THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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

....from the editor....

Somewhere in my past, I stumbled upon the following:

The *status quo* is merely the *status quo*. It's not necessarily the right or the only way.

In this issue of the newsletter it might be particularly valuable to keep this aphorism in mind as you read the articles which deal with outreach to faculty. The authors of these articles rightly stress the importance of establishing lines of communication, and this is certainly valuable.

But we might also ask ourselves whether the need to reach out is the task only of the writing center. And why do we generally assume that it is *our* responsibility. Why, we might usefully ask ourselves, aren't composition teachers writing articles and presenting papers on how to interact appropriately with writing labs? Why aren't faculty thinking about actions and communication links they should be initiating between themselves, their students, and their writing labs?

•Muriel Harris, editor

Teachers and Tutors Talk

In every successful writing center, effective communication is the focus of tutor-training workshops, the medium of student-tutor interaction, and the goal of student learning. Yet, too often, communication in and about tutorial sessions seems confined to the writing center or at best, passes one-way from tutors to teachers. At Idaho State University, tutors at the Academic Skills Center Writing Lab routinely send a short report to teachers after every tutorial session, describing what problems were discussed and what progress each student seemed to make in originating ideas, in understanding a grammatical concept, in rethinking a topic, or in revising or editing a draft. Occasionally, a teacher may chat about a student's progress with a tutor in the hallways of the Liberal Arts Building, but these discussions are too accidental to provide most tutors with helpful feedback about their efforts in the Writing Lab. We felt the teacher-tutor communication—and tutorial conferences as well—

could only improve if both parties would talk together about their complementary roles in students' writing processes.

Therefore, last spring we invited teachers and tutors to an informal meeting to share ideas about how to improve the writing conferences in the Writing Lab. A half-dozen teachers and ten graduate and undergraduate tutors participated in the meeting; some of the graduate tutors, who as TAs instructed their own freshman composition classes, also offered their perspectives as teachers. The dialogue in that meeting was very instructive. Not only did the teachers communicate ways in which they might help tutors do their jobs more effectively, but the tutors also revealed, in the wisdom of their experience, how they might provide significant instruction to their peers who subsequently become tutors. Therefore, at the end of that semester, we asked all the Writing Lab workers to write up one page of recommendations for tutor-trainees.

Now, after meeting with four teachers and six tutors and after collecting a second set of "tutors' tips," we have synthesized the data in the following report. First, we will consider how teachers might help tutors in their conferences with students. Then, we will summarize our tutors' practical advice for their peers in the Academic Skills Center Writing Lab and in other writing centers.

Teachers Talk

At the first meeting between teachers and Writing Lab tutors, one of the teachers perceived that both groups seem to share one underlying assumption. That assumption is that when a student seeks help at the Lab, the task of instruction falls exclusively on the tutor's shoulders. However, if teachers consider that understanding the assignment is crucial to the tutors' job, then teachers must contribute toward the task of tutoring. In order for tutors to become aware of assignment requirements, teachers need to make them available via the students throughout the writing process.

First, teachers can convey assignment requirements to tutors by providing written guideline handouts that students and their tutors can refer to during each stage of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, and revising. An assignment handout should include all primary requirements for the specific assignment. For example, if the general assignment in a freshman composition class is a self-expressive essay, teachers might include in the guidelines that this essay should (1) express a clear thesis; (2) express the thesis through the telling of a story; (3) imply an audience larger than self to which the thesis is relevant; (4) include vivid description; (5) be written in first or third person; and (6) be between 600-750 words in length. Guideline handouts should be explicitly stated, but should be neither so general as to encourage absolutely free interpretation nor so specific as to encourage formulaic writing.

Besides providing such handouts, teachers can remind students to take to tutorial sessions other materials relevant to an assignment, especially when an assignment remains elusive to them despite a handout and even after-class discussion of it. Other materials might include the class text in which the student with his tutor can refer to model essays or to discussions of essential elements of the specific essay type assigned. In addition, a teacher could distribute a sample of a student essay that effectively models a particular assignment. A teacher might also provide other written information that further defines one of the assignment requirements, for example, a handout explaining formatting specifications for MLA or APA documentation. Because students

are inundated with new information on an hourly basis, teachers might remind them, especially before due dates, about the relevant handouts distributed for each assignment. Teachers can also remind students that reviewing such materials with a tutor will help the tutor to better conceptualize an assignment and consequently to better advise them on their writing.

Second, through marginal and end comments on essay drafts, teachers can continue to provide assignment guidelines to student and tutor alike. Especially when they write comments that are easily understood, teachers make the tutoring process easier for tutors and more satisfying for students. The following discussion provides some general advice on effective comment-writing practices.

Many teachers use symbols for at least some of their marginal comments: "frag" for fragment; "p" for error in punctuation; "sp" for spelling error, "//" for faulty parallelism, etc. To avoid confusion, the same symbol should be used consistently for a single instruction. For example, teachers must avoid alternating between "t" and "vt" for verb tense error. They must write symbols legibly and place them carefully in the text so that both student and tutor know precisely where such symbols indicate a writing problem. And most importantly, teachers must minimize the use of symbols in two ways. First, teachers should not mark every place that a student makes a specific kind of error, for a slew of red marks may intimidate a student who feels he can't possibly make all the revisions indicated. Furthermore, if every error is identified for him, he will never learn to edit his own work. Second, teachers should use only ten or twelve symbols, and only those symbols that may be easily inferred by student and tutor alike, such as the first four mentioned above. To keep symbols communicative, teachers should avoid using extensive lists of handbook abbreviations, many of which are not easily inferred. *The Little Brown Handbook*, 4th edition, lists 81 symbols, including arbitrary distinctions between "appr" (inappropriate diction) and "ww" (wrong word), as well as potentially confusing symbols for "ca" (case form error) and "coh" (coherence lacking) that would be puzzling for most students. Asking a student to recognize more than ten or twelve symbols complicates the task of interpreting his instructor's comments and creates an unneces-

sary burden in the already difficult writing process.

Marginal instructions which aren't symbols must be explicit, rather than elliptical, in complete sentence or question form, unless teachers are offering positive evaluation, such as "strong thesis" or "clever observation." For instance, "confusing" or "irrelevant" are ambiguous directions for revision, while "I do not follow your reasoning here" or "This example does not prove your point in this paragraph" may be more easily interpreted and acted upon. In any case, like symbols, marginal comments should be written legibly and placed precisely, which means confining them to the margin or to a line between the student's text. Teachers should not render potentially useful comments illegible by writing them across the student's words.

Since in-text comments generally address sentence-level concerns, end-of-text comments should focus on rhetorical and discourse-level weaknesses, so they must include more of an explanation than "incomplete use of cause/effect mode" at the end of a draft returned for revision. Likewise, if teachers ask students to revise an evaluated essay to improve the grade, they must write more than "D+, poorly argued." Such comments offer little guidance to either student or tutor in the task of revision. On the other hand, so as not to overwhelm or confuse a student or tutor with too many global revision suggestions, teachers should limit end-of-text comments to two or three specific problems. Teachers should also indicate the hierarchy of the problems: what is most important for the student to consider in his revision, what is secondary, what is less significant. Such specific guidelines indicate to tutor and student where they should begin the revising process. In communicating to the tutor, then, teachers should provide clearly stated and concrete criticism by supporting comments with direct references to the student's text. Rather than writing statements such as "Your ideas should be better developed" with no reference to specific ideas by page, paragraph, or summary, teachers should suggest the kinds of content authors might include to fill out their ideas. In general, end comments should be descriptive rather than prescriptive. They should be heuristic in revealing a problem for which a single solution cannot be prescribed but for which at least several are possible. Finally, teachers can provide some assignment

guidelines through positive comments by telling students what they did well. Positive end comments indicate to both student and tutor what teachers value in an assignment and also provide the encouragement writers often need.

Tutors Talk

At the two Writing Lab meetings between teachers and tutors, the tutors generally agreed that teachers can contribute most to the success of a tutorial conference by providing specific suggestions to guide the session. Some tutors expressed appreciation for those teachers who regularly provided assignment handouts and wrote extensive comments on student papers; other tutors hinted that those teachers who have not written explicit comments might consider doing so. Still other tutors mentioned that, even if students are referred to the Writing Lab without a draft in progress, it would be helpful if teachers sent a brief note expressing what reading or writing problem a particular student should review with a tutor, whether it be sentence punctuation, paragraph transitions, or the interpretation of literature. Besides the recommendations revealed in the two teacher-tutor meetings, experienced tutors also gave advice to tutor-trainees in the form of one-page "tutors' tips" written at the end of each spring semester. For ease in presentation, we offer the following list representing a synthesis of the tutors' advice from both the meetings and the written comments. This advice generally addressed one of five issues in individualized writing instruction: planning, counseling, responsibility, authority, and training.

1. **Planning.**
   Complementing the teachers' talk, several tutors emphasized the importance of beginning the conference with a clear plan. In the very first visit, the student should be informed of Writing Lab policies: tutors help not only with "remedial" problems, but with every level of competence; and tutors inform the teacher about the student's progress in each tutorial session. Then, when a student returns for an appointment, a tutor should review the student's file a few minutes before the meeting to prepare for helping him in the types of problems he has experienced before. One tutor recommended that, when beginning a rough draft conference, it is also helpful to review the student's previous essay, if she

has brought it, before trying to help revise a new draft. If a student brings in a draft that neither peers nor teacher have commented on, the tutor should first ask the student what concerns her about the draft, address those problems, and then assess if there are more important problems to consider. One tutor warned, "Too many times a student will bring in a paper hoping for a quick answer that will save him some time." The planning function of the writing tutor also includes beginning instruction at the student's level. That is, the tutor must "assess the student's grasp of the writing process or of grammar and then approach his particular problems at his level of understanding or ability; lengthy explanations of rules and conventions will often confuse more than clarify." One key to successful conference planning is to remain "flexible in our expectations."

2. **Counseling.**
   Several tutors noted the importance of their "counseling" role in a tutorial center since "many of the students we see have a poor self-image." Thus, a tutor should make an effort to be personable by "learning her tutees' names and telling them her own." Experienced Writing Lab workers also emphasized that tutors need to be psychologically "prepared for stressed students to either fall apart or trash their teachers." Though part of the tutors' usefulness is to provide an open, sensitive, and accepting attitude, they should not side with students against their teachers. As soon as a student has vented negative feelings and the tutor has expressed her understanding, both tutor and student should confront the frustration and settle down to some constructive activity with the writing itself. Furthermore, tutors should "make sure tutees get positive feedback." One veteran tutor advised trainees to "be flexible, and to avoid approaching every student with the same attitude." Another tutor agreed that we should "recognize the uniqueness of every student and use our empathy sincerely and consistently." Finally, at the end of the tutorial session, tutors "should make sure tutees feel good about their experience by expressing confidence in their abilities to improve."

3. **Responsibility.**
   Most tutors commented on the importance

of designing the conference so that students take responsibility for their tutorial session by doing most of the talking and most of the decision-making. One way to help motivate inexperienced writers to take charge is to "stress the importance of writing in the students' discipline and in their future careers" so they can see the long-range purpose of improving their skills. One tutor advised that "students will often want us to do their work for them; we must be assertive about what we ethically cannot do," such as editing their papers instead of teaching them how to edit. Here, the tutor's goal is to guide students in finding their own solutions, not to help too much, but to listen attentively, concentrating more on questions than answers, refraining from "filling in the blanks," and waiting—even in silence—for the student's response. This strategy includes instilling a patient attitude in the student, who must realize that "learning is not an overnight phenomenon" and that significant progress may require several tutorial sessions. Above all, tutors cannot promise improvement and should indicate that students' work in the Writing Lab will not guarantee better grades in their writing classes.

4. Authority.

A few tutors advised others to "trust your instincts and abilities in writing and in giving useful advice." In part, this means that tutors should relax, "have fun," and be themselves during the conference. Cultivating this relaxed but self-confident attitude also suggests that tutors should not become too serious and act like an authority figure. On the contrary, "if students bring in a topic we know nothing about, we shouldn't be afraid to ask questions before we examine the paper." As peers in the college learning experience, tutors should confide to other students that they don't know it all—that they, too, are "still working on the writing process" because "there is always room for improvement." Thus, tutors can effectively "model writing behaviors and skills by writing with their tutees and by relating personal experiences."

5. Training.

To improve familiarity with Writing Lab materials and to "make tutoring more efficient," several tutors advised trainees to peruse the reference library and to examine the textbooks, forms, handouts, and worksheets—even to work some of the exercises. One tutor advised her peers to consciously draw on courses they have studied—grammar, linguistics, literature, and speech—to help with Writing Lab conferences. One graduate tutor recommended that trainees observe an experienced tutor in a writing conference before tutoring themselves. In order to learn the features of a detailed conference report, tutors can review student files to read a few reports that more experienced tutors have written to teachers. Then, when actually writing such a report just after a session, the tutor can make an extra carbon copy in order to "recreate the session later when reflecting on it in the tutoring journal." Of course, writing in a journal for a formal tutoring course is always a fruitful occasion for raising the tutor's awareness of developing skills and behaviors in both her tutees and in herself. It is also important for tutors to discuss their frustrations with specific tutorial situations in meetings with the Writing Lab Director and their peers. Finally, tutor trainees who have questions about a tutorial problem should ask the more experienced tutors for advice and learn the strengths of particular tutors, such as business writing or ESL, in order to refer students to them.

Through both teacher-tutor meetings and tutors' written advice for their peers, everyone involved in writing instruction can profit. At Idaho State, one specific practical outcome of the most recent meeting was that the Basic Writing Instructor plans to assemble all her assignment handouts into a Writing Lab packet for use in tutoring her students. But at both annual meetings, the participants were reminded that tutors play a complex role, negotiating between reassuring students that their efforts are worthwhile and demanding that they take full academic responsibility for their own improvement. That is, tutors must act as insecure writers' friends and help them improve their skills, but then leave them to accept the credit or blame for success or failure in class. And this dual role is difficult, especially when the tutor's positive feedback may raise a student's expectations for good grades, while the teacher's assessment of the student's actual performance does not seem to match the student's self-perceived potential. Thus, from

Bridging the Gap: The Theoretically and Pedagogically Efficient Writing Center

When educators discuss writing centers, they usually refer to a lab setting with writing tutors available for students enrolled in writing classes, particularly developmental writing classes. Unfortunately, some educators do not consider a writing center to be an interdisciplinary facility when, in fact, it should be. With the focus of education on cultural awareness and on literacy, colleges, particularly community colleges and urban universities, are faced with the need for centers of learning that provide students with multi-faceted learning opportunities. One such center is the interdisciplinary writing center—a center that provides students a setting for cross-curricular writing assistance.

Community college students are usually "non-traditional" in the sense that they have backgrounds different from those of university students and have needs different from those of university students. For example, many community college students left high school before finishing. They married and/or worked, eventually completed requirements for a GED, and enrolled in a community college to "start over," to improve their lives, or to educate themselves so that they could compete for better jobs. Because of their absence from an academic setting for a varying number of years and because of their lack of certain skills usually acquired in four years of high school, these students have highly specialized needs, particularly in communication skills. However, university students, usually classified as "traditional" students, also have needs. For example, many university students have graduated from high schools, many times urban schools with little emphasis on written communication skills, and, therefore, lack specific communication skills requisite to survival in an academic setting. An interdisciplinary writing center cannot meet all of their needs, but it can certainly meet many of their writing needs.

Community college students, as well as university students, need somewhere they can go for help in writing for any discipline—a place where they can feel comfortable asking for suggestions on how to get started on a paper, how to punctuate, and how to document correctly. A lot of writing centers provide assistance for students working on freshman composition papers, but not enough of them provide assistance for students working on writing assignments in other general education or elective courses. Since more and more instructors are including writing in their classes, students are looking for ways to meet the criteria delineated in these different writing tasks. Students not only write for humanities classes (expository essays, critical analyses, book reviews, music critiques, literary analyses, and research papers), but they must also write for social science classes (expository essays, causal analyses, outlines, summaries, abstracts, research papers), for natural science classes (descriptions, process analyses, lab notes, summaries, abstracts, research papers), and for health science classes (lab notes, summaries, abstracts, nursing care plans). Obviously, these students need a place to go for writing assistance—a place that provides tutoring to help them understand how to meet the specific demands of different audiences and purposes in their writing. So, the question remains—how does a director make the college or university writing center an interdisciplinary writing center?

First, directors of writing centers should hire tutors, preferably full time, to work in the writing center. These tutors should have a minimum of a BA in English or Composition and should be selected carefully according to the following criteria:

1. a determined level of proficiency in writing

2. some knowledge of the composing process

3. some experience with non-traditional students

4. an understanding of the needs of non-traditional students

5. an awareness of and some understanding of interdisciplinary writing

Since consistency is important, in order to maintain a continuum for students, and in order to provide an area consistently conducive to the development of writing skills, these tutors need to work regular hours.

Second, directors of writing centers should draft faculty tutors from disciplines other than just the humanities. This can actually be relatively easy to do. Directors can meet with division or department chairpersons and request a few minutes of time at a division or departmental meeting for a discussion of the writing center's "new role" or a new direction. They can ask colleagues who are friends to "be brave" and volunteer to tutor to help students learn about the audience, purpose, and documentation requisite to their particular disciplines. They can seek out new faculty members particularly tenure-track faculty eager to fill a curriculum vitae with innovative items. Above all, they can be honest and clarify their intentions, their long-range goals, and their emphasis on meeting the needs of students.

Third, directors of writing centers should make the prospect of tutoring in this center attractive to faculty members. They should consider what kind of perks they can offer. In some instances, depending on the performance review structure, faculty members feel intrinsic rewards and feel that they earn intangible credit, non-visual "feathers in their caps" for this type of involvement with students. Faculty members often receive letters of evaluation at year's end—letters that not only acknowledge the faculty members' participation as tutors, but that also verify advising or conferencing credit needed to satisfy contract agreements. Whatever the situation, directors can make this tutoring more than just intrinsically worthwhile for faculty members.

Fourth, directors of writing centers should provide hired tutors and faculty tutors with an orientation session at the beginning and a sharing session at the end of each semester. The focus in these orientation sessions should be on the following:

1. the goals of the writing center

2. the general policies of the center

3. ways to meet student needs

4. ways to encourage colleagues to make student referrals

5. schedules—making sure to "spread out" or balance faculty tutoring as much as possible.

These beginning orientation sessions should include sharing ideas about typical writing assignments, methods for working with developmental as well as advanced writers, ways to help students develop self confidence as writers, tactics for dealing with students who want editors, and diplomatic and sensitive ways to work with students who may have acquired assistance in the writing center, but who, nonetheless, did not receive the A's they wanted. The sharing sessions at the end of each semester should simply put into focus the accomplishments and/or problems in the center during the semester in relationship to the goals presented at the beginning of the semester. This can be a fine justification for an open-house sharing with faculty tutors as well as with faculty members not yet involved with the writing center.

Fifth, directors of writing centers should, contingent on budget, have available at least some of the following resources for student use:

1. handouts on writing in the humanities, the social sciences, the natural sciences, the health sciences

2. dictionaries (unabridged, etymology, foreign language [Latin, French, German, Spanish], literary terms, social science terms, medical terminology)

3. style manuals
   a. *MLA*
   b. *APA*
   c. *The Chicago Manual of Style*
   d. *CBE Style Manual* (Council of Biology Editors)
   e. *Handbook for Authors* (American Chemical Society)
   f. *A Manual for Authors of Mathematical Papers* (American Mathematical Society)
   g. *Style Manual for Guidance in the Preparation of Journals Published by the American Institute of Physics* (for health sciences)

4. sample assignments and papers from various disciplines.

If the writing center has computers, various programs can be used, for example word processing programs and tutorials that focus on the process of writing, on causal relationships, and on logic, reasoning, analysis and synthesis of ideas. The purpose in providing these resources for students is to make available to them a center as conducive to writing as possible. Students writing analyses of a play should have access to a dictionary of literary terms, students writing sociology reports should have access to a dictionary that provides definitions of social science terms, and students writing nursing care plans should have access to a dictionary of medical terminology.

Finally, directors of writing centers should advertise to students the goals of the center, the resources available in the center, the types of assistance provided by the center (for example, help with writing, help with editing, help with word processing, and so on), the names of the hired tutors and faculty tutors who work in the center, and the hours for the center—particularly the hours for "specialized" writing help. Above all, they need to let students know that this center is an interdisciplinary setting conducive to learning about writing and that students from all levels of all disciplines are welcome. Directors also need to inform faculty members of the same information—via memo, or in-house publication, or division or departmental meetings—and to encourage them to refer their students to the center. A community college writing center should be, and can be, if theoretically and pedagogically sound, a successful interdisciplinary writing center for all students.

Pam Besser
Jefferson Community College
Louisville, KY

New from NCTE

Thinking and Writing in College: A Naturalistic Study of Students in Four Disciplines. By Barbara E. Walvoord and Lucille Parkinson McCarthy. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1991. 261 pages, paperbound. Order from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801 Stock No. 54247-0015. $19.95 (NCTE members, $14.95)

This study of critical thinking across disciplines is particularly relevant to writing labs involved in writing across the curriculum. The product of a seven-year collaboration, the book offers insights into the effective use of writing to teach students to think like professionals in various fields. Working in "focused pairs" with faculty in business, history, psychology, and biology, the authors' aim was to discover teachers' expectations about "good" writing and thinking in each discipline, the kinds of difficulties students encountered in trying to meet those expectations, and ways in which teachers' methods and students' strategies helped or hindered progress. Among the authors' conclusions is that mixed or unclear messages from faculty in assignments and other communication cause some students to perform poorly, despite serious struggles to meet a teacher's expectations. Difficulties students encountered in their evaluative or problem-solving writing projects ranged from conceptualizing an appropriate audience to stating a position and using discipline-based methods to support it.

Evolving Perspectives on Computers and Composition Studies: Questions for the 1990s. Edited by Gail Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1991. 364 pages, paperbound. Order from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801 Stock No. 11661-0015. $24.95 (NCTE members, $19.95)

This collection of essays deals with four aspects of computers in academe: the influence of the new electronic age on teachers' lives, the ways computers change the responsibilities of students and teachers, the significance of hypertext for writers and teachers, and the political implications of the computer revolution for classrooms, university departments, campuses, and American education in general.

Tutors' Column

Working with International Students

In the Writing Center at Southeast Missouri State a substantial number (20%) of our students are international students. These students are usually above average; they are carrying heavy class loads, taking 16-18 hours each semester in order to complete their college degrees as quickly as possible because of the expense of studying and living in a foreign country. Internationals usually do well in their classes, but if they have problems, these problems are often the result of their difficulty with the English language, particularly in the two required composition classes. Another related concern for them is being able to pass the Writing Proficiency Test, which all students must pass in order to graduate. The test is given after students have completed 75 hours of course work. Students can sign up for weekly appointments in the Writing Center, or they can get help on a drop-in basis.

One of the first lessons I learned about tutoring international students came from my fourteen-year-old son, Brian. Early in my first semester of tutoring, bad weather made it impossible for me to keep an appointment with Khoo. Since Khoo seldom missed his appointments, I called to explain the situation. When I hung up the phone, Brian said, "Hey, Mom, isn't he a college student? You talked to him like he was a kid." I realized that I was equating language skills with mental skills. This early change in my perception of international students' abilities probably accounts for my lack of apprehension in working with foreign students. Even though there are no "typical" international students, there are several situations that I encounter regularly in working with these students.

A common problem for the international student is understanding the assignment. Li's composition instructor sent her to the center for help in writing. I soon discovered that her poor writing often was related to misunderstanding the assignment. For instance, the instructor began each class by writing a quota-

tion for thought on the board; Li thought each quotation was a writing assignment. Usually she could not understand the quotation well enough to write about it. She was reluctant to ask the instructor additional questions because this was a sign of disrespect in her Oriental culture.

Enlisting the aid of the instructor helps me deal with the student's writing problems. After I sent my initial report to Li's instructor, he was conscientious about checking up on her progress whenever we met in the hall or the teacher's lounge. As the semester continued, the instructor became more aware of her need for specific directions, and Li began to understand the assignments better. By the end of the semester she was able to write according to the instructor's expectations.

Often the main thing that we offer an international student is confidence in his/her ability to use the language. Even though Yayoi was a better than average writer, she signed up for weekly appointments in the center. Usually she had a draft which was near completion. As I read through her essay, I marked places where she had misused the language or where I had trouble understanding what she was trying to say. Then we would read through the essay again as she tried to correct her mistakes, first on her own, or with some prompting from me if she was unable to detect the problem. Usually after seeing the same error two or three times, Yayoi was able to recognize the error the next time it occurred. By the end of the semester she had "graduated" to a walk-in basis, dropping in for a few minutes to have something read, but no longer needing the weekly conference.

Yim Yiu is another one of my international students. I function as a listener and a sounding board for him. He comes to our conferences with questions about usage. In our first conference he was concerned about the placement of prepositional phrases in

sentences that he had read in a national news magazine. He had highlighted some examples which seemed confusing to him. Yim Yiu needed assurance that I, as a native speaker, also found the sentences confusing at times. He wanted to know how to avoid such confusion, so we talked about using two or more shorter sentences rather than longer sentences which contain too much information. I always look forward to conferences with Yim Yiu. He makes me analyze my own understanding of the language—usage that I take for granted.

Since my experiences with internationals were limited when I began working in the center, I was particularly apprehensive about being able to help them. As I have gained more experience in tutoring, however, I have found my work with these students to be enjoyable and rewarding.

Judy Strickland
Graduate Teaching Assistant
Southeast Missouri State University
Cape Girardeau, Missouri

Teachers and Tutors Talk
(cont. from p. 5)

our teacher-tutor talks at Idaho State, we learned to caution tutors to be, at all times, realistic with their tutees—in setting tutorial goals and in charting improvement.

More generally, from such meetings and "tutors' tips," teachers and tutors can share their complementary perspectives and voice their particular concerns about students' problems and successes with writing center conferences. And writing center directors can expand the occasions for tutor training and professional communication. In the end, we can all learn how teachers can better communicate with tutors to help make their students' visits more productive, and how tutors can help one another become more effective partners in collaborative writing tutorials.

Marj Hoye and Greg Lyons
Idaho State University
Pocatello, Idaho

Calendar for Writing Center Associations (WCAs)

Feb. 14: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in Flushing, NY
    Contact: John Troynaski, Writing Skills Workshop, 232 Kiely Hally, Queens College/CUNY, 65-30 Kissena Blvd., Flushing, NY 11367-0904.

April 11: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Emmitsburg, MD
    Contact: Carl Glover, Writing and Communications Program, Mount St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, MD 21727.

April 11: New England Writing Centers Association, in Fall River, MA
    Contact: Ron Weisberger, Bristol Community College, 777 Elsbree St., Fall River, MA 02720

Free Guide to Succinct Writing Available

James L. Evers Associates, a New York training firm, is offering a free copy of "The Economy of Plain English," a three-page guide to succinct writing. For a free copy, send a stamped, addressed, business envelope to James L. Evers Associates, 10 Rockland Avenue, Nanuet, NY 10954. The company also sells a 73-page manual entitled *Hate to Write But Have To?: Self Instruction in Effective Business Writing for the Reluctant Writer*. Write the company for more information.

Communications with the Faculty:
Vital Links for the Success of Writing Centers

Writing centers are often housed apart from the faculty whose courses they are designed to serve—physically, administratively, emotionally—and are generally staffed by non-tenure-track instructors assisted by student tutors. These programs must, therefore, develop effective ways of communicating with the regular faculty on a consistent and frequent basis. Failure to do so can result in a center not integrated with its department; disinterested, unsupportive faculty; and, as a consequence, an incoherent teaching program in the center, a program unable to work compatibly with the professors and classes it purports to serve.

As Director of the Learning Assistance Center at Stanford University for twelve years and as Director of the Writing Center at San Jose State University for four, I have learned—sometimes the hard way—how crucial faculty endorsement of a support program can be. It is not possible to run an effective teaching program in a tutoring center, a writing center, or a learning assistance center without it. Indeed, sometimes it is not even possible to survive. Faculty need to value the center—to take it seriously—and students need to know that they do.

How can those of us working in writing centers and tutoring programs help make it more likely that faculty will value and support the center? Through trial and error, over the years, I have developed some approaches that work. I offer them here, in the hope that some of these ideas will be adoptable by those who work in, or are responsible for funding or administering tutoring programs elsewhere. I am speaking here of state or federally funded programs designed to help, among others, students who lack strong high school preparation for college, students whose first language is not English, minority students, students who are the first generation in their families to attend college, older re-entry students, and handicapped students. The academic success of a substantial portion of today's student population depends upon the strength and quality of programs like these. And the strength and quality of these programs often, underneath, depend in turn on how they are viewed by their own faculty.

Rather than discuss communication with faculty in the abstract, I will look at an actual working model for illustration—the Writing Tutorial Center at San Jose State University—and at the Center's relationship to the faculty teaching the courses it supports. Here we have something concrete, ideas we can see being put into operation every day, policies and suggestions to believe in because we know they are being put to the test and prove credible semester after semester.

In our Writing Center, we value close working relationships with the faculty, and we work hard, consistently, to enhance them. This is a good thing, because without an effort on our part, a communication gap might naturally arise between the Center and faculty in the Department: we are housed in a different building from the faculty, so there is little automatic informal interaction and no tenure track professors teaching in the Center.

To be specific, we seek to bridge the communication gap with the faculty in eight different ways: 1) with an efficient, accurate, computerized mechanism for periodic reporting to faculty of student test scores, homework grades, and attendance rates; 2) with Tutor Liaisons, designated tutors responsible for frequent, personal communication with individual course professors about the progress of each student; 3) with invitations to faculty to become involved directly in Writing Center activities; 4) with programs good enough to attract some of the university's best students as tutors, students who then automatically become our ambassadors to the faculty; 5) with participation in fall and spring orientation meetings for new and returning faculty and with distribution of printed material describing the Center and its activities to faculty assigned to teach the courses we support; 6) with personal meetings with professors teaching

basic writing and with faculty charged with overseeing various aspects of the Department's composition program; 7) with memos to professors at key points during the semester on matters of importance to the Center; and 8) with a Director who is a member of the faculty and who sits on the Department's Composition Committee, helps set policy, and reports weekly on Center activities. I will address each of these eight means of communication; some are, I believe, new ideas, while others are fresh approaches to old ideas.

But first, a few words about our program. Our Writing Center is part of the English Department, its tutors mostly undergraduate and graduate students taking degrees in the English Department, and its Director an English professor. All Basic Writing students—students who score below 147 on the English Placement Test—are required to come to the Writing Center, and their performance in Lab counts as 25% of their final grade in their Basic Writing course.

Students sign up at registration for the ninety-minute Lab class attached to the Basic Writing class they select, and they received four units of credit for class and Lab rather than the three units a student receives for completing the regular freshman English course, which has no required Lab. Because each Lab section is tied to a specific section of Basic Writing—there is no drop-in tutoring—all of a professor's students come to the Writing Center at the same time each week, just like a class. All students in the Center at any given time are working on the same assignment from the same professor (promoting an integrated Lab and writing class curriculum). We in the Center are able to match students with the same tutors week after week, allowing tutors to come to know their students' writing well and making it possible for them to provide instruction each week which is particularly effective because it builds on the instruction of previous weeks.

All writing centers need an effective testing program, a record of which students regularly complete Lab homework assignments, and an accurate way to keep attendance data (at San Jose State we have five hundred students every week) and, then—very important—an efficient way of reporting this data to faculty. Faculty are not in the Center on a regular basis to see how their students are doing. They

do not know, unless we tell them, who is studying hard, who is missing class, and how each student is performing in Lab on a daily basis and at testing time. If we at the Center are able to produce complete, accurate reports throughout the semester, faculty are more likely to be interested in their students' Lab performance, more willing to speak to a student who is missing Lab, more likely to take a student's Lab performance seriously in computing his or her course grade, and, in general, more apt to be involved with and supportive of the entire Writing Center program.

At San Jose State good database software helps the Center Director and the Lab Manager produce timely and accurate, as well as comprehensive, quantitative documentation of student progress for faculty three times each semester. Data on student attendance and homework are entered in the Center computer daily and, at testing times, objective and essay test scores are entered. Then, faculty receive printouts showing each student's objective and essay test scores in the Center, giving up-to-date attendance records and weekly Lab homework assignments. At the end of the semester, each faculty member receives a final document showing test averages, final homework scores, final attendance records, and final grades.

Score reports go out to Basic Writing faculty along with a letter of explanation from me. And I use this opportunity to achieve a second goal: to reiterate for faculty pertinent Department and Lab policies regarding Basic Writing, policies on grading, curriculum, expectations about faculty assignments for Lab, and so forth. This letter states, for example, that the Lab grade counts as 25% of the final grade professors give their students in class, thus reminding faculty both how Writing Center grades are determined and how a student's Lab performance fits into a professor's own final course grade. Reiterating Department policy on such matters early each semester seems to encourage faculty cooperation, helping to head off possible resistance to Lab requirements, questions about course autonomy, and so forth, before they have a chance to get started.

Two years ago we introduced a Head Tutor or Liaison system, and it has increased the effectiveness of our communications with the faculty. Head Tutors have two duties in Lab—to improve the quality of daily instruc-

tion, and to maintain calm and keep order—and one duty outside—responsibility for frequent, personal communication with individual course professors about the progress of each of that professor's students in the Center.

At the beginning of every term we assign a Head Tutor to each of the class sections which meet in the Writing Center that semester. This person is key to the smooth functioning of his or her Lab class. He or she checks student attendance, notes any tardiness, explains Lab policies and procedures, substitutes tutors if someone is sick, and, in general, functions as a peer supervisor in the Lab. The role of the Head Tutor is to inspire, encourage and support both the students and the tutors who are working in that particular section. He or she develops lesson plans for group time, helps students use the computer to write and revise, gives instruction in aspects of the writing process, assists new tutors, and helps students with writer's block.

Particularly pertinent here, however, is that Head Tutors have a crucial role in the Center's system of communications with faculty. Each Head Tutor serves as liaison to the course professor, letting him or her know about the performance of each Lab student on an ongoing basis. The Head Tutor, in turn, communicates to the Lab the professor's wants and needs.

When they meet, Head Tutors and professors may discuss students who are having difficulty writing because their skills are weak or because they speak little English. If a student is defensive, scared or just disinterested, tutor and professor may look together for ways to solve this problem. Perhaps they will discuss a particular essay assignment—how effective it was in eliciting good writing—or a new software program we are using in the Center—whether it is helping students or is just boring drill and practice. The liaison system helps tutors understand the philosophy and direction of the class they are supporting. And it encourages Basic Writing faculty to be more involved in the mission of the Writing Center. Students benefit from this kind of coordination and collaboration between faculty and tutors.

The more faculty in the Department feel involved with the Writing Center, and the more they understand its work, the more likely they

are to be supportive of the center, both philosophically and practically. Knowing this, we have experimented with invitations which bring faculty to the Center physically and which involve them intellectually and emotionally in the Center's program.

We have three approaches. First, we ask Basic Writing faculty to assign short essays for their students to write and bring to Lab every week. The most important part of each student's work in Lab is his or her weekly

> *"We are the ones who need to make the effort, who need to reach out to the faculty. We cannot wait for them to come to us."*

individual conference with a tutor about this essay. And during group time we encourage students to go to the computer and revise their essays based on what they have learned in their conferences. Thus, the focus of the Lab's weekly program is on work the professor has assigned. Such an arrangement puts faculty in a leadership role in the daily operation of the Center and helps tie the tutors' teaching in the Center more closely to the professor's classroom curriculum.

Our second approach is to actively encourage faculty to visit the Writing Center, to drop in anytime they are in the vicinity. The Chair, the Director of Composition, the Coordinator of Basic Writing, and members of the Composition Committee sometimes stop at the Center. If they haven't come for a while, I invite them directly, and name a date and time. Professors currently teaching Basic Writing are encouraged to come anytime, but particularly when their own students are in Lab. I always make it a point to call and thank Department faculty whenever they stop at the Center—especially if the visit is a spontaneous one.

A third way to involve faculty directly in the Writing Center is to invite them to make short presentations to the tutors in an area of their expertise. Some give guest lectures in the tutor training class, a three-unit course for new tutors which itself helps legitimize the Center's tutoring staff in the eyes of the faculty. Meet-

ings between tutors enrolled the course and faculty are usually mutually gratifying. Faculty have an ideal audience, a group of bright, eager tutors keenly interested in what faculty have chosen for their lifework: teaching. And tutors are primed to hear whatever the experts have to say about the art of tutoring; they are trying each day to help the students assigned to them and are looking for ways to be more effective.

At San Jose State we have many students whose native language is not English, so I invite ESL faculty to speak in the Lab, to discuss current theories of second language acquisition and then to propose specific teaching approaches to actual student papers. I also invite professors of Technical Writing whose perspectives on writing and editing are helpful to those students—and tutors—headed for jobs in nearby Silicon Valley. And I ask Teacher Education faculty to speak about some aspect of the art of teaching and, specifically, about the language skills of area high school students, those students who will soon be in our classes here at the university.

Once each semester, I invite three or four faculty currently teaching the Basic Writing courses to make a panel presentation to the tutors at a Writing Center staff meeting. I ask these professors to discuss their classes—their vision for their classes, their goals and objectives, their triumphs and failures, their everyday activities. The more we in the Writing Center know about what faculty are trying to accomplish in their writing classes the better we can complement their efforts with our tutorial program. And then there is the personal element. The better they know us—and we them—the more likely we all are to work together harmoniously and effectively.

The list of faculty I invite to the Writing Center each year is meant to be illustrative, of course; it is not exhaustive. We can each look around our own campus and generate our own personal list. Is there a senior professor of rhetoric who would enjoy talking to young teachers about writing? Or a professor of linguistics who would like to present her recent research on the difference in oral and written language use between African Americans and European Americans? Is there a professor who is writing a new textbook for freshman English and would like to try out some fresh ideas? I have invited each one of these to our Writing Center. And it has been most success-

ful. We, they and the Center have all benefitted.

It is not easy to get a job in the Writing Center anymore. The program is well respected; it is good enough to attract some of the university's best students, who apply to be tutors. Thus competition is keen. Interestingly, this fact—indirectly—enhances our communications with faculty. The job application process is demanding. Each applicant must pass a screening test on grammar and writing skills, show knowledge and experience that would be likely to lead to good tutoring (relevant coursework and high grades, computer expertise, previous teaching experience), have good faculty references, demonstrate a caring attitude toward low-achieving students, and perform well in an interview. Among the graduate and undergraduate students who are our potential tutors, however, the Writing Center has developed a reputation as a good place to work and, as a result, in spite of the stringent application process, I consistently have more well qualified applicants for tutoring positions than I have places. Thus I can hire some of the best students in the university.

This happy situation has many benefits. Such a select group is a joy to work with, they appreciate a well ordered program, a Writing Center where real learning is taking place, and their students appreciate their commitment and their competence. Particularly important in the context of the current discussion, however, is the fact that, as good students in their own departments, they have the respect of their professors and can communicate to these professors their enthusiasm about the high quality of instruction in the Center. In this way, our tutors become wonderful ambassadors for the Center.

At the beginning of each semester, the English Department has a full day of faculty meetings and orientation programs for both new and returning faculty. After the opening general meeting, there is a special meeting for faculty teaching in the department's composition program. Given the number and variety of our writing courses, most of the English Department faculty teach some level of composition. So the semi-annual department composition meetings is one of the few times of the year when I have a chance to tell a large number of our faculty what goes on in the Writing Center and to distribute various materials. I then

meet with the Basic Writing faculty and go over the Writing Center program in more detail, answering questions and explaining curriculum and procedures.

The Basic Writing faculty continue to meet periodically throughout the semester, and either I or the Lab Manager also attends these meetings. In addition, I call or go to see as many Basic Writing professors as I can during the semester in an effort to keep the lines of personal communication open—so that questions can be answered and problems solved in an easy and timely fashion, before real difficulties have a chance to set in. I also meet with the Department Coordinator of Basic Writing, the Chair of the Department, and the Director of Composition to discuss matters pertaining to the Writing Center.

Sometimes all this feels like overkill. But I have learned that, while I know the details of the Writing Center program, many faculty never hear—or forget—even the basic outlines. The Lab program is large and rather complicated both logistically and in terms of the many types of writing activities we engage in, and many faculty in composition (quite a few are part time) are new every year. These facts make good communication between the Lab and individual professors harder and, yet, at the same time, more important. Over the years, I have found that faculty are generally grateful, rather than annoyed, to have reminders from time to time about Lab activities that affect them and their students, and to have the Lab Director or the Head Tutor in touch when there are student absences, triumphs or disappointments on Center tests, curriculum matters, etc., to discuss.

At the beginning of the fall term in the Writing Center we give a comprehensive orientation for both new and returning tutors (we have 34 tutors on staff). As part of this orientation, we distribute copies of the Tutor Handbook. This Handbook, which we wrote and which we update annually, covers most of the topics tutors need to be familiar with in order to perform well in Lab—policies and procedures, conditions of employment, teaching tips for individual and group time,

"The more faculty...feel involved with the Writing Center, and the more they understand its work, the more likely they are to be supportive of the center."

information on computer assisted instruction, guidelines for Head Tutors, suggestions for first day jitters, etc. We give copies of the current Tutor Handbook to the Department Chair, the Director of Composition, and the Coordinator of Basic Writing each fall. In May these people also receive copies of the end of the year student evaluations of the Center and copies of all the reports we send to faculty three times each semester on their students' test scores, homework grades, and attendance records.

The Director of the Writing Center is a member of the faculty in the English Department. Writing Center heads are sometimes staff rather than faculty, but I think it is a distinct advantage if the Director is a member of the faculty and can function more as a peer among peers. The Director of our Center is automatically a member of the Department's Composition Committee, the governing board for all aspects of the Department's composition program. This, too, is an important communication link between the Writing Center and the faculty. Key people in the Department—those most interested in and knowledgeable about the composition program—sit on this committee. So it is an excellent forum for the Writing Center.

These are all vital links between the faculty and the Writing Center. Without these methods of communication with the faculty, who are, after all, key to the success of any support program in the long run, the Writing Center would indeed suffer.

Of course, the Center program itself must be a good one, the curriculum well thought out, the tutors well trained, the teaching effectively done. But running a high quality program, hard as it is, is not enough. People need to know about the Center, to know it is good, to believe in it. We need to stay in their minds, not to be left forgotten in some corner of campus. And that means daily effort, daily contact. In general, I have found that the onus is on us: we in the Center are the ones who need to make the effort, who need to reach out to the faculty. We cannot wait for them to come to

us. Nor can we sit complacently and think they already know all they need to about who we are and what we do.

The steps outlined above take time, I know, and they take effort and energy. But the effort is worth it. Constant, repeated contact between the Writing Center and the department's faculty does bring results—not only in increasing their knowledge of and understanding about the Center's program, but, most important of all, in generating good will. From us to them and from them to us. Good communication is a vital part of good working relationships in any university department. And we have found that the kind of communication efforts described above work: they foster a mutually gratifying, cooperative teaching spirit between tutors and professors, between the Writing Center and the English Department, and, in the end, what we gain is important indeed: higher quality teaching for our students.

Carolyn Walker
San Jose State University
San Jose, CA

NCTE 1992 Achievement Awards for High School Writers

To encourage high school students in their writing and to recognize publicly some of the best student writers in the nation, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) will give achievement awards to students. Nominees must be students who will graduate from high school in 1993. For information about nomination procedures and official nomination blanks, contact: Achievement Awards in English, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. Deadline for submission of nominations is January 23, 1992.

If your writing lab is actively involved in promoting or assisting with writing contests, consider sharing your work with others interested in adding this service to their writing labs. Send the newsletter a description of your program along with information you think will be useful to others.

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

Address correction requested