

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

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

Volume 14, Number 7

March, 1990

...from the editor...

While assembling this month's newsletter, I noticed a common concern in several of the articles, the tutor's role as counselor. With that reminder, I asked about attitudes toward writing when I met with a group of people from the community who had registered for tutorial help in our Writing Lab. Despite years of hearing students de-scribe their anxieties, I was unprepared for the floodgates of emotion that poured out that night. One person described co-workers who publicly belittle her writing; another confessed to avoiding any move up the corporate ladder that would involve writing; someone else told us he put off graduate school because of writing inadequacies.

We talk about treating the "walking wounded" among our students, but there's clearly another constituency in our communities who can benefit from the supportive, collaborative environment of tutorials. And I was reminded of how important it is not to let our students leave the lab with debilitating fears that will haunt them long after they've forgotten composition classes.

Muriel Harris, editor

....inside....

**Writing Center Directors:
Why Faculty Status Fits**
•M.A. Elliott 1

**The Hurricane and the
Writing Lab**
•Bonnie Devet
and tutors 5

Conference Calendar 6

Tutoring Ties
•Amy Walker and
Gail Corso 7

Tutors' Column
•Angellique Galskis 9

Announcements 10

**The Library Information Aide:
Connecting Libraries, Writing
Centers, and Classrooms**
•Susan Nugent 13

**Writing Center
Directors: Why
Faculty Status Fits**

Certainly you're swamped with scheduling and perpetually pestered with paperwork, but anyone could see, I'm sure, that as a writing center director you are first, foremost, and above all else a teacher. Right? So we thought as we set out to develop the rationale for upgrading this long ignored position at our community college from its mistaken assignment as lab assistant to the English Division to the more appropriate and definitely more accurate status of English faculty.

Nearly a year after developing the first recommendation for making this a faculty position, however, we were surprised by the administration's response: The position would be upgraded to professional/technical support staff, but not to faculty. Faculty positions can be given only to those whose primary function is teaching, came the response, while the primary function of this position must surely be to supervise students

one more lab by our administration.

6. The job title and description of the writing center directorship should match the actual qualifications needed and duties performed in the position. This sounds like a statement of the obvious, but I have discovered that a single interpretation of it is far from obvious. If, for example, an institution decides that the directorship should be a support staff position, then the initial assumption is that the person filling the position needn't have a graduate degree, professional training in composition theory, or teaching experience.

Yet what if the institution includes these qualifications in the job description but classifies the position as support staff? I believe it is fair to ask if such a system does not exploit applicants in this situation by requiring faculty qualifications without offering faculty status, pay, or benefits.

Why, then, would those with faculty qualifications apply for such a position if they believe they could be exploited? Our institution provides a clear illustration of this situation. Because it operates on a high part-time to full-time faculty ratio, many part-time instructors survive on low wages and no benefits as they wait, usually years, for full-time positions to open. These faculty are as interested in effective teaching as their full-time colleagues and in most cases are equally qualified, so such a "faculty-like" position with reasonable pay and benefits appears more attractive than their current, tenuous waiting pattern. The last two writing center directors our institution has hired for this support staff position have been part-time faculty members, and there is little reason to believe that institutions will have any trouble continuing this practice.

As Muriel Harris reminds us in her SLATE Starter Sheet entitled "Writing Centers":

The National Writing Centers Association statement strongly advocates that the director have faculty or administrative status. Appropriate preparation, adequate compensation for administrative duties, and clearly articulated standards for evaluation of the director's performance must be worked

out so that the director has a frame of reference for the job.

Appropriate preparation for directing a writing center must certainly include training in composition theory and teaching experience, which by definition places the position in faculty or administrative status. In terms of administrative and other duties, institutions might have specific requirements by which their director can most effectively meet their center's needs and for which the director should be compensated accordingly. A writing center director at our institution, for example, must be available to work during our two summer sessions. This director would probably continue to be most effective and fresh in the job if allowed (read "required" for contract purposes) to teach one composition class in the fall and spring and perhaps one in the summer in order to keep tuned in to classroom practices, other faculty, and current texts in use, with appropriate compensation in time and staff for the writing center. Evaluation standards for the position might have to be developed anew, but with writing centers booming at universities, colleges, and secondary schools across the country, models for developing such standards are in ready supply.

A national survey of writing center directors to establish their preparation, status, compensation, and the standards by which they are evaluated would be of great value to all of us attempting to develop the most effective centers of learning possible for student writers at our institutions. Perhaps such information from other institutions would help all of us remind our administrators that writing centers have much more to add to the effectiveness and status of our institutions than they will cost in the long run. They can do so, however, only if administrators are willing to invest now in the quality of personnel needed to build this effectiveness and, eventually, status.

M. A. Elliott
El Paso Community College El
Paso, Texas

Work Cited

Harris, Muriel. "Writing Centers." SLATE Starter Sheet. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, Sept. 1988.

Position Available

Writing Center Director

Position: Current duties involve training peer tutors, leading workshops for students, working innovatively with faculty across the curriculum. Opportunity to develop a writing program that presently has strong student, faculty, and administrative support. Three-year renewable position; adjunct appointment as lecturer in academic department, probably teaching one course each semester.

Qualifications: Master's or Ph.D., with experience teaching in and administering writing programs. A commitment to implement effective instruction college-wide.

How to apply: Send letter and curriculum vitae to
John Lemly, Chair
Writing Center Search Committee
Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, MA 01075-1484
(413-538-2146)

Applications received by early March will be seriously considered. Interviews will be held at the 1990 CCCC conference in Chicago.

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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Address correction requested

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The Library Information Aide: Connecting Libraries, Writing Centers, and Classrooms

Coach called on Thursday, "Susan, I need your help. One of my basketball players has a research paper due Monday." The staff of the Writing Center is used to such calls. What concerned me most was that this basket-ball player and I had worked together weekly on his writing. However, he had not once mentioned a research paper. Meeting Michael, I asked why we hadn't worked on this paper in our last few sessions. Michael responded, "But I thought research meant library work. What's that got to do with writing. The Writing Center staff recognized the problem for the Michaels of the campus (and there are many). After discussing the many facets of this problem, the Writing Center staff decided to create a position of Library Information Aide (LIA). Trained student tutors filling this position help students throughout the writing-researchwriting (WRW) process.

The LIA Program has as its primary purpose to help freshmen and non-traditional students develop their research and writing abilities. The Library Information Aide offers one-on-one conferencing for students who request help with a research assignment given in an introductory course. This help includes teaching the students the necessary research skills, integrating the researching and writing to maximize discovery throughout the process, and conferencing with students on their drafts.

In developing an approach to filling this objective, the Writing Center staff decided to:

1. Work with the library in the training of the Library Information Aides.
2. Target specific classes each semester.
3. Involve faculty in this process.
4. Use this program to make connections with students, faculty, librarians, and Writing Center staff.

Training the Library Information Aides

Because both the library and the Writing Center are faced with students not under-

standing the many connections within the research and writing process, we decided to work together in addressing the problem. One of the reference librarians agreed to train all peer (and faculty) tutors in mapping research strategies. After three sessions with the entire Writing Center staff, she continued working with our LIAs who now turn to her for any research-related questions.

In training the LIAs, the reference librarian teaches our LIAs to help students efficiently and effectively tackle research given a specific task. The emphasis is on research concepts. For instance, the importance of browsing as part of the research process is stressed. Such browsing needs to include time looking through the card catalogue, the various indexes, and the periodical section before a research topic is finalized. Research is seen as a series of choices to be made, a problem to be solved. The researcher needs to determine how best to solve the problem. For example the researcher must decide in light of the topic and assignment what books or periodicals, trade journals or scholarly journals, are most appropriate. As the researcher makes these decisions, she can literally map her work in the library to use her time wisely. This conceptual approach to research is far more effective than the typical library tour over-viewing too many reference books in too much detail with no real purpose.

As the LIAs learn this approach to library research, they need practice time. Each LIA builds into her Writing Center work schedule time for trying this conceptual approach on a number of topics in a variety of fields. With practice, the LIA develops confidence. The LIAs are encouraged to continue working with the reference librarians, turning to them whenever they need help. In this spirit of cooperation, the LIAs learn to introduce students to the reference librarians, the people who can best answer more sophisticated student questions about the library.

Concurrently, the LIAs are trained by staff at the Writing Center in a writing process approach to tutoring peers. In addition to our peer tutors, the Writing Center staff consists of

Tutoring Ties

Background information: This scenario represents an interchange between a novice tutor and a student. This is probably one of the first sessions with a student, and so our scenario on the surface represents how the tutor interacts with the tutee about a particular writing assignment. But more importantly, it represents the internal dialogue going on within the tutor. This internal dialogue will be represented by a third voice in the script - to be heard only by the tutor, and to be seen only in the active choices the tutor makes.

Internal Voice: This might be my tutee. She looks like she's so organized. I hope we have a good session. The secretary has pointed her in my direction. I guess I'll stand up and greet her and try to make her feel comfortable.

Tutor: Hi! Are you Gail?

Internal Voice: I sound so phony. Meeting people for the first time is always so awkward.

Tutee: Hi! Yes.

Tutor: Well, it's nice to meet you. I'm your tutor, Amy.

Internal Voice: Skip the small talk, and let's find out what brings what's-hername-Gail? here.

Tutor: Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

Tutee: I'm a sophomore and I'm undecided about my major.

Internal Voice: I wonder what she's going to choose.

Tutor: How have your classes been going this semester, Gail?

Internal Voice: She's pulling something out of her notebook. I wonder what she's working on. It looks like a lot of notes. It looks as if she has done a lot of pre-writing.

Tutee: Well, I like my classes, especially my

philosophy class, but I'm having a problem right now with a particular writing assignment.

Internal Voice: PANIC! I can't believe that my first tutee would come in with a PHILOSOPHY paper. What am I going to do? Aristotle, Plato and all those thinkers confuse me. Why couldn't she be writing on an experience that changed her life, or some-thing that we talked about in Writing Lab practices. Calm down. Let's see about this assignment

Tutor: Well, Gail, tell me about your assignment. What do you want to accomplish?

Internal Voice: I've assumed it's a paper, and I forgot to ask her when it's due, and oh, I have to remember the communication triad. Well, at least she's looking comfortable; I'm ready to die.

Tutee: I'm really interested in my topic, but I can't seem to get beyond the first few lines. I've done all kinds of research, but now I can't use any of it. I just can't focus my ideas.

Internal Voice: She seems to have written a lot of notes. I wonder what kind of philosophic concern she is interested in. I hope I can understand her ideas.

Tutor: What have you been writing about?

Internal Voice: Why is it taking so long for her to express her ideas?

Tutee: I've got this great idea about the problems created concerning pre-marital sex. You know the Catholic Church has a different view than society. It creates problems.

Internal Voice: This is for a philosophy course? I can't believe it. What happened to the tree-fell-in-the-woods hypothesis?

nately, upon returning, she found her apartment completely flooded, with every item of clothing and every piece of furniture destroyed. The client did not even know where she would live in order to complete the school term. Such a hopeless tale moved the tutor so much that she wanted "to hug the client" and tell her all would be "all right." But, if the tutor had expressed her emotional engagement, the distraught client would have probably broken into tears and not completed the writing. To prevent the client from crying and to help the student cope with the assignment, the tutor focused on the essay's structure and grammar, even though referring to paragraphs and comma splices did seem frivolous under the circumstances. This tutor, trying to balance the emotional with the objective side of tutoring, effectively led the client to complete the assignment.

Another tutor also discovered the emotional side of tutoring, but in her case it was her own emotions, not the client's. Her tutee's Hugo paper repeated no tragedy or loss. Instead, the writer had avoided the storm by fleeing south to Florida, where he enjoyed a water-skiing vacation. When he returned, his property was undamaged. Possessing such luck, the writer showed no sympathy or understanding for the vast losses which teachers and friends endured. The tutor found the essay "sickening." And being offended by the client's "too-glib" attitude, the tutor feared that her feelings would interfere with the tutorial. To refrain from demonstrating her annoyance at the client's insensitivity, the tutor deliberately focused on organization and grammar. It was certainly not the place of this tutor, or any tutor for that matter, to let her reaction to a client's attitude impede a tutorial. The boundary of the "intimacy and immediacy of the tutor-student relationship" (Simard 204) had been reached and defined in this tutorial.

Of course, we tutors at the Writing Lab of the College of Charleston hope no other writing centers and their tutees experience the destruction of a 135 mile-per-hour hurricane or other natural disasters. If they do, these labs will probably see that emotional essays generated by such experiences remind us tutors that we perform a balancing act in a tutorial, providing emotional help when needed but also being objective when we must. Even as we play this vital role for our clients, we are also offering them a place for solace and cleansing, key

features when writing about devastating experiences. Thus, in a small way, we tutors would like to think our writing lab has contributed to the recovery from Hurricane Hugo.

Bonnie Devet with the tutors:
Ericka Burroughs, Lydia Hopson, Donna Kenyon, Trisha Martin, Cheryl Sims, Hope Norment, Liz Young, Prof. Sylvia Gamboa, Prof. Kathy Haney
College of Charleston
Charleston, SC

Work Cited

Simard, Rodney. "Assessing a New Professional Role: The Writing Center Tutor." Writing Center Theory and Administration. Ed. G. Olson. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1984. 197-205.

**Calendar
for
Writing Center Associations
(WCAs)**

- March 22:** National WCA Special Interest Session, at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, in Chicago.
Contact: Pamela Farrell, Red Bank Regional High School, 12 Essex Drive, Little Silver, NJ 07739 (201-842-8000).
- April 7:** Mid-Atlantic WCA, at Widener U., Chester, PA
Contact: Sandra Gamble, Humanities, Widener U., Chester, PA 19013 (215-499-4332).
- Apr 20-21:** East Central WCA, at Indiana State U., Terre Haute, IN
Contact: Peter Carino, Corky Dahl, or Brenda Ameter, Writing Center, Indiana State U., Terre Haute, IN 47809.
- May 4:** North Shore Writing Center Conference, in Illinois.
Contact: Betty Brockelman or Paula Williams, Maine Township High School West, 1755 S. Wolf Road, Des Plaines, IL 60018.

say. After a lengthy discussion, I stumbled on to the right question: How do you feel when you write?

Alice didn't even have to think about the answer. "I feel like I'm being examined by a doctor." I didn't really understand Alice, but I understood this feeling immediately.

Alice's doctor may have been the rules of a past English teacher, her own inner editor gone out of control, or a belief that she simply could not write. But Alice had no problems speaking about how writing made her feel. No one could tell her the answers were not correct and speaking does not follow a rigid set of rules. When Alice left, I did not have the writing sample I needed for evaluation. What I did have was a very good idea of Alice's attitude about writing.

Thanks to Alice, a discussion of how writing feels has become my tool for discovering something about the student on which to build future sessions. It has also become a painless way for me to obtain the writing sample I need to evaluate my student and his needs.

My approach is nearly a trick, almost magic. Every student has something to say when asked, "How does writing feel?" Inspired by Alice's original description, I ask him to create a simile by filling in the blank: "Writing makes me feel like _____." The word "like" seems to bring out creativity and avoid short answers such as "angry" or "anxious." My student doesn't know that this simile will become the introductory sentence of her first writing for me. I do. So, as the student speaks, I write down what she says. I listen to her describe, and when she is rolling along in response to my requests for additional information, I quietly turn the paper toward her and point to it. It isn't a blank piece of paper. It isn't intimidating. The student's own words are staring back at him, waiting to be expanded.

Angelique Gaiskis Eastern Illinois
University Charleston, IL

**12th Annual Conference
of the
East Central Writing Centers Assn.**

April 20-21, 1990

"Bridging Learning Communities"

**Indiana State University
Terre Haute, Indiana**

For information or registration materials,
contact Peter Carino, Coralyn Dahl, or Brenda
Ametter, Department of English, Indiana State
University, Terre Haute, IN 47809.

**2nd Annual Conference
of the
Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Assn.**

**April 7, 1990
Widener University
Chester, PA**

**"Writing Centers: Teaching, Technology,
and Research"**

Contact: Sandra Gamble, Writing Center,
Widener University, Chester, PA 19013 (215-
499-4332).

**New York College Learning
Skills Assn.**

**13th Annual Symposium on
Developmental Education**

**April 22-24, 1990
Ellenville, NY
Nevele Hotel**

For registration information, contact Dr. Kathleen Schatzberg-Smith, Asst. Dean of Instruction, Rockland Community College, 145 College Road, Suffern, NY 10901 (914-356-4650. Ext. 261 or 210).

Tutoring Ties

(cont. from page 8)

freewrite about each point. And I will be back in one minute. We can talk about your freewrite then. Will that be okay?

Tutee: Great?

Internal Voice: Now that Gail is writing to think, I'll just get a tutor form from the secretary, and fill out the heading for her. Before she leaves, I'll ask her to complete it for us.

Tutor: Okay. Gail, let's hear what you have.

Tutee: Well, it's pretty rough. It seems that responsibility to the priest means a quality about a person, able to care for oneself and another, maybe like being able to do what one has to so as never to disappoint the other person. My friends don't see responsibility the same way. If one partner supplies the birth control, then safe sex suggests responsibility, But also, long term commitment seems to be important to Catholics. I guess love is important too. Also, one person's commitments, The time element is forever, not just for now.

Tutor: Well now, you have lots to talk about. Why don't you create a double list here. One column might be for the Catholic Church's definition, and then maybe, another list could be for your friends' viewpoints. Is that how you define society?

Tutee: That's a great idea. I'll start with what I have scribbled here. I'm going to use my friends' viewpoints to explain what the two books have already said. And from the freewrite and my notes scribbled on the chart, I'm beginning to see what I really want to say.

(As the tutee begins to create lists for both sides of the page, the tutor thinks:)

Internal Voice: This is a good start. But before Gail leaves, I'd like her to talk a bit about what direction this paper is going in and how she can keep a handle on her information. I'll ask her to write down her ideas, then have her fill out the lab's form, and

then I'll accompany her to the secretary to make sure that she can get back in as soon as she is ready, It was really good working with. Gail. I can't believe she's so involved in writing about her topic.

(After about ten minutes have elapsed, and Amy has peeked over Gail's shoulder to see how she's doing, Amy reminds Gail of the time.)

Tutor: Gail, our time is nearly over. What I'd like you to do is to tell me what you may have discovered about your topic in writing this list,

Tutee: Well, it looks like the Catholic Church wants all three conditions to work at once, and society says it's okay if maybe only one of these conditions is met. And society accepts as an example of responsibility that one partner is using birth control. I guess I'll have to be really careful about how I define terms. There seems to be a real difference in how both groups define spiritual and erotic love. I'll look more carefully at what I have to come up with how the two groups agree or differ, and then see how the three qualities might fit into the paper. I know I'll need to come in again, but I think I have a good start here, and maybe, I'll just have to see if it makes sense to someone else.

Tutor: Okay, Well, write your ideas down. And next time you come in, I hope that you have gotten further into your paper. Before you leave, please fill out this information form. You can stop in whenever, but if you make an appointment, you will be guaranteed an appointment with a tutor.

Tutee: I definitely will come back, Amy. I didn't realize that I had so much to say. Will I be able to work with you again, Amy?

Internal Voice: Great! I can't wait to see how these ideas evolve. I hope Gail can come in later this week with more on paper. She seems to have it together, but I'd still like to read her paper.

in a lab setting. The position's title, therefore, would be lab supervisor.

In all fairness, I have to acknowledge that this upgrade from classified staff to professional/technical support staff does improve the position somewhat. Our writing center director (or lab supervisor) now makes a few hundred dollars more a year (though clearly not faculty wages). I'm sure she has moved up a couple of rungs on an organizational chart kept in scrupulous order somewhere at the college. She may even be able to hire lab assistants in the future to help her with the ongoing training of the twenty tutors at three campuses that she must teach to tutor over 3,500 students a year (most of whom will visit the writing center several times each) in all aspects of the writing process.

So what difference does it really make whether her official title is faculty or staff?

Ah, Shakespeare: What's in a name? She whom we call a writing center director by any other name would be as effective. Or would she?

Unfortunately, in our highly stratified academic systems, job descriptions can determine (and often restrict) the general quality of an applicant pool, the allotment of time and resources for a particular position, and even the level of professional respect and cooperation awarded a job holder who, in many larger systems, is known to the majority of her colleagues by job title alone. In other words, the titles attached to positions in such systems have a direct effect on who applies for and finally fills positions, what resources they receive to help them fulfill their responsibilities, and how they (and thus the services they provide) are perceived by their colleagues.

I realize that this is not news to any administrator, and that our administration did not randomly assign the support staff title to our writing center directorship. This being so, I can only assume that the information we provided our administrators did not make clear enough to them what was perhaps too obvious to those of us connected with the writing center: As with any teaching position—some more than others—administrative and supervisory duties are required of a writing center director, but they are secondary to the essential role of teaching. In the hope of giving other writing

center advocates who have yet to fight this battle the benefit of our hindsight, I'd like to outline here some of the reasons we presented to our administration for making the writing center directorship a faculty position, and other reasons we only wish we had presented:

1. The writing center serves as a support facility for all composition and literature classes, and for classes from across the curriculum that use writing in any way. The writing center director must have a strong background in composition theory and a clear practical knowledge of the institution's general application of that theory in order to provide this support effectively. The best way to obtain such practical knowledge is through teaching, and a writing center director should certainly have classroom teaching experience.
2. A writing center director needs to keep abreast of current composition and writing center research and procure resource materials for the writing center and staff on an ongoing basis. In addition, the writing center provides an ideal setting for the study of one-to-one learning by a director capable of doing academic research. This need for continuing research or other development in their fields is a common requirement of faculty at progressive colleges and universi-

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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.

ties and is one demand that distinguishes faculty from most support staff positions at such institutions.

3. Most writing centers are heavily dependent on peer tutors because of the outstanding service and understanding they are able to provide their fellow students at a relatively low cost to the institution. This system is beneficial not only to the count-less students who are helped by peer tutors in their quest to become better writers, but to the peer tutors as well, who desire and need to continue to learn about the writing process and one-to-one learning.

The writing center director is responsible for teaching tutoring methods, composition theory, and the reasoning behind the basics of grammar and mechanics to her tutors. Obviously, the tutors' success in helping other students depends in large part upon the director's ability to convey this information clearly, add to it continually, and evaluate the tutors' ability to put it to use-the basic requirements of a faculty member in any field. In fact, the situation provides an excellent opportunity for a credit class in education or even composition theory with a built-in practicum, an opportunity I'm sure many institutions with faculty directors have begun to take advantage of already.

4. A significant aspect of a writing center director's job is to maintain a dialogue with the faculty about individual student needs, faculty expectations, and writing center concerns. A writing center director with faculty status comes to this dialogue as an equal, thus easing the development of the professional rapport essential to a support system based on the uniqueness of each writer and writing situation. A classroom faculty member is much more likely to discuss with another faculty member the teaching approaches she has tried with a particular student, the problems she has faced, and the approaches she believes could help the student in the one-to-one setting of the writing center, because she believes the fellow faculty member begins with the same general base of knowledge as she. If she is talking to a lab supervisor, however, the chances are great that she will expect merely supervision of drill work- if she bothers to use the center at all.

Most writing centers, like ours, have worked long and hard to overcome the erroneous notion that we exist to supervise drill work and walk students through note-book exercises. Faculty status ensures that a writing center director has the background and experience needed to establish the center's credibility as a support facility for students attempting to increase their skills in all elements of the writing process, including high-level thinking skills needed in classes across the curriculum. Faculty status also helps the director establish herself as a part of the overall faculty information network, which in turn helps the center to gain and maintain credibility throughout the institution.

5. Although the wish to keep job titles consistent among lab directors at a single institution is a reasonable one, writing centers can differ in such elemental ways from the other labs that such consistency would not be reasonable. The characteristics that most clearly distinguish the writing center from other labs at our institution are:

- *a strong commitment to the primary use of one-to-one tutoring rather than computer assisted instruction, audio-visual aids, or programmed learning aids, thus requiring a large staff and extensive tutor training/teaching by the center director;
- *the primary employment of students as peer tutors, with the express intent of providing a learning experience for them as well as their tutees;
- *the individuality of every tutoring session created by the individuality of every writing situation. The subject of concern- writing- makes rote responses and even right answers near impossibilities; we must attempt to help writers find answers appropriate to their own writing situations.

We have clung tenaciously at our institution to the name "writing center" rather than the equally common "writing lab" in hopes of highlighting these important distinctions. We know that much is in a name when it comes to organizational charts and administrative decisions; unfortunately, we are still officially classified as

The Hurricane and the Writing Lab

In late September, Hurricane Hugo roared through Charleston, South Carolina, ripping off roofs, toppling massive oaks onto buildings, and flooding historic homes. The Writing Lab at the College of Charleston was as protected as advanced preparation allowed. Computers were covered; disks with exercises and handouts were stored in safe, dry places; loose objects were put away in desk drawers. Like all such storms, Hugo was capricious, damaging some buildings but leaving others unscathed. The building housing the Writing Lab was lucky, receiving no appreciable damage, so the Lab could reopen the first day classes resumed.

Soon after the Lab reopened, students brought in assignments to write narrative-descriptive essays explaining how the century's worst hurricane had affected them. In tutorials our clients are usually working with material which tutors have not read, unless tutors happen to have studied the short story or novel which tutees are analyzing. The Hugo assignments, however created a unique opportunity for us Writing Lab tutors. Since both tutors and clients had experienced the storm and its aftermath, Hugo provided a common back-ground for tutors and clients. This shared experience allowed us tutors to compare the tutorials conducted with the Hugo assignments. Although many of us felt uncomfortable because the papers were extremely personal reflections on the storm, our work with these essays underscored what we had known instinctively about the expressive value of writing and the emotional nature of tutorials.

The Hugo papers, as we came to call them, revealed a facet of writing not always seen in our Lab. Usually, our clients' essays are analytical and referential, not personal and expressive. The devastation wrought by Hugo, however, led clients to write essays which revealed a range of emotions. One tutee, for example, wrote that initially, he was glad Hugo had struck St. Croix and Puerto Rico because at least the storm had not come to his beloved hometown, Charleston. Later, of course, he felt guilty when he learned about the destruction suffered on these islands.

Another client used his writing to vent

frustration and anger. His mother, who lived on a barrier island off the Charleston coast, elected to stay behind with the house while her son drove inland for protection. After Hugo stormed through, martial law was imposed, so no one was allowed onto the flattened barrier islands. Since the hurricane had severed all communication lines, the boy did not know if his mother was alive. Ignoring martial law, the boy borrowed a boat and sneaked over to the island to find his home severely damaged. His mother was alive. When reunited with her, he broke out a bottle of wine and a can of Spam to celebrate with her. His having written about his separation and near loss of his mother helped him put into words his anger and frustration, as evidenced in the paper's title, "Hugo, the Bastard." These emotional essays reminded us that writing can, indeed, help clients express various feelings.

Working with these papers and others written from the heart also pointed out to us the roles which tutors play in tutorials. Most tutors would ignore that they act as unofficial counselors, offering clients emotional support and encouragement. The Hugo assignments showed us this vital feature of tutorials. In one paper, for instance, a student described his separation from his brothers who had remained in Hugo's path, while the student, his sisters, and their kids sought shelter inland. In his essay the student expressed his anxiety about not knowing whether his brothers were alive. The tutor observed that this client had come to the Lab not only to seek help with the paper's grammar or organization but also to read his essay aloud and share his thoughts. As the tutor said, "He wanted to talk about the [Hugo] experience." As befits a writing center where nurturing and support are essential ingredients of tutoring, the Lab and its tutor were there to provide this emotional assistance.

However, the Hugo papers pointed out an important question: "Where are the boundaries of empathy in a tutorial?" We seem to have discovered this boundary when dealing with the Hugo essays. One heart-rendering paper, for instance, described how the client thought the storm would not be severe. So, she had fled to safety, carrying with her only a few items like tee-shirts and sweatpants. Unfortu-

Tutor: Sounds like a very interesting topic. Has your instructor approved your topic, and, uh, when is it due?

Tutee: Yes, he really liked my choice. I just have to present my findings as objectively as possible. We're supposed to be logical, and not let our emotions get in the way. It's a hot topic because so many of us are living away from home for the first time, you know. My room-mates have been giving me all sorts of ideas, and I am getting really confused. And my boyfriend is Catholic too. It was his idea that I talk to a priest.

Internal Voice: This is really a good topic, and I bet she has lots to get going with. I'm even interested in this.

Tutor: Let's hear what ideas you already have about these two viewpoints. For now, I'll list them while you talk. Why don't you also feel free to look at what you have already written?

Internal Voice: I know that she should really be taking these notes herself but I'll start so as to help her get going, and then, I'll ask her to map out connections between any ideas she can use in this paper.

Tutee: Okay. Well, the Catholic Church views premarital sex as immoral unless certain conditions exist.

Tutor: Well, Gail, what are some of these conditions? And how do you know what these conditions are, and when they are met?

Internal Voice: It sounds as if I'm moving her into thinking in heuristics. I'll graph a quick chart of who said what, and when, and why.

Tutee: Well, I talked to a Catholic priest here in Bowling Green, and he said that, well, something about the difference between erotic and spiritual love. Also, we have read a few chapters from books on this topic. We have actually talked about society's views on the issue of pre-marital sex, but I thought I might talk about how the Catholic Church's views are different.

Internal Voice: I got that down, and now maybe Gail can fill in some more of these answers to questions on this chart to help her see a pattern develop. I wonder if I should intervene and ask 'she has heard of the Vatican's most recent statements about women, homosexuals, pre-marital sex.... No, I want to hear what Gail has found out, and leave this debate out of this discussion.

Tutor: First. I'd like to hear what you remember from the conversation with the priest. What was his name? And now, you can start filling in info on this chart I started for you of who said what, when, where and why. Just so that you can start seeing patterns evolving for your paper.

Internal Voice: I wonder how she'll handle taking notes while she's talking. We'll see.

Tutee: Well, he talked about trust, commitment and responsibility. They seem to make the difference for Catholics to have pre-marital sex. It used to be that Catholics could never have pre-marital sex, but now the priest told me that the Church has a more understanding view.

Internal Voice: The Church has really changed. Gail has some good ideas here, but I think she needs to be defining through examples. I'm not sure that our definition of responsibility might be the same as the priest's. I'll try to get her thinking about what these qualities mean. So far she seems to be doing well with her lists. Maybe some sort of chart branching off from her lists might help her make connections.

Tutor: Can you think of examples for each of these qualities?

Tutee: I have some written down from my talk with the priest. It gets tricky what with his examples. I'm so used to what I know that it's hard for me to get these right.

Tutor: Well, Gail, why don't you read through your notes for a few minutes, and then (cont. on page 11)

Tutors' Column

The Painless Writing Sample

During my interview for a graduate assistantship, Dr. Simpson asked me the dreaded question: The Question I Couldn't Answer. Leaning forward in her chair, with a friendly face and friendlier voice, she caused my mind to go as blank as an unplugged television. She suggested a scenario and asked me to imagine it:

You are a tutor in the Writing Center. A student rushes in, crying, near hysteria, because she has just failed the required Writing Exit Exam. What do you do first?

She emphasized the last word. I could feel the gears and wheels in my brain trying to turn. I finally put together a few thoughts about setting the student down with pen and paper, getting a sample of her work so we could begin to correct her particular problems. I did not sound eloquent or confident.

Simpson nodded and took time to remove her glasses. "What's wrong with handing her a tissue?" she asked.

Nothing is wrong with it. In my time as a tutor, I've learned that several things are as important as getting that initial writing sample. We need the sample as a starting point, but we must be careful with our students.

Consider what causes a student to visit the Writing Center. None of the most common reasons make him feel confident, inspired, or friendly.

1. He has failed the required Writing Exit Exam.
2. She fears failing the exam.
3. He is required to visit because a teacher is displeased with his writing.

4. She is required to visit as part of a Developmental English class.
5. He believes his work is not up to standards.
6. She has an important paper due and her efforts are not satisfactory.

We begin tutoring from a negative position. Sandwiched between his failed efforts and false starts, the student may bring resentment, boredom, fear, or frustration. Often his feelings are hurt or he believes he does not need a tutor. Because we are not allowed, by good sense and academic integrity, to edit or rewrite student work, and because we do not have a magic wand to wave, we may disappoint a student further.

We begin our work with students by handing them a tissue, sympathizing with their fears, and encouraging them to believe they can learn what is required. As English majors with talents for using and appreciating language, we may find it hard to identify with our students. Is this required of a good tutor? Not necessarily. The most significant thing we can do during a student's initial visit is to discover her attitude about writing. This, and not a writing sample, is the true beginning point of successful tutoring. By accident, I discovered a way to combine learning about my student's writing attitude with obtaining the first writing sample.

Alice, one of my first students, was literally frightened of a blank piece of paper. She had failed the Writing Exit Exam, which did not help her confidence. She had successfully completed all other requirements for a degree in elementary education. I asked what caused her to be unable to even force herself to write. She did not know. I asked how long she had suffered from this panic. She could not

Tutor: I'd be glad to talk with you about your writing. Gall, your paper sounds super. Do you think you could have it rough drafted by Friday, so that you will have enough time to get it finished the way you'd like it for your instructor?

Tutee: Yes. Sounds good. The paper is due in three weeks. Thanks so much. I guess I'll throw away all these scrap papers, now that I think I can write this paper.

Tutor: No. Why don't you save them until you are finally satisfied with your paper. Bring them next time too. And remember, when you seem lost for words, try to use some of the strategies we used today in order to get your ideas flowing.

Tutee: Okay. I never tried doing that for any of my papers outside of English class. I guess it really works.

(The tutor smiles and then, tutor and tutee stand up. The tutor walks Gail to the secretary's desk to set up another appointment.)

Tutee: It was really great meeting you! Tutor: Bye.

Internal Voice: I can't believe an hour flew by. I can't wait till my next appointment comes. And to think, I doubted whether I could really help someone get started!

THIS IS REALLY JUST A BEGINNING.

Amy Walker and Gail Corso
Bowling Green State Univ.
Bowling Green Ohio

A reader comments....

The policy of the current Randolph-Macon College Writing Center echoes the Modern Language Association's guideline which urges, "contributors to be sensitive to the social implications of language and to seek wording free of discriminatory overtones." We respect

our students' individual views, and we do not currently alter pronoun usage in any paper. We respect the power of language too highly to treat any aspect of it facetiously. Hence, I was disturbed by the flippant tone of the two letters about sexist language, which appeared in the December 1989 issue of the Writing Lab News-letter (Vol. 14, No. 4).

Whatever our individual beliefs, we do not consider our Writing Center the proper place for proselytizing. We do consider the Writing Center a place where all students at R MC can receive both patient consideration and honest advice about writing. We consider language usage, sexual discrimination, and tutorials serious matters, and we attempt to convey our respect for these issues both privately and publicly.

Mary Jo Berger, Director and
Writing Center Tutors:

David B. Moncure

Kathleen Crabbs

Susan Wilborn

Randolph-Macon College
Ashland, Virginia

The Blue Book Approach to Publicity

At Williamsville South High School, in New York, Thomas Rath developed a clever, unusual promotional handout for their Writing Center. In a traditional blue book for exams is a quiz about the Writing Center. At the top of every page is either a true/false or multiple choice question about the writing center, with an answer circled in red and a "handwritten" teacher's comment below which explains the answer. Some of the questions are from Rick Leahy's "Seven Myth-Understandings about the Writing Center," Writing Lab Newsletter 14.1 (September 1989): 7-8; other questions pertain to Williamsville's Writing Center.

If you'd like more information about this interesting way to explain what your writing lab is about, contact Thomas Rath, Williamsville South High School, 5950 Main Street, Williamsville, New York 14221.

faculty who are experienced teachers of composition and trained extensively in the process approach to writing. Most of these faculty also teach one or two classes each semester in English composition. Our LIAs either learn a conference approach to tutoring writing under the guidance of a faculty member or take a three-credit course in the teaching of writing.

Working with a Writing Center faculty member, the LIA examines many samples of student writing, first looking at strengths and weaknesses. As the LIA develops her diagnostic abilities, she begins to learn to prioritize writing concerns. For example, if the paper needs development of details, the LIA learns to ignore mechanical problems, knowing those can be addressed at a later stage. The LIA also brings her own writing to conferences with a faculty member. Here she experiences what her students will experience. After sitting in on faculty conferences with students, she then reverses roles with the faculty member. The faculty member monitors several LIA sessions, offering advice when asked and providing feedback after the session. As faculty, we often discuss the writing of students together, thus creating a collaborative atmosphere, including our LIAs in this collaboration. We turn to each other for advice, and encourage the LIAs to follow this practice. Besides this practical experience, the LIAs read a number of articles on tutoring, critiquing papers, and teaching writing. These articles serve as spring-boards for discussion at weekly staff meetings.

Targeting Courses

In an attempt to start working with students early in this WRW process, we decided to target specific introductory classes and faculty each semester. In incipient semesters, we have worked closely with freshman composition faculty and continuing education faculty realizing that many of their students need our help. This past year, our college started Fresh-man Year Experience courses so we decided to target these enriched courses. Each passing semester not only gives help to a different body of students, but also promotes exposure and support to a variety of faculty members.

One reason for targeting courses was our concern that we would be deluged with students if we open this service to the entire college. Since the program is voluntary for the student, we could not predict how many stu-

dents would come for help. As we targeted courses, we also wanted to continue to address individual needs. We have found, as with other outreach programs, they are underutilized at first, but the longer we have LIAs, the more they will be used. Each semester we work closely with more and more students, as well as more and more faculty.

Another major reason for targeting courses was to focus the work of our LIAs. Instead of having all LIAs ready to tutor in any course, we ask the LIAs to divide the responsibility of courses. For example, all interested students in Intro to Political Science will work with the same LIA. Therefore, that LIA becomes our "political science expert." In the library, she makes sure she is aware of trade and professional journals in that field, knows which index will be most helpful, and is familiar with the location of political science materials throughout the library. By targeting courses, we could more effectively control the number of students and insure that LIAs were adequately trained and experienced before getting involved extensively and intensively in the process.

Involving Faculty

Faculty for these targeted courses are sent the following two hand-outs: Help with Writing: Faculty Checklist and Preresearch Questionnaire. The first hand-out, Help with Writing : Faculty Checklist, asks the faculty member if she would like LIA or Writing Center assistance in teaching a number of research skills, including mapping a research strategy, searching database information, quoting, paraphrasing, and synthesizing information, introducing computer-assisted instruction, and conferencing students throughout the process. The second hand-out, Preresearch Questionnaire, requires the student to consider various elements of the assignment in preparation for the meeting with an LIA. Questions focus on possible approaches to the subject, writer's knowledge of the subject, various purposes and audiences, and required format. These hand-outs serve two purposes. First, they are re-minders of the many ways the Writing Process Center can help their students. Like all Writing Centers, we spend much energy on publicizing our services. The hand-outs, though, are better than much publicity because they show faculty specifically how we can help them. Unlike the global objective of improving student

writing, the LIA Program will help faculty in their classes with their assignments. When a faculty member sees that a Library Information Aide can, for example, show the students the difference between a scholarly and popular journal in the faculty member's field, then the faculty member can see immediate returns on sending students to the Writing Center.

Second, these hand-outs encourage faculty to analyze their assignments. For example, when we query if students should be introduced to database information searching, faculty must decide whether that amount of information would be necessary for the student. In turn, if the faculty member indicates it is not necessary, then LIAs don't need to add to the complexity of the research process by introducing that procedure. Also, faculty review of these questions helps them remember the background of many of our students. Most high school libraries in New Hampshire, for instance, use the Dewey Decimal system in contrast to the Library of Congress system. Faculty who believe their students know how to use a card catalogue effectively sometimes assume too much. The Faculty Checklist asks faculty to consider the depth of research necessary to fulfill this assignment as well as the manuscript style required for students.

The Preresearch Questionnaire also suggests to the faculty member the need for careful consideration of the assignment. When faculty read the third question concerning audience, for example, they have often called me, as Director of the Writing Center, to discuss the concept of audience for research papers and to explore possibilities of an audience other than the professor for student work. Purpose of the paper is another rhetorical element that promotes discussion with the faculty member. Again, by including it on this questionnaire, faculty begin to consider alternative purposes for writing.

Following the distribution of these hand-outs to faculty in targeted classes, the Library Information Aides schedule appointments with faculty to encourage participation and to discuss faculty responses to the questions on hand-outs. This follow-up meeting between faculty and LIAs is essential. Despite our many efforts to promote peer tutoring, many faculty still question the competence of these tutors. Upon meeting with these LIAs, however, faculty qualms about LIA competence

subside quickly. Our tutors, in turn, become more confident about their abilities.

Also, faculty truly enjoy discussing their objectives with LIAs. Many times these conversations with LIAs lead to faculty wanting to discuss other ways of incorporating writing into their classes. While the Writing Center is addressing immediate concerns, the present assignment, faculty begin to realize the potential relationship that could be developed with the Writing Center. These faculty often request workshops for their students or classroom presentations by Writing Center staff as well as increase student referrals to the Writing Center after these LIA meetings.

At the end of the faculty-LIA meeting, the LIA leaves adequate copies of the Preresearch Questionnaire for the faculty member to distribute to all students. When the faculty member passes these forms out to the class, students perceive the LIA program as recognized and supported by the professor. Consequently, more students take the opportunity to develop both their writing and researching skills.

Developing Connections

In the third semester of the existence of this program, we at the Writing Center see three major benefits. First and most obvious, those students who participate within the program learn effective methods for researching and writing papers. Second, our LIAs gain much experience in tutoring, researching, and writing. We are discovering what an excellent preservice experience this is for education majors. But for us at the Writing Center, the third benefit, the by-product of this program, is equally important. Our staff is actively involved with librarians and faculty in an effort to improve student learning. The discussions among Writing Center staff, librarians, and faculty have helped us build a sense of community. The common goal has led to collaboration in many other areas. The Library Information Aide Program has become a means for developing dialogue among the three groups, always with our students' research, reading, and writing the tie that binds us together in this community effort.

Susan Monroe Nugent Keene
State College Keene, NH