the spring 1988 semester. The surveys were always given during the students' first visit to the writing center, and only one survey was completed by each student, About half of students surveyed (49%) were enrolled in the second semester of freshman composition, a course devoted primarily to writing from sources. Approximately one-fourth of the students (27%) were taking their first course in freshman composition.

Table 1: Results of Conferences	
Students	
Very helpful	76%
Somewhat helpful	4%
Not helpful	0%
Tutors	
Very productive	41%
Somewhat productive	55%
Unproductive	4%

Students were also pleased with the attitude of their tutors (see Table 2). Eighty-three students described their tutor as "friendly." Only nine described the tutor's attitude as "businesslike," and none of the the students thought the tutors were unfriendly. When students were asked if they would be likely to come again based on this experience, 90 out of the 92 responding felt that they would.

The tutors were less

positive about the students they tutored (see Table 3). On a scale that ranged from "eager" to "hostile," the majority of students were rated as "receptive" (58%). However, eight students were considered indifferent; five, uncooperative; and one, hostile. How did these indifferent, uncooperative, and hostile students feel about their tutors? Most of them found their tutors to be friendly (nine of thirteen responding) .

Even the hostile student said nothing worse than that the tutor was "businesslike." I am not suggesting, of course, that students who are uncooperative will necessarily bring out anger and hostility from their tutors, but I do think it is worth noting the more positive

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Table 2:  Attitude Assessment,      │
│            Student Responses          │
│                                       │
│  Students' perception of the tutor    │
│                                       │
│  Friendly tutor          83%          │
│  Businesslike tutor       9%          │
│  Unfriendly tutor         0%          │
│                                       │
│  Students' willingness to be          │
│        tutored again                  │
│                                       │
│  Would like to come again  90%        │
│  Reluctant to come again    2%        │
│  Refuse to come again       0%        │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
```

orientation that the students showed toward their tutors than vice versa. Perhaps the most startling statistic in this regard is that after 42 of the conferences the tutor was not enthusiastic about tutoring the same student again. And in ten of these cases, the tutors remarked that they would not tutor the student again if they could avoid it.

Because of the overwhelmingly positive response of students to the conferences, it is difficult to determine what made the conference successful in their eyes. They seemed to accept Pope's philosophy when they come into the writing center: "whatever is, is right." From the tutor's perspective, though, it is easier to compare successful and unsuccessful conferences. We have designated the 41 conferences rated by the tutor as "very productive" as successful conferences. Since only four of the conferences were actually considered "unproductive," we combined that category with the "somewhat productive" one and designated them as "less successful" conferences.

The successful conferences were more likely to be with a female student than with a male student (see Table 4). It should be noted here that four out of the five tutors were also female. The race of the student seemed to have

little influence on the success of the conference with the exception of a slightly greater percent-age of Hispanic students in the less successful category. Of the four conferences, however, described as unproductive by the tutors, all were with white students.

A higher proportion of students in the less successful category were taking the first course in composition. This may be due to a number of weaker students taking the first course in the spring semester. Some of these students may either have failed the course in the fall or taken the remedial course.

We were curious to see if teacher-mandated conferences would be less successful. Our suspicions were confirmed by the statistics. Only three of the eleven students required by their teachers to visit the center had successful conferences in the opinion of the tutors. However, nine of these eleven students responded that the conference was "very helpful" to them. Here again, we see the disparity between student and tutor assessment of the results of a conference.

A great deal of research on writing has indicated the strong connection between student attitudes and success in writing. Interest-

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Table 3:  Attitude Assessment, Tutor│
│            Responses                  │
│                                       │
│  Tutors' perception of the student    │
│                                       │
│  Eager               27%              │
│  Receptive           58%              │
│  Indifferent          8%              │
│  Uncooperative        5%              │
│  Hostile              1%              │
│                                       │
│  Tutors' willingness to tutor student │
│        again                          │
│                                       │
│  Would like to          58%           │
│  Wouldn't mind          32%           │
│  Wouldn't if avoidable  10%           │
└─────────────────────────────────────┘
```

ingly enough, our survey showed little connection between student attitude and the success of conferences. Although a slightly greater percentage of students who seldom enjoy

writing had the "less successful" conferences, a slightly greater percentage of those who usually enjoy writing also had less successful conferences in the tutor's estimation.

More important than attitude in deter-mining the success of the tutorials we surveyed was the skill level of the student. Although students with average to excellent skills did not always have successful conferences, it was true that over 25% of the less successful conferences occurred when students rated their skills as "poor." Tutors judged the writing ability of thirteen students to be in the "poor" range. In twelve of these cases the conference was less than successful. The four conferences considered unproductive by tutors were all with students whom they rated "poor" in writing ability.

Although, as we have seen, the tutors were generally harsher critics than students when assessing the results of a conference, there were some areas of agreement. Of the 41 successful conferences, only one student considered the conference not to be very helpful. Of the 59 less successful conferences, 13 agreed with the tutor that the conferences was only "somewhat helpful" or "not helpful."

Discussion

The finding that tutors tend to be harsher critics of writing conferences is understandable. Tutors are more aware of the problems in a particular paper, and therefore, are less likely to feel satisfied with the revisions made by the student. Students, on the other hand, are often uncertain how to revise a paper; consequently, the suggestions made by the tutors are likely to be considered very helpful. This knowledge has many ramifications for staff training. Tutors who question the results of their conference should be re-minded that they are having a positive influence on student writing even if they are not fixing all the problems they see in student papers. Success should be measured not in terms of the quality of the revised paper but by the progress made during the tutoring session.

The correlation between students with poor writing ability and the less successful conferences is disturbing. It signals the inability of our writing center to help marginal students. Several factors should be considered here. Since our tutors generally focus on

broad, rhetorical issues in recommending revision, they may feel stymied with students who do not have a command of basic writing skills. Also, these surveys were made during the student's <u>initial</u> visit to the writing center. Students who are struggling with a multitude of writing problems need to make repeated visits to the writing center. We do not currently have a procedure that will ensure regular and continuing visits from these students. Finally, such statistics indicate that most of our tutors would rather deal with the macro-structure of a paper than with routine editing procedures. In fact, our tutors are discouraged from focusing on these issues because of the

Table 4: Successful vs. Less Successful Conferences		
Variable	Success-ful	Less Successful
Sex		
Male	17	28
Female	24	31
Race		
White	30	42
Black	3	5
Hispanic	4	9
Oriental	4	3
English Course		
English 1301	9	18
English 1302	21	28
Attendance		
Required	3	8
Voluntary	38	51
Attitude toward writing		
Usually enjoy	11	17
Sometimes enjoy	21	27
Seldom enjoy	9	15
Skill level		
Excellent	2	1
Good	12	20
Average	23	22
Poor	4	15
Student assessment of results		
Very helpful	37	39
Somewhat helpful	1	13
Not helpful	0	0

time constraints of most tutorial sessions and because of a departmental policy against proofreading student papers. These findings raise the question of how a writing center and a skills laboratory can be successfully combined.

Finally, it does seem our tutors were able to "read" the outcome of conferences with some success. Although students were much more likely to consider a conference "very helpful," tutors seldom ever considered a conference very successful that wasn't rated the same way by the student. Put another way, tutors frequently underrated conferences, but virtually never overrated them. This is an encouragement for the tutor who has wondered if his success in tutoring is perhaps a self-delusion.

Conclusion

The results of this survey certainly need to be corroborated by writing centers at other institutions. Given the widely varying conditions of writing center operation, these results may have little bearing on other institutions. The questions raised by this survey are, how-ever, ones that affect the operation of every writing center. Understanding the factors that lead to success in writing conferences should be the basis for planning staff development, for organizing the writing center operation, and for assessing the results of the writing center program.

A number of other factors not discussed here should also be a part of writing center evaluation. Practical considerations such as when a paper is due and how long the conference lasts undoubtedly influence the results of a conference. The expectations students have for the conference also play an important role in its success or failure. By asking such questions and engaging in rigorous examination of our conference procedures, we can pass beyond the preoccupation for "showing we are busy" that Janice Neuleib observed and attend to the more serious business of discovering what goes on in writing conferences.

David W. Chapman Texas Tech University Lubbock, TX

Works Cited

Neuleib, Janice. "Evaluating Writing Centers:
A Survey Report." Writing Lab Newsletter 11.4 (1986): 1-5.

North, Stephen M. "Writing Center Research: Testing Our Assumptions." Writing Centers: Theory and Administration.
Ed. Gary A. Olson. Urbana, IL: NCI"E, 1984. 24-35.

Using Videotapes

The answers to these questions may call for a retake. Facing the need to retake the video may not be happy for tutor writer/directors, but in the long run they will be happier with their product. The video will be really useful for the staff and finally more fun for the writers/ actor/ directors.

Videotaping is still in its infancy in writing centers and learning centers, but those who have a video camera to see themselves as others see them will be less able to hang on to old and useless habits. No center director who has had the successful training experiences of using videos will want to lose this tool as one handy and helpful method for enlivening and enriching staff meetings and encouraging good tutoring.

Janice Neuleib, Maurice Scharton, Julia Visor,
_and Yvette Weber-Davis
Indiana State University
Normal, Illinois

Training Manual Available

The Writing Center of Harvard University offers two publications written by several of its peer tutors: 1) The Harvard University Writing Center Training Manual (_. •), 43 pages, focusing on training new writing center staff; and 2) Improving Student Writing ($3), an 18-page guide for teaching assistants and new instructors, focusing on such topics as evaluating student writing, designing assignments, and holding conferences. To order, please send a check in the appropriate amount, made out to Harvard University, to: Linda Simon, Director, The Writing Center, Harvard University, 12 Quincy Street,Cambridge, MA 02138.

Tutors' Column

I thought she made quite a picture standing there, framed in the doorway, when I first looked up and saw her. She seemed small and nervous, leaning first on one foot and then on the other. A bright pink blush spread up her neck and smeared her face. She looked older than the traditional college student, tired, beaten, and withdrawn. I was afraid she would turn and run out before I could get *over* to where she was anxiously waiting. I smiled and said, "May I help you with something?'

The pink turned to a splotchy red and she sighed, " Oh yes, would you please?" Since the room was filled with students chatting away at other writing assistants, I showed her over to the round table in the corner where we could have a little privacy and less noise. It had been a hectic day with many students asking for help on last-minute entries to the creative writing contest or with papers and poetry they wanted to submit to the college literary journal.

I sat down beside her and pleasantly asked her to sign my student register sheet. She looked around nervously, as if she was embarrassed about the whole thing, and then replied, "I probably shouldn't be here; maybe I don't belong here. I guess I should just go. I just thought...well, some ladies I work with said I should...Oh dear, I don't know what I was thinking of." She put her hands over her face, and I noticed the redness flair up again through her fingers. I felt really bad for her because she was having such a difficult time asking for help. I explained how all of us in the writing center ask each other for help with our papers. We can all use an objective opinion on our writing sometimes.

Well, it was obvious that her self esteem was at a very low level, so I decided she needed a "warm up" before we looked at her writing. I began by asking friendly questions about her. She got right into It I guess she really wanted to talk. Since I am an older student myself, we found we had many things in common, and before long, the redness in her face went away

and she seemed to relax. She said she was 40 years old and had several children, Her husband had recently left her, and she was now working in the Women's Resource Center on campus. She said she was thinking about taking some classes to help her better her job capabilities, and then she got into some more personal confessions. "I was a cheerleader in high school and very outgoing," she said sadly. "I really <u>like</u> to be involved." Then she went on about how she had married a man who constantly put her down. She had written poetry and other things for people she knew on special occasions. But apparently, her husband had told her repeatedly that her writing was not good and that nobody would be interested in reading it. Hurt and discouraged after all these years, she sat there now bedra ; led looking, and very unhappy about herself. But the worst part was that she thought she couldn't write or that nobody would like what she had to say.

Suddenly, she pulled out several poems she had written and laid them carefully in front of me on the table. " Are these good enough to submit to the literary journal?' she asked shyly. Then she explained that the ladies she worked with told her they were good and that other people would enjoy them. She blushed again momentarily. she didn't want to admit that she was proud of them herself, but I could tell she was.

After explaining the circumstances under which she had written each poem, she read them to me, asking my opinion about which three she should turn in to be considered for publication. The poems were quite good, but a little too general in subject; how-ever, I told her they were nice and certainly good enough to send in, which was true. She beamed and went on to explain further about each one. I could see she was starting to feel better about herself and a little more confident. She was finally relaxed about the whole thing and even excited that someone was interested in her work.

Well, as the story goes on, I just

couldn't choose which of two poems was the best. We had picked two we liked for sure which seemed to have the most appeal for the potential audience, but we couldn't decide on the third. (The limit was three per student.) I decided to ask another writing assistant which she would pick out of the two. At this point, it all turned into a disaster. Ignorant of the situation, the other writing <u>assistant</u> started going over the poems in the usual manner, as she had been doing with other students' work all day. She made a few comments on the poetry and said in a kind manner, "These are a little bit too general; you need to be more specific for people to relate to what you are trying to say." That's when I blushed and turned bright red. I knew what would happen to this student, and it did. She returned to her state of anxiety, got up from her seat, gathered up her papers and mumbled that she didn't really want to turn them in anyway because she knew they weren't very good. She was hurt and just not ready for normal criticism; I was hurt for her, too. I tried to reassure her and explain that it was only one person's opinion, but to no avail. She stumbled out of the center with her papers in a heap in her arms, most likely never to return again.

I learned several good lessons from this experience. I realized that I shouldn't have involved an unknowing third party in such a delicate case without somehow explaining the circumstances. Also, I guess I didn't make clear to the other writing assistant what it was we wanted help with. It is important that we give the help and advice that the student asks for. I don't mean that we should pamper people with unmerited compliments or be dishonest and misleading, but sometimes we unintentionally go beyond what is wanted. Also, students are all at different levels of writing; not all are experts yet. But they never will be if they don't get a little kindness and support and encouragement to try again. A good rule would be that we need to treat each case as a unique situation and be careful not to damage those who are at a more <u>fragile</u> stage of their writing development.

I guess it could be said there is not any one way to assist students with their writing, but we should remember to be sensitive, thoughtful, and considerate. They won't improve if they don't write at all anymore. People didn't understand poets like Emily Dickinson or appreciate her poetry until she

was gone. We never know who we might be <u>dealing</u> with in the writing center. Perhaps we should treat them all as budding young artists with something important of themselves to give.

> Jo Ann Holbrook Peer
> Tutor
> Weber State College
> Ogden, Utah

Job Announcement

Writing Center Director. Twelve-month non-tenure track specialist position, renewable, beginning September 1990. Duties include hiring, training, scheduling, and supervising the tutors in the English Department Writing Center, administering and developing the computer program in the center, designing and supervising mini-classes, practice labs in the areas of reading and writing, and managing the budget. Ph. D. preferred, M.S. required plus related experience in writing center administration, basic reading and writing instruction, and computer lab management. Application dead-line: February 15, 1990. Interviews will be held at 1990 CCCC Conference. Send letter, vita sheet, and list of references to Nancy Wood, Chair, Search Committee, English Department, The University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, TX 76019. AA/EOE employer. Salary: $25, 000.

COMMUNICATION BRIEFINGS is a monthly eight-page publication containing a variety of brief articles that offer ideas and techniques to help you communicate effectively. Articles focus on topics such as structuring small group communication, handling public relations, resolving employee conflicts, designing publications, and raising funds. While the publication is oriented to readers in the business world, there are numerous techniques and suggestions useful for writing lab administration. Subscriptions are $59.00 for twelve issues. Write for a free sample to see if you'd be interested: COMMUNICATION BRIEFINGS, P.O. Box 587, Glassboro, NJ 08028 (800-888-4402. In NJ call 609-589-3503.)

Call for Papers

Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition

July 11-14, 1990
State College, PA

Walter Beale, Lester Faigley, Linda Flower, Winifred Horner, Kathleen Jamieson, Lee Odell, and John Trimbur will be among the featured speakers.

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

To submit a proposal or volunteer to chair a session or to learn more about the conference, write to John Harwood, Department of English, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802. (BITNET: JTH at PSUVM)

NWCA Presentation at CCCC

You have a date 6:30 to 7:45 p.m. on Thursday, March 22, 1990 at the Palmer House in Chicago. At the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), join the National Writing Center Association (NWCA) session focusing on the training of writing center staff.

Writing centers throughout the country are training peer, paraprofessional, and professional tutors regularly. Each institution has its own unique setting, goals, activities, materials and methods of evaluation. A panel of college and high school writing center directors will address these specific concerns in the training of staff. Presenters include Elizabeth Ackley, David Fletcher, Muriel Harris, Bonnie Sunstein, and Pamela Farrell, Chair.

Conference Announcement

CUNY Writing Centers Association

February 24, 1990
New York City
Borough of Manhattan
Community College

"The Power of Diversity: Writing in the Center"

Featured Speaker: Muriel Harris

For registration information, contact Gail Wood, Co-Chair, English Skills Center, College of Staten Island, Sunnyside Campus, 715 Ocean Terrace, Staten Island, New York 10301 (718-390-7794).

Writing Across the Curriculum: A Workshop on Program Planning

April 16, 1990
Troy, Alabama

This one-day workshop is for faculty and administrators interested in beginning a WAC program. The workshop topics will include the background of the WAC movement, administrative support and involvement needed, options in program design, options for selecting participating faculty, assessment of campus writing-to-learn practices, ongoing requirements of a WAC program, and resources for program planning.

For registration information, contact Joan Word, WAC Coordinator, Wright Hall Suite 133, Troy State University, Troy, Alabama 36082 (205-566-8112, ext. 3349).

Ethics in the Writing Lab: Tutoring Under
the Honor Code

"This isn't going to be easy," I thought to myself as I quickly scanned the first page of Thomas' paper. "He's completely missing the symbolism of the wall in the poem."

Thomas was my hardest-working tutee. He was energetic, eager, and exhibited an intense desire to improve. That's what made the situation so difficult.

"Do you see anything else in this pas-sage?" I asked him again. He was writing a paper on Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall," for his English 37 class. The outcome of this paper would determine whether or not he'd pass the course. He wanted so desperately to write a solid paper, and I wanted him to write a good one, too- maybe just as much.

We quickly addressed the several grammatical problems in Thomas' paper, but he had other, more serious deficiencies. I had studied the poem the previous semester, and knew that Thomas was <u>missing</u> several key points in his analysis of the poem. His paper was due in two days, and Thomas had a long, long way to go.

"How would you explain, in your own words, what Frost is trying to say with this passage?" I asked him a bit more impatiently than I had intended. Thomas took the book from between us and stared at it for a long moment. He was growing more frustrated by the minute but just couldn't seem to see what I thought was obvious symbolism and meaning.

At this point, I realized that Thomas sensed he was missing something. He knew I was trying to make him see an important point, and that I wasn't going to reveal it to him.

"How can I make it any plainer to him?" I thought. "l saw the symbolism the first time I read the poem without any trouble at all. He just can't seem to pick it up. Am I not explaining this very well?"

I changed gears and flipped a few pages to Frost's "The Gift Outright" and had Thomas read the poem. ' h e idea of a gift is pretty

central to this poem," I told him. "Frost weaves several different connotations of 'giving' into the poem. Try to find a few of these connotations." Thomas read the poem several times, but the furrow in his brow only seemed to grow deeper than before.

"I see what you're saying about this poem, but I don't see what it has to do with my paper," he said. "You know it's due in two days, don't you? What's the matter with what I wrote? Is it wrong? Tell me what I should say if it's not right! "

I looked helplessly at Thomas, then at the poem. I couldn't think of any more questions to ask which would help him see what I saw. I didn't know what step to take next.

"It would be so easy just to tell him what the wall symbolizes," I thought. "Then at least he would have a start in the right direction. No ... I can't just tell him the answer .. . that wouldn't be right. But if he doesn't get a passing grade on this paper, he fails the course. He's worked so hard ...."

Every writing lab tutor faces his or her share of difficulties with the tutoring process, from "breaking the ice" with tutees to dealing with all types of writing problems. Beyond these problems associated with tutoring, however, almost every writing lab tutor must deal with ethical dilemmas which arise from peer tutoring. The example above focuses on one such ethical problem- to what degree does a tutor's role extend to helping with the ideas and content of an assignment- and portrays the moral dilemma that accompanies such a problem.

ln the tutoring process, tutors inevitably reach an imaginary line which establishes an ethical boundary. On one side of this line, the tutor's actions are justifiably ethical because they allow the tutee to learn and develop original insights. The tutor guides his or her tutee in this pursuit with appropriate questions, encouragement, and any available re-sources. The assistance a tutor offers can help a tutee connect thoughts and ideas, which

helps provide a true learning experience. On the other side of this ethical boundary, the tutor's actions can no longer be considered ethical because he or she impedes the tutee's academic progress; whether by doing the work for the tutee or by taking away his or her chance to discover insights independently, the tutor robs the tutee of intellectual growth and development. When a tutee is "spoon-fed" knowledge or is not given the opportunity to make original intellectual discoveries, he or she does not grow as a thinker. After all, the purpose of higher education is not simply to acquire knowledge, but to learn how to acquire knowledge. How would a tutee benefit if he or she were told directly what Frost's wall-the central concept of the poem- symbolized, and then simply incorporated that concept verbatim in a paper? At the same <u>time,</u> how does a tutor know when his or her actions are no longer helping but hurting a tutee? This, then, is the ethical dilemma.

A set of tutoring procedures which derive from a set of ethical guidelines- guide-lines which are embedded in the operation of the writing center- can help the tutor become sensitive to ethical considerations. The tutor defines his or her role by the tutoring procedures at his or her command; thus, the tutor who follows procedures based on ethical considerations consciously includes ethics in the perception of his or her role as a tutor and is better prepared to see the ethical boundary.

At Lawrence University, a set of ethical guidelines has developed through the institution of an Honor Code. In 1962, students and faculty established this code of honor to maintain an atmosphere in which the entire community could interact within a set of ethics. The Code helped lay an ethical foundation for the entire operation of the university-including the Writing Lab. The Lawrence Honor Code states, simply, that "No Lawrence student will unfairly advance his or her own academic performance, nor will he or she in any way intentionally limit or impede the academic performance or intellectual pursuits of his or her fellow students." Every student who is admitted to the university receives instruction about the Code. After fully understanding it, the student signs his or her name to the Code as an affirmation to abide by its stipulations.

The Honor Code fosters an atmosphere of trust at the University because students

agree, in effect, not to cheat in any way or impede anyone from the pursuit of knowledge. This understanding and trust allows professors the freedom, for example, to administer unproctored or take-home exams with the assurance each student will abide by the Code. Administration of the Code is the responsibility of the Lawrence Honor Council, comprised of ten students and the Dean of Students. The Honor Council educates the community about the Code's stipulations and hears cases of alleged Honor Code violations.

Because the Honor Code affects all aspects of campus activity at Lawrence, the Writing Lab adopted certain procedures in order to operate completely within the parameters of the Code. As a result of these unique procedures, an ethical framework has gradually developed in the Lab, allowing tutors to deal effectively with ethical dilemmas as well as with every-day tutoring. Tutors understand that their role and the tutoring procedures they use must reflect the ethics outlined by the Honor Code.

All students are required to reaffirm the Honor Code on written work. A student must sign "1 reaffirm the Honor Code," followed by his or her signature on every paper, exam, lab report, etc. This reaffirmation reminds the student of his or her obligation to the Code, and reminds the professor of the student's commitment to completing work ethically. Students working in the Writing Lab must also indicate that they received assistance from a tutor. The tutee simply notes that a tutor helped with the completion of the assignment. The student's reaffirmation of the Honor Code on that assignment is his or her claim that all of the work not attributed to another person is, indeed, his or her own. This procedure not only satisfies the provisions of the Honor Code, but teaches an ethic. After all, the ethical procedure outside of the classroom is to attribute assistance received to the appropriate parties. Professors and authors are expected to credit colleagues with whom they develop their ideas and analyses, and also any other assistance which goes into the formation of a particular work. In the Lawrence Writing Lab, the same ethical practice is followed- partially because of the restrictions of the Honor Code but, more importantly, because it helps a tutor become more conscious of his or her role and more sensitive to the needs of the tutee.

In the Lawrence Writing Lab, a student may be either faculty-referred or self-referred. That is, a professor may encourage a student to use the Writing Lab, or a student may seek assistance in the Lab on his or her own. In either case, the tutoring process begins with a faculty contact and faculty consent for the student to work in the Lab. A faculty member must sign a form granting permission to the student to work in the Lab for a specified period of time. This form is kept on file at the Lab for the duration of the tutorial. According to his or her needs, the student is then matched with an available tutor. Next, the tutor schedules a conference among the student, the professor involved, and him or herself to discuss what aspects of the student's writing warrant the most attention and what the focus of the tutorial sessions will be. This procedure satisfies the Honor Code implication that the student has a duty to report, and the professor a right to know, what assistance the student will receive. As a result, the tutoring session begins with an emphasis on satisfying an ethical obligation, which again helps the student become more sensitive to the ethical requirements of the tutoring situation. In addition, this procedure provides unique advantages for both tutor and tutee.

Occasionally, students are intimidated by their professors and may hesitate to seek assistance alone; the tutor can be the link. The tutor can help a tutee overcome apprehension about seeking help from a professor outside of the classroom. Because the tutor arranges the initial meeting with the professor, the tutor "breaks the ice" for the tutee and demonstrates how beneficial such an arrangement can be. Thus, the student may be more willing to communicate with that professor or any other instructor. In addition, the professor can indicate what areas of the student's writing need the most work, and outline for the tutor ways in which these problems might best be addressed. Occasionally, tutorial sessions include the faculty member as well, in response to the concerns voiced at the initial meeting. This three-way contact opens the lines of communication and funnels the necessary attention to the student.

Tutors keep detailed records of each tutoring session outlining what objectives they accomplished. These notes, kept on file in the Lab, help chart the progress of the tutorial and also help the tutor pick up where the last session left off In addition, tutors submit periodic reports to the student's professor and academic advisor. These reports, written at the middle and end of every academic term, detail what has occurred in the tutorial, what progress the tutee has made, and what plans the tutor has formed for future sessions. In this way, the Honor Code stipulations are fulfilled and the instructor can periodically monitor the scope and direction of the entire tutorial process.

Each fall, the Writing Lab and the Honor Council jointly present a documentation workshop to all new students with the purpose of fostering a greater awareness of the dangers and pitfalls of plagiarism. An overhead projector is used during the workshops to show examples of plagiarism and to explain common plagiarism problems. Many students believe that if a piece of information can be found in more than one source, it is common knowledge and does not need to be cited. Many are completely unaware of the definition of plagiarism or the procedure for proper documentation. Amazingly, some students come to Lawrence believing that copying material without documentation is not unethical. Because the Honor Code places emphasis on a student's "making a work his or her own," the problem of plagiarism must be addressed. Both during the workshop, and within the first few weeks of school, students learn several accepted forms of documentation and why proper documentation is essential. As a result, students learn to take ownership for their work and give credit where due; they learn how to take others' ideas and use them to form original thoughts and insights.

While the ethical guidelines established at Lawrence through the Honor Code help foster a sensitivity to ethics in tutoring, the training each new tutor undergoes also helps kindle an "ethical consciousness." Training sessions focus on minimal-input tutoring: tutors ask questions rather than give answers. The emphasis of the tutorial session is to keep the pen or keyboard in the student's hand, to <u>minimize</u> the amount of tutor input into the tutee's ideas and inspirations. As the tutor in our hypothetical example portrays, tutors under the Lawrence University Honor Code are particularly attentive to the danger of impeding the academic process of their tutees by denying them the opportunity of intellectual discovery and learning.

Thus, if the Honor Code were removed from the University framework, the ethical procedures would remain in the Writing Lab. In addition to providing operational advantages, they have inspired an ethical attitude. In the Writing Lab, the procedures- while based on ethical guidelines- become an important tool for the Lawrence tutors because they help them with the procedural and ethical problems associated with tutoring. Beyond the stipulations of the Honor Code, the procedures in the Lawrence Lab help a tutor define what behavior is ethically a part of his or her role.

Fringe benefits have also been realized with Lawrence's unique combination of ethics and procedure. At any university, professors naturally tend to question whether tutors can be trusted. As a result of the procedures followed at Lawrence, the University Writing Lab has gained the all-Important respect and support of the faculty. Through frequent contact with tutors as part of the tutoring process, professors know the tutors and under-stand their plight. They encourage the efforts of the Writing Lab by joining the staff and working with the tutors, rather than over-seeing them. By being involved with the tutoring process, the professors often take more interest in the tutorial sessions and the student's progress than they would If they were removed from the situation. Professors are also more willing to encourage other students to seek help or improvement at the Lab as a result.

Although Lawrence's Honor Code may be unique, the Lawrence environment is not. The ethical sensitivity found in the Lawrence Writing Lab is the product of a simple set of guidelines that can be followed in any institution: recognizing professors' "right to know" their students' efforts, helping students without hindering them, and recruiting the faculty in the process. These guidelines will benefit the student, the tutor, the professor, and the Writing Center.

The procedures enacted at the Lawrence Writing Lab were a direct result of the Lawrence Honor Code, yet the benefits they provide can be advantageous to any Writing Center. The procedures are not only beneficial to the operation of the Center, but they also help establish the tutor's ethical consciousness, enhancing his or her ability to help a student.

"I'm very sorry, Thomas, but I can't simply tell you what you should say in your paper," I said, moving the paper and the book of poetry toward him. "I think at this point we should call your professor and arrange a meeting between the three of us. At our last meeting with her, she said to call if we ran into any trouble, and I think she can help us get a better perspective on this poem."

Thomas looked slowly up from his paper and shrugged his shoulders.

"You're right," he said. "she's been very helpful up to this point. I feel like I'm missing something in the poem that you're not going to tell me, but I don't want you to tell me. I want to find it out myself."

I smiled and reached for the phone. "Look up her number for me, will you?"

Jennifer Herek and Mark Niquette Peer
Tutors Lawrence University
AnnlPtnn WT

The Life and Times of a Writing Center Technical Coordinator

Well, I thought I had seen everything when it came to starting a writing center, but then the computers came. And within a few weeks I was certain once again that I had seen everything when it came to starting up a computer facility within a writing center. But today it happened! It really happened: I HAVE SEEN IT ALL. Nothing will ever surprise me in the Computer Room after today.

Well, you see it was like this. I was really up a tree, and not Tree86, not even VTree. We were committed to running this comparative study of two style checkers. Did I say committed? We should have been, rather than agree to producing preliminary results

within a month ... and that only three months after the hardware had been delivered. But as I always say, I'm nothing if not agreeable. So when the boss lady said, "Run the study so we can use the software," I said, "Okey dokey." And then reality began to hit me- and the software.

So as I say, I was sitting at a double floppy machine- does this give you any idea of what we were up against- punching keys and accessing directories like a mad woman so that I could modify one of the marvelous style checkers which comes, need I say it, on three damned diskettes! Anyway, I was trying to pare it down to one, or at the most two diskettes, so that the subjects could manage the study in less than God's lifetime, and I had my program diskette in Drive B and my data diskette in Drive A and had implemented the program with the proper command.

Hurray! It worked! I could now expect that at least a decent number of the subjects

would finish the study before reaching unmeasurable stress levels. I was thrilled and all ready to show my creation to the boss, who at that moment was standing directly over my right shoulder. Turning to her with a grin, I pulled out my data diskette triumphantly when I gagged!

There on its back, tiny legs still wriggling, a ROACH lay near the hub of the 5 and 1/4" diskette. Not wanting to be upstaged by an insect, I flourished the diskette and said, Well, Boss, we really debugged that one! "

Margaret-Rose Marek Texas
Christian University Fort Worth,
Texas