

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 18, Number 10

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

June, 1994

...FROM THE EDITOR...

The themes of this enlarged issue of the newsletter are "sharing" and "community." Sharon Wright's article shares the results of her survey on salaries, staffing, budgets, and other matters critical to our daily existence. The catalyst leaders and others share with us reports of the first National Writing Centers Association conference, and Michael Pemberton shares with us the responses he received to the ethical questions he posed in a previous column. There's also a plea from me to share our online resources.

The sense of sharing with each other is critical to the sense of community we feel, and I hope the newsletter continues to play its part in maintaining that sense of community. I also hope the hefty size of this newsletter does not impose too much on your time. Several years ago, a reader survey indicated, among other things, that our usual sixteen pages was about the upper limit for the length most readers prefer for the newsletter. I normally stick to that page limitation, but this issue had to expand in order to include news, announcements, and timely reports that are useful before we close up shop for the summer.

Since this is the last newsletter issue for the year, I wish us all a lengthy, leisurely vacation. Enjoy your well-deserved R&R, and we'll reconvene in September.

Muriel Harris, editor

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Mapping diversity: writing center survey results

If writing centers are to participate fully in what Harland Cleveland calls "the information age" (13), we need to share information with each other, with campus administrators, and with the academic community. As a starting point, Oklahoma State University's Writing Center decided to begin collecting information by conducting two surveys. One of these covered institutions designated OSU's official peer institutions by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. These institutions are:

University of Colorado at Boulder
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
Indiana University in Bloomington
Iowa State University of Science & Technology
University of Iowa
Kansas State University
University of Kansas, main campus
University of Michigan at Ann Arbor
University of Minnesota-Twin Cities
University of Missouri-Columbia
University of Nebraska in Lincoln
University of Oklahoma
Purdue University, main campus
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Ohio State University, main campus

The purpose of our questionnaires was to set a baseline, a frame of reference, for writing centers to use in strategic planning.

Fourteen of the 16 institutions (including Oklahoma State) that received questionnaires responded, giving us a generous 87.5 percent response rate in compiling results. Occasionally, respondents chose not to answer one question or another, so the percentages reported sometimes do not total 100 percent. In addition, on some questions only percentages of 20 percent or higher are specifically mentioned to avoid excessive detail. Here are the highlights of what we found:

Reporting Lines

As for our place on the administrative ladder, 28.5 percent of our directors report to a department head; 21 percent to a dean, and 14 percent to a vice president or provost. The remaining 35 percent report to an individual within a depart-

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

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ment. Among our peers, 50 percent of our writing center directors do not hold academic rank, serving instead as fulltime administrators. At the opposite end of the scale, only 7 percent were assigned to academics 100 percent of the time, despite functional oversight of the writing center. Seventy-one percent were assigned to writing center administration for 50-100 percent of their time, and most of the time the assigned division worked out in practice; only 14 percent spent about 15 percent more time on writing center business than we should, according to our assigned split. As the amount of time devoted to administering writing centers might suggest, directors' credentials are being codified: only 7 percent of those reporting said they have no written job description for the director's post. On the contrary, 79 percent said the job required either a doctorate or tenure-track faculty status; 14 percent required a master's degree. In addition to these educational requirements, 36 percent required teaching/tutoring experience; 14 percent required experience in either ESL or basic writing; and 7 percent required experience in writing across the curriculum. But, somewhat ironically, none of the universities responding to the survey required administrative training or experience for its writing center director.

Salaries

Salaries among OSU's peers vary substantially, from a high of \$77,000 for 7 percent of the directors surveyed down to a low of \$15,000 for a graduate assistant/temporary director hired while the institution conducted a search for a tenured associate professor to direct the center. The lowest salary reported for a continuing director was \$21,000 at 14 percent of the schools surveyed. Another 14 percent earned \$27,000-\$28,000; but almost half of us (46 percent) earned \$31,000-\$42,000.

Budgets

Our writing centers exhibit extreme disparity in funding levels, ranging from a dream budget of \$750,000 (7 percent) to \$15,000 (7 percent); 14 percent report budgets of \$125,000-\$150,000; 28 percent receive \$50,000-\$90,000; 21 percent get \$28,000-\$40,000. The writing center director develops the budget at nearly 36 percent of these institutions, while the director and one other administrator develop the budget together at another 21 percent. The department chair determines the writing center

budget at 28.5 percent of the institutions surveyed, and a composition director makes out the budget for 7 percent. The amount allocated to the writing center is most often controlled by a provost (14 percent), a dean (28.5 percent), or a department head (28.5 percent). This funding comes solely from the university budget at 71 percent of our peer institutions.

Staff

The number of staff hired in each writing center ranges all the way from only 2.5 to 60. Fifty percent report 9-20 on staff. The staff is sometimes comprised entirely of graduate assistants (50 percent), or entirely of faculty (7 percent); only 7 percent use undergraduate tutors exclusively. In 71 percent of the peer institutions surveyed, 90-100 percent of the writing center staff were Americans; however, 14 percent report employing a higher percentage (55-70 percent) of internationals than Americans as tutors. In addition, institutions may draw their tutoring staff entirely from an English department (50 percent) or from many departments (43 percent). The number of employees hired is most often determined by a group that includes the director (50 percent); an academic department head determines the number of staff hired at 21 percent of the writing centers, while the director makes this decision at another 21 percent of these universities. The director, however, most often selects the specific tutors (57 percent). Relatively often (28.5 percent of the time), a group including the director selects tutors. Given the range of staffing patterns, it should come as no surprise that most of the institutions surveyed train new staff members rather extensively, with 49 percent reporting orientation and training seminars that last at least one full day and up to an entire semester. Written instructions, combined with peer coaching are the most frequently used staff training techniques; 14 percent also offer specialty workshops, and 7 percent use role playing as a training technique. In addition, 71 percent say they have a written handbook or policy manual for staff, a figure that rises to 85 percent when we include those institutions that are in the process of developing a staff manual.

Writing Center Operation

The majority of these writing centers remain open more than 40 hours a week (57 percent); 71 percent are open at least 40 hours weekly and remain open throughout

the summer session. A few (28 percent) have branch locations in university libraries, residence halls, a school of business, or an engineering library. Some (36 percent) enjoy the stability of fulltime support staff, and 50 percent employ one or more part-time support staff members, who may be computer specialists (28.5 percent), secretaries (28.5 percent), administrative or staff assistants (14 percent), receptionists (14 percent), and/or work-study students (43 percent). These employees not only perform traditional clerical and receptionist duties, they also serve an increasingly important technical function in operating, maintaining, and repairing the sophisticated equipment that many centers now use. For instance, 86 percent of the peer group has computers in the writing center; 58 percent use a networked system, and the number of computers on hand ranged from 3 to 20. Only two of the 10 institutions surveyed reported having no computers, and one of these was installing a 40-station lab. Also, 78 percent of these writing centers had 1-3 laser quality printers; 28 percent had 2-10 dot matrix printers. Fifty percent also had a copier, 28.5 percent desktop publishing capability, and 7 percent a scanner.

Observations

The overall pattern of responses was encouraging, suggesting that writing centers in the peer group were moving toward greater sophistication, broader appeal, and wider access. However, the total lack of administrative training or experience required of center administrators—despite the fact that one of our primary tasks is, after all, administration—emerges as something of a blind spot. Many of us are responsible for tens of thousands of dollars in budget decisions. Should we not at least require professional development seminars on administrative topics—budgeting, instituting change, leadership, and so on—for our directors? Should we change our job descriptions? Or are there better ways to address this issue? Another potential soft spot is the high percentage of international tutors assigned to work in some of these writing centers: Are these tutors being selected for their skills, or are they being warehoused in the center to keep them out of the classroom? Either scenario may be the case, but each will impact clients, public relations, and the effectiveness of our centers in completely different ways. Thus, we need to recognize the broader issue here: The expertise of our tutoring staff, whether com-

prised of faculty, undergraduates, or graduate students, native or nonnative speakers, is one of two factors (the other being equipment) which will largely determine the impression created among our clientele about the quality of our centers. What strategies can we employ to ensure that all staff members, regardless of their initial background and/or expertise, will be or become effective writing coaches? Can we make these strategies more widely available to ourselves and our colleagues? Finally, the limited number of centers (28 percent) that reported funding sources augmenting the general university budget allocation suggests that we need better fund-raising skills and a more diverse portfolio of funding sources. Given the systematic and repeated budget cutting in much of higher education today, we should consider fund-raising campaigns, applying for grants, offering communications seminars for businesses for a price, and any other method we can dream up to reduce dependence on single-source funding.

SCWCA Survey Results

At the same time that we sent out surveys to the relatively homogeneous institutions considered OSU's peers, questionnaires also went out to a far more diverse list of 41 South Central Writing Center Association members. This group included both private and public institutions, including colleges and universities both small and large, serving two-year, four-year, and graduate students in both public and private settings. We received responses from 30 of the 41 SCWCA institutions contacted (73 percent). Again, readers will note that percentage totals sometimes do not add up to 100 percent; this resulted from instances in which some respondents chose not to answer a question or from rounding off percentages. With these limitations in mind, here are the SCWCA survey results:

Qualifications

Requirements for the director's post in the SCWCA are uneven, to say the least; almost a fourth (24 percent) report that no separate job description exists, while the remaining 76 percent list one or more of the following requirements: a terminal degree (24 percent); teaching or tutoring experience (38 percent); a master's degree (38 percent). Only 10 percent require any management or administrative experience for the director, the same percentage of schools that requires a bachelor's degree or computer proficiency

for the director. But nearly one-half of the directors surveyed have additional administrative responsibilities, ranging from chairing the English Department to directing assessment to coordinating computer-assisted instruction to chairing an academic committee.

Salaries

As might be expected from the wide range of education and skills required of center directors, salaries run from a high of \$48,000 for a 12-month contract down to \$9,200 for a 12-month, part-time director. The good news is that 62 percent earn at least \$26,000 a year. The bad news is that only 17 percent earn \$40,000-\$48,000; half of this small group of directors held nine-or 10-month contracts, the other half, 12-month contracts. Thirty-one percent earn \$30,000-\$38,000 per year; 55 percent of this group of directors work on a nine-month contract; 11 percent have 10-month contracts; and 22 percent, 12-month contracts. Fourteen percent report earning \$26,000-\$29,000; one-half of these directors work on nine-month contracts, the other 50 percent have 12-month contracts. At the lower end of the scale, 17 percent said they earn \$21,000-\$23,000, with contracts divided as follows: 40 percent/nine months, 40 percent/12 months, and 20 percent/11 months. The final tier (10 percent) included an adjunct director and a part-time director, earning \$15,000 and \$9,200 a year, respectively.

Budgets

Some SCWCA centers (14 percent) have no separate budget allocation; but 14 percent have budgets totaling \$90,000 to \$125,000; and another 14 percent have budgets of \$68,000 to \$70,000. So 28 percent of SCWCA centers receive at least \$68,000 annually. Seventeen percent say their budget allocation falls between \$40,000 and \$50,000; another 17 percent receive only \$20,000-\$25,000 to support the center. The lowest range included two groups, those who scraped by on \$10,000-\$15,000 (14 percent) and those starving for funds (10 percent), with budgets of \$3,000 to \$6,800. Some SCWCA directors (17 percent) do not participate in a budget development process targeting specific goals and setting priorities. On the other hand, an even smaller percentage (14 percent) develops a budget independently. But 39 percent work with a higher-level administrator—such as a department head, dean, or provost—to develop the budget; and 31 percent report that the depart-

ment head alone determines the center's budget. Almost half (48 percent) reported that a department head controls the funding level allocated to the center. The next largest group (14 percent) said a dean controls their allocation; 10 percent said that the writing center director has control. A variety of other campus administrators were listed by the remaining centers polled. Most of these centers (69 percent) depend entirely on the university for funding; however, other options occasionally turned up, including federal grants, student fees, private donations, an on-campus grant, an endowment, income from professional seminars, and one state grant.

Staffing

A dramatic staffing range exists among SCWCA schools, with one institution reporting a single tutor, while another institution reported a staff of 40 (a number that included student interns). Overall, 52 percent reported supervising 1-10 staff members; 34.5 percent employed 10-20; and 14 percent employed a staff of 25-40. Unfortunately, directors seldom determine the number of people who will be working for them, according to SCWCA survey responses. Instead, that number is most often determined by a department head (41 percent). Another 10 percent say the division head and dean decide together how many will be hired, and the writing center director controls the number hired at only 27.5 percent of the institutions surveyed. The remaining directors say they work with other administrators or use a formula to determine the number hired. Most directors do exercise some control over tutor selection: 59 percent select the tutors who work for them; another 21 percent have a voice in making this decision as part of a committee of two or more. A few—10 percent—say the department head names those who will work in the center. Those hired as tutors are most likely to be American; 69 percent employ only American tutors; however, one school reported a 50-50 mix of American and international writing center tutors, and one even reported having a slightly higher percentage of international students (55 percent) on staff as English writing tutors. These centers usually offer some staff training, with 59 percent reporting seminars that range from 10 hours to 15 weeks in length; 20 percent also offer two or three hours course credit for writing center work. The rest use a mix of written instructions and

peer coaching (62 percent), specialty workshops (17 percent), lecture (10 percent), and an occasional videotape (7 percent) to train staff. Most centers also rely entirely on English majors for their staff (55 percent), but 27.5 percent draw tutors from many campus departments. Somewhat surprisingly in an era of litigation, 48 percent of our centers have no written policy manual or handbook for the staff; 45 percent do, however, have a handbook in use; and another 7 percent are working on one.

Writing Center Operation

SCWCA centers stay open anywhere from four to seven days a week and for 25 to 70 hours weekly. Only 7 percent remain open for fewer than 30 hours a week; 41 percent operate for 30-40 hours a week; and as many as 38 percent remain open 41-62 hours weekly. More than one-fifth of the centers (21 percent) operate branch locations, although that also means that 79 percent do not have branches. Nevertheless, it is encouraging to see that 10 percent even have branches on other campuses, while others report branches in a dormitory, law school, or MBA program.

Given the range of responsibilities and programs SCWCA directors juggle, it was a little dismaying to find that 45 percent of SCWCA centers have no clerical or technical support personnel of their own. On the other hand, 41 percent do at least have part-time help, and 10 percent actually have fulltime support personnel; some even have both part-time and fulltime support. The most fortunate 10 percent have their own computer specialist on hand, and another 10 percent have a secretary for the office; while 34 percent employ a work-study aide. Equipment available varied widely. SCWCA members with networked computers (31 percent) had as few as three and as many as 50 in the lab; the majority of labs—those that do not network their terminals (62 percent)—ranged from a single terminal to as many as 30 PCs or Macs. The number and type of printers available in SCWCA writing centers included: one or two laser printers (45 percent), 1-15 dot-matrix printers (52 percent), 1-3 ink jet printers (14 percent). In addition, 24 percent had desktop publishing capability; 10 percent had a copier. A handful had a video camera, VCR, TV, an overhead projector, a scanner, or an e-mail terminal in the center.

Conclusion

As colleagues engaged in promoting strong writing skills, we need accurate information to set benchmarks for professional standards, facilities, and appropriate working conditions. Judging by the disparity among our responses, we have our work cut out for us. We are a highly diverse lot—far too diverse in funding levels, support staff, and equipment for the good of our clientele and too diverse in administrative and budgetary control, professional qualifications and salaries for our personal good. Somewhat ironically, the only place we clearly need *increased* diversity is in the sources of our financial support. But by sharing information we can begin to chip away at the extremes, negotiating improvements that will one day allow every writing center to match its peers in every category.

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Work Cited
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The National Writing Centers Association Conference

April 13-16, 1994 New Orleans

For those who had neither the funds nor the time to attend the first National Writing Centers Association Conference, the co-chairs and the leaders of the catalyst sessions, poster sessions, and writing center director's symposium offer the following summaries.

NWCA Conference Evaluation: Some Observations from the Co-Chairs

Now that we have returned from the First National Writing Centers Conference in New Orleans, we think it might be a good time to review what worked well and what still needs polishing during the planning for the next conference (yes, people are already hard at work planning for the next one). Before launching into this discussion, a preface is perhaps necessary to explain how we arrived at the first conference. This first conference was a gamble in many respects. We had no idea how many people would attend, how many would submit proposals, or even what we would say to each other if we actually did congregate. In addition, we started out this conference without a budget; we relied on the goodwill of our respective institutions and the other institutions of the other conference steering committee members Christina Murphy (Texas Christian University), Joan Mullin (University of Toledo), and Eric Hobson (St. Louis College of Pharmacy) to provide postage, photocopying, desktop publishing, student help, and other supplies. Yes, it was reminiscent of one of those awful early 50's movies when the "gang gets together with the neat ideal of putting on a show." We were full of great intentions and plans, and yet none of us had ever done anything like this before. However, our main intention was to produce a different type of conference, so we included poster sessions, catalyst sessions, a cajun band, and dance lessons, and judging from the conference participants' responses to our questionnaire, we think we managed to do just that!

According to these evaluations, our two biggest successes were the actual location of the conference and the introduction of the poster session format to the conference itself. First, no one disliked being in New Orleans! The French Quarter received high marks, as did the Doubletree Hotel and its staff. The poster sessions, organized by Eric Hobson and modeled on similar displays in social

and natural sciences conferences, received nearly unanimous praise. Conference participants remarked on the liveliness and informativity of these sessions, and poster session presenters themselves were pleased with the exposure their presentations received.

On the negative side, participants responded that we did not provide enough communication before the conference. Confirmations, receipts, and programs were not available before on-site registration. In addition, the luncheon was cramped and, in general, the meeting rooms were small. Many of these concerns can be rectified next time now that we have a general idea of numbers, with a little more lead time, a pre-conference operating budget, and the general experience of getting one of these conferences "under our belts." However, one concern does deserve special attention. Many of the evaluations were critical of both the concurrent presentations and catalyst sessions. Specifically, the complaint was that *too many presentations were read*. We think this problem is difficult to address given the different levels of presentational experience participants came to the conference with. However, we as an organization need to perhaps recognize that our ethos as presenters is as important as the message we communicate.

Overall, however, the conference received high marks for the variety, scope, and inclusiveness. People commented favorably on the band, the beer, and the beignets. People were annoyed at the type size on the name tags; when we got to this point we knew things were going pretty well (but the type size will be enlarged next year).

Finally, speaking of next year, it became readily apparent that participants want an annual conference. Our hunch (or "neat idea") was correct; we are a growing, vibrant organization with more than enough research and success stories to share each year. To this end, and given the participants' many sug-

gestions, Eric Hobson is putting together a conference steering committee (in conjunction with the National Board and the first conference's steering committee) to plan the Second National Writing Centers Conference in St. Louis, in September 1995.

We enjoyed meeting so many people at New Orleans, and we thank you all for your patience, your suggestions, and your cooperation.

See you in St. Louis!

Byron Stay
Mount St. Mary's College
Emmitsburg, MD

Ray Wallace
Northwestern State University
Natchitoches, LA

Catalyst Session: Writing Centers as Electronic Communities

Our presentations began with Jan Roush from Utah State narrating the development of their writing center both in theory and in practice. Starting in 1984 with no particular plan for creating a paperless classroom except their belief in writing as process, Jan and her colleagues determined hardware decisions based on their software choices. As time went on, the physical arrangement—which began with cramped students facing walls—evolved into terminals all facing frontwards toward the teacher with an open middle space for revision work with tutors, hard copy remaining primary. Becoming more experienced in the use of equipment, more recently the center moved to networked computers, enabling greater collaboration through the physical clustering of students in groups. With increased exchanges of disks and the introduction of e-mail, Utah State has developed into a true paperless classroom. Jan's talk "The Electronic Triangle: Writing Center, Writing Programs, and Writing Classrooms in an Ethernet Age" set the

stage for our session by illustrating the changing priorities and decisions that were made in one writing center as new information became available about on-line tutoring over the last decade.

In "Tutors—On-Line and Off-Center," Maura Taaffe of Wright State in Dayton reported on how, at such a large commuter university with a writing center serving 2800 clients a year, tutors participate in many kinds of ongoing communications through vax-notes and e-mail. Maura posed questions concerning how these conversations can enhance college writing and thinking, and how we can learn more about electronic communications from a study of various types of tutor messages. Tutors in her writing center participate in a bulletin board program set up according to as many as 125 topics per quarter. Subjects range from introductions among new and experienced tutors and ESL, LD, and WAC concerns to serial stories, responses to required readings, entries for Off-Center and WCenter to personal messages about school, religion, current events, game playing, and creative writing. Maura found that opening the communication boundaries—director to tutors, tutor to tutors, tutor to teachers, tutor to students—helps the whole writing center community share ideas about writing, computers, and the work of the center. Her next enterprise will be to code messages and explore how this increased communication makes for better tutoring and improved student writing.

Carl Glover, of Mount Saint Mary's College in Maryland, then presented his show-stopping talk—"Ask Carl," or "How a Discourse Community Defines Itself." In an original and entertaining format, Carl picked up on Maura's question of how an electronic forum for writing center specialists can serve the community and enhance our work. Carl noted a range of response from disgusted to delighted to his WCenter column, "Ask Carl," which now also appears in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* as a "a highly irregular column of misadvice, weak puns, and general high jinks." He explored the idea of writing center as playground, where perhaps everything is relevant in an atmosphere that fosters teaching alongside of scholarship. Though some criticize that there are not enough serious messages that stay on topic, Carl believes that there need not be a monitor to define the forum because the purpose and nature of WCenter arises from those who

show up, that WCenter regulates itself. In an environment of relaxing, lively verbal play where diverse voices are all heard and accepted, Carl reminded us that interesting, "important" ideas do indeed occur, WCenter itself echoing the substance and style of the work of writing centers.

In a provocatively titled talk "Traveling Down the Information Highway a Bit: Connecting or Just Diffusing Through Technology," Dawn Rodrigues of Kennesaw State in Georgia spoke of how their writing center became a computer center too as the staff became computer technicians. Her central question was whether we are going too far with technology in writing centers, which she ended up answering in the negative, though she voiced some common concerns about on-line tutoring: what about the loss of human interaction and how can that be compensated for, and is the physical writing center the only place for writing and reading? While her colleague Bob Barrier is currently analyzing some 3300 WCenter messages (including "Ask Carl") in the same vein Maura was talking about, Dawn is researching how the Internet can allow linkups among colleges. She is involved in a study of five alliances among eighteen regional sites around the country, each set up with a special focus such as WAC, writing in the community, learning disabilities, on-line writing, and how to search the Internet.

Picking up on the question of now that we're connected to the rest of the world, what do we do with it, Jim Thornton and Brenda Thomas of LaGrange College in Georgia in "Research on the Use of Computers in Writing Centers" experimented with tutoring student writing using computers vs. pen and paper. They discovered some fascinating results: "Writing style, mechanics, and readability do not vary significantly as a function of whichever method is used. Students who cross media during the writing process produce longer final drafts and expend more time writing." They found the computer particularly useful for revision, but for the less-than-computer-literate student, composing on the computer produces more errors that are sustained throughout final drafts and is perhaps not as beneficial as generating ideas on paper.

Continuing with the obviously shared interest in effects of electronic conversations on tutors and their work, Scott Kelly of the University of Oklahoma focused on how

e-mail and the writing center change each other. He brought up, as Carl did, the question of whether communication in and about writing centers should be goal-directed or considered in the context of a refuge and haven between the academic and the outside world. What's the relationship between content and humor? What are our constraints and how do we maximize the mobility we now have? And again, what is the nature of our work and shouldn't we be a community that defines and defends itself? In "Condition Overload: Dealing with Electronic Discussion Lists in the Writing Center Environment," Scott emphasized that since e-mail is global and continuous, collapsing time and condensing talk, we do need to think about limiting intake and deleting the overload.

I finished off our panel of presentations with a description of "Facilitating Peer Review in a Networked Writing Center Environment." Computer use changes the roles and the behavior of both teachers and tutors as they interact with students, which makes understanding the relationship between technology and authority important. With parallels to Jim and Brenda's study, I found that while writers and readers conventionally produce coherent and separate drafts which can be reviewed, revised, and retyped, in an electronic environment the distinction between drafts is less clear, the process of writing more seamless. Writers and readers can interact with segments of an emerging text—our linear paradigm of attending to invention, arrangement, and then style dissolving into real recursiveness. What effect will these differences have on teachers'/tutors' decisions about when and how to incorporate peer critiquing into the writing process? With an interest in the writer-text-READER relationship, I offered ideas on how teachers and tutors can set up and monitor writing workshops that reap the "usual" benefits of collaboration and take advantage of the increased amount of participation and involvement reported when students write with computers.

In groups led by discussion facilitators Wilkie Leith, Sarah Kimball, and Bob Barrier, we began with a consideration of some wonderful questions posed by Linda Myers:

1. What can we identify as common threads, questions, issues in current electronic use in writing centers?
2. What do our theories, methods, purposes say about our direction as writing centers?

3. What does computer-assisted tutoring say to those outside writing centers?
4. Should we moderate electronic student/tutor interaction, whether it be one-to-one or conference board interaction?
5. Are computers taking over our writing centers? Are computer-assisted tutorials any more or less beneficial than traditional one-to-one tutorials? Is this just a high-tech way of doing the same work, or is this a new way of doing new work?
6. What philosophical and physical considerations are part of developing a computer-assisted writing center: hardware, layout arrangement, software. . . ?
7. There are issues of anonymity in correspondence and of access to technology. Are we really teaching when we send messages? Are we helping a person or a text?

Following are some of our responses to these questions:

- There is the contrast between online tutoring vs. in-person responses. We might gather students' responses after both and compare. What counts as tutoring hours and what kinds of units (hours, texts of various lengths?) shall tutors be paid for? How do we keep track of all the responses back and forth? Do we keep some in a separate file for a later in-person conference? The importance of having a user-friendly program was brought up; Norton Textra Connect, for example, makes it easy to compose and to share texts. Students end up reading and writing more often and more critically in a networked environment, doing more "thinking-in-progress."
- As for technology going too far, the consensus seemed to be that it hasn't gone far enough. With the American lag in science knowledge, we can't afford to be behind in technology. Indeed, writing centers can model the use of computers both inside and outside the university. WAC possibilities are certainly among the most intriguing. The question remains—do we manage technology or does it manage us? The problem of funding was brought up, how hard it is to keep up with hardware; but if we are just word processing, how important is

more speed and memory anyway? How soon before students are coming to college with their own laptops? How will they afford them? Another question is that of the evolving etiquette as far as "mixed" ownership of what is said, how posted comments might be taken out of context, what passes for a text. Although what appears on WCenter is considered public domain, one might ask for permission to use something.

- We also talked about the benefits of tutors using computers, especially if they're networked: they can use the Internet, search the library, set up bulletin boards, read the news. The one thing they seem hesitant about is criticizing each other's writing, since they know each other so well. Archives of good student papers and samples of projects donated by faculty might be used to train tutors, as could WCenter. A greater sense of community for tutors is valuable so they feel a connectedness with other tutors, other writing centers.

- The notion of community and connectedness seemed to be the most central to our whole session, as we ended with a discussion of linking our writing centers to other groups in the university as well as to high schools and the community at large. We need to be in on the setup end of getting new technology and planning the most effective physical arrangements for its use. We need to capitalize on support systems within our universities and let administrators know we're there, know what we're doing, and what our needs are. And finally we need to identify technical managers who can be on site in our classrooms and writing centers to help us with our computers so that, working together, computer and composition specialists can enable our students to take their place in the community of writers.

*Nancy Montgomery
Sacred Heart University
Fairfield, CT*

The discussion portion of this catalyst session was guided by the following questions:

- What can we identify as common threads, questions, issues in current electronic use in writing centers?
- What does computer-assisted tutoring say to those outside writing centers?

- Should we moderate electronic student-tutor interaction, whether it be one-to-one or conference board interaction?
- Are computers taking over our writing centers? Are computer-assisted tutorials any more or less beneficial than traditional one-to-one tutorials? Is this just a hi-tech way of doing the same work, or is this a new way of doing new work?
- What philosophical and physical considerations are part of developing a computer-assisted writing center: hardware, lay-out arrangement, software. . . ?
- There are issues of anonymity in correspondence, access to technology; are we really teaching when we send messages, are we helping a person or a text?

These questions evoked productive discussion that raised more questions, but allowed us to see where we are now regarding electronics in our writing centers and also established pathways toward answers in the future and future areas of research.

Electronics as Power:

Computer technologies have created the Internet that gives new power, persuasion, and play. Writing centers are no longer "isolated," "by ourselves," as was the complaint of the '80s. E-mail creates a bond which can wield change within the writing community which can then subtly create change within the very political infrastructure of the institution. Given the premise that we possess power for change, we must decide what changes we seek to evoke. And, how can we most effectively organize ourselves to elicit such changes?

Internet Use:

We need to negotiate within and between discourse communities. How are informal communities affecting tutorials? Granted, we continually note that the writing center is not a formal classroom; however, we do conduct the business of tutoring about writing. Public and private sectors want students who can write well for the public, not just for friends. The Internet fosters many new types of communities; we need research that examines if these communities help or hinder our ultimate goals for teaching and learning. Would a standard and moderators within Internet communities maintain instructional goals?

Tutors:

Computers are not replacing human tutors and we do not ever intend them to. Computers are only a component of the writing center. We need research that examines what *actually* occurs during on-line tutorials.

Does on-line tutoring create detached editors instead of personal tutors? Or are new electronic relationships allowing tutees to feel "safe" because they correspond with a non-judging stranger? What are we losing when we lose the personal? If we give up personal contact, how negative is this loss? Electronic interaction changes the roles of tutors, students, and instructors. We need to examine what these changes are, to question how the changes effect current pedagogies, and to suggest effective pedagogical changes for the future.

Tutor Training:

Tutors need to be versatile to meet the needs of the individual tutee on- or off-line, wherever she is comfortable. How will we train tutors to balance on-line and face-to-face tutoring? What are effective ways to train tutors for on-screen and on-line conferencing? If tutors work on-line, how will we pay them? How will we structure their hours? How will we limit the amount of text tutors are receiving for review?

Supplementary Usage:

In addition to on-line tutoring, what are other ways computers can help tutees? Possible applications include library access, ESL boards, and cross-disciplinary conversation. We can also use computers to help tutors. In large writing centers, tutors who would not otherwise meet can interact through a conference board. On an alternate conference board, teachers could post their assignments to inform tutors of specific assignment goals.

Ownership/Plagiarism:

Are there ways to prevent tutees from plagiarizing material from conference boards? One method is to adapt citation techniques to cite conference board contributions. If one contributes to a conference board, does that indicate that she is open to citation? Does she automatically require "official" citation or are her ideas public domain?

Hardware:

To keep up with the ever-changing technology (foregoing an inconceivable budget increase), how can we upgrade and maintain the technology in our writing centers? Options include cultivating links with other

technological disciplines and appointing writing center staff members to university computer committees. Interdisciplinary connections will enable us to share resources such as service contracts, technical maintenance staff, and computer training. Participation on computer committees will give us a voice in hardware and software decisions, rather than dealing with inadequate hand-outs.

Discussion raised more questions than we were able to answer. However, we defined clear avenues for future research.

Linda Myers
Lehigh University
Bethlehem, PA

Catalyst Session: Writing Centers as Administrative Communities

Group leaders: Jeanne Simpson, Barry Maid, Cindy Johaneck, Eric Hobson

Cases addressing staffing, location, reporting lines, and assessment initiatives were distributed to four small groups for discussion and recommendations for action. We used the SOAP heuristic provided by Eric:

Subject: questioning phase, gathering subjective information and history

Object: gathering objective information, data, reproducible findings

Assessment: defining the problem, determining its severity, analyzing its status (improving/worsening), searching for causes

Plan: determining course of action, making appropriate recommendations, establishing and maintaining a system for monitoring outcomes

Recommendations for writing center directors:

- Clarify the writing center's mission and its relationship to the institution's mission
- Develop clear policies and procedures consonant with the mission
- When new initiatives appear within the institution, it is prudent to prepare to address them before being asked, the "pre-emptive strike"
- Budget authority is crucial to having the ability to address administrative problems
- Look for opportunities whenever you

perceive a threat; often these are opportunities to gather data to support requests, to identify strengths, to conduct research

- Assessing writing center work can be done by using student surveys; tutor journals and conferences, peer evaluations and portfolios (tutors need to be assessed too)

Recommendations for NWCA:

- Collect and disseminate model mission statements for writing centers
- Collect and disseminate model policies and procedures for writing centers
- Develop a mentoring program for novice writing center directors
- Designate sessions to address issues identified: assessment, policies and procedures, reporting lines, budget authority, location

Jeanne Simpson
Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, IL

Catalyst Session: Writing Centers as Research Communities

During this catalyst session, seven writing center researchers (Carol Peterson Haviland, Marsha Penti, Judith Rodby, Barbara Roswell, Carol Severino, Nancy Welch, and Meg Woolbright) presented snapshot papers of their current research. Following these presentations, workshop participants discussed the work they were currently engaged in and reflected on the presentations in an effort to address such questions as: What are the common threads and issues in writing center research? Who is being served by this research? What do our theories, methods, purposes say about our direction as writing centers?

Common Threads

Members of the workshop described the papers as "electrifying," "a rich feast," "the best papers I've ever heard." Many of the papers were based on stories of lived experience, particularly stories that probed at painful contradictions and questioned the writing center's complicity with institutional practices that silence or frustrate students. The research presented at this session was not contained by the limits of traditional academic evidence. Although characterized by rich theoretical investigations into students'

cultural and literacy backgrounds, the research began with stories of the writing center, and moved from these stories into conversations with colleagues in settings as diverse as the produce section of the grocery store. While much of the research was informed by contemporary theory, it also included remembered wisdom from grandmothers. The research was not self-congratulatory but instead self-critical, deeply aware of the partialness of individual perspectives. It was also strongly multi-voiced, merging the voices of contemporary theorists in poststructuralism (Roswell) and postmodern feminism (Woolbright) with the voices of students, tutors, and teachers (Haviland). This research also challenged traditional academic boundaries about what can be researched. It probed at the "borders of the unthought" (Welch), questioned artificial disciplinary separations (Severino), remarked on the multiple and contradictory positions writing center people hold in the academy (Penti), and complicated institutional requirements (Rodby).

Who benefits from writing center research?

Although much writing center research is done for traditional academic purposes (to support graduate programs, dissertations, and professional advancement), it is clear that much of it grows out of daily contact with students and the willingness to take students' concerns seriously. It is research that addresses issues related to questions about how students are represented in higher education, what happens when students with strong religious convictions go to college, what it means to be able to write in more than one language, and how well-intentioned institutional requirements can result in the denial of agency and gross misunderstandings. Because it is research that examines contradictions that arise out of practice, it does not make writing centers more comfortable places to be. However, in many ways writing center research is engaged with important contemporary issues. It is investigating ways of working productively with difference, and it has implications that reach beyond the academy. As Joe Saling, one of the workshop participants, reminded the group, traditional academic research has failed the academy in terms of its effectiveness in producing change.

Direction of writing center research

Workshop participants agreed that the effectiveness of writing center research will depend on preserving a self-critical edge and

on writing in a manner that is accessible to multiple audiences. It must continue to be research that demonstrates awareness of institutional context, but it should not be limited by local context. The success of writing center research depends on having our students as our collaborators. Writing center research will also continue to be characterized by personal risk-taking and by a stretching of traditional limits. Such research cannot arise out of a position of victimization or self-promotion, nor can it be done at the cost of other writing center responsibilities such as collecting data on writing center usage and gathering practical information for working with students. If writing center researchers continue to conduct research that is integrated with their philosophical positions and their daily work with students, research that risks critiquing the system, they will be making knowledge that will help the academy respond more insightfully to the challenges of the next century.

*Nancy Grimm
Michigan Technological University
Houghton, MI*

Catalyst Session: Writing Centers as Teaching Communities

This session started with three scenes from the future: Barry Maid presented a writing center that has managed to fully integrate itself into the university. All writing courses take place with writing center one-on-one or small group pedagogy, and writing across the curriculum is fully implemented. At this point, however, the Vice President of Academic Affairs asks the writing center director to become a degree-granting program.

Stephen Newman described a writing center which has regressed to a remedial center. Because writing across the curriculum serves as a writing program, and because of severe cutbacks in the university budget, the writing center can only be used by those tagged as retention risks.

Muriel Harris presented two contrasting futures. In one, technology allows students to enter the sterile, high security zone of the multi-media center. There students can electronically receive help, write papers, use world-wide data bases and create hypertextual interactive responses to assignments. In the other future, Ye Olde Writing Shoppe, tutors maintain the human element

so important to writing center work, but demand students come with hard copy only. They refuse to work with technology and its new world.

Participants in the session used scenes from the future to think about how we can connect to the university's teaching mission and how we could promote ourselves as leaders of the future. If we do not prove ourselves valuable within our own contexts, we will be shaped by institutional pressures around us. We must find ways to actively shape education by integrating our ways of learning into the institution.

Participants thought of several ideas for outreach: Make known your center's mission statement (and make sure you have one); use tutors in public or classroom presentations; fulfill university committee obligations so you can get to know others and others can come to know your writing center; create and distribute writing center newsletters which inform and teach the community; establish a grammar hotline (or writing hotline); create partnership programs with various businesses; establish an outreach program to engage in community projects.

Through each of these efforts, writing centers can show that they stand on the cutting edge of higher education: we need to demonstrate that centers offer solutions for problems created by the now-outmoded structural and pedagogical methods still employed by educational institutions. We offer students methods of inquiry, not conflict; collaboration, not isolation; active talk, not passive silence; "hypertextual organization," not hierarchical authority. Furthermore, when centers blend their critical, collaborative inquiry with technology, they demonstrate how one-on-one pedagogy fits an electronic model of education: by blending technological and human methods of learning.

Writing centers continue to redefine the ways in which people think about teaching and learning. Centers do this by drawing on current resources from various disciplines, which is how we can shift our methods to suit particular situations. We have been and continue to be about contexts and change. Therefore, writing centers can help higher education redefine scholarship, administration and a collaborative educational enterprise that truly serves students in their contexts—both current and future.

(continued on page 19)

A summer exercise in wholeness: ESL teaching as cooperative cultural exchange

I was sitting in the Pepperdine University Writing Center this summer, not having much to do between appointments, when a head popped in the doorway. "Mark, I need see you," I heard. I turned and saw the face of one of the new Korean students. "Come on in, Kwan," I told him. "No, outside," he said, jerking his head backwards to persuade me to join him in the hall. "Kwan, what's wrong?" Earlier that week he had pulled me aside and told me how worried he was about his English proficiency and shyness. "Just come here," he said, seeming a bit nervous. I readied myself for something serious. When I got into the hall, he smiled and placed a towel and a tube of sunscreen in my hands. "Can you put on back? I'm going to beach." I looked at him for a moment in disbelief, and then told him, "You need to get yourself a girlfriend, Kwan." He hung his head and gave me a grinning "I know" before he took off his shirt. I quickly looked both ways to make sure that no one else was in the hallway, and rubbed the sunscreen on his back as swiftly as I could.

This is one example of the evolving role of our Writing Center—from academic tutoring to applying sunscreen. But more than this, it is a small illustration and reminder of how tutors should approach teaching international students. Five years ago, the director of our Writing Center noticed that an increasing number of foreign students were having difficulty adjusting to mainstream classes. To help fill this deficiency, the director started the English Language Institute (ELI), a seven week intensive English immersion literacy program in which new or continuing foreign students take five hours of English and Speech classes a day and participate in social events throughout the surrounding Los Angeles area. In the program, the professors and Writing Center tutors work closely with

each other to help the students become better prepared for the rigors of college academics and the possible pitfalls of social interaction in a new country. Keeping true to Pepperdine's mission statement of educating the whole person, the ELI staff, besides teaching written and spoken English, involves the students socially and culturally by taking them to theatrical productions, museums, and typically American activities like baseball games. Through this program and my continuing work in the Writing Center, I've learned a good deal about the importance of involvement in teaching English to non-native speakers of the language.

One of the reasons I became involved with ELI was to develop my own skills in teaching English as a second language and to acquaint myself with some of the problems international students have. I virtually became a teacher of English and a student of international education. In my experience with higher education, I've become well acquainted with "Academic Pride" in teachers as well as in myself. Many times, to try to preserve the roles of teacher and student, we in academia focus on creating the image that we know almost everything in our field, and we expect teachers to teach and students to learn. I've had several professors who have tried to encourage the distance between themselves and their students, possibly to raise their esteem in both their own eyes and those of their pupils, and more than once I've caught myself doing this as a graduate student among undergraduates. This can be annoying to some students; to international students, it can be plain dangerous.

When Lynn Goldstein and Susan Conrad studied writing center sessions with ESL students, they found that the students who did not actively participate in negotiation made

only slight sentence-level improvements and no substantial changes. This means that students who were told how they should change their papers and who gave replies back to the tutor like "uh-huh" and "okay" made little changes, while those who argued their position and discussed their essays with the tutor made wholesale improvements. The percentages were astounding: when the tutor negotiated a revision with a student, the student successfully made the revision 97% of the time; however, when the tutor simply told the student about a necessary revision, the revision was successfully made only 18% of the time! This tells us something—we cannot resort to the traditional relationship of a teacher lecturing to a student because with international students it simply will not work. There must be some give and take; both sides must teach, and both sides must learn.

This past summer I tried as much as possible to put myself in situations in which the international students would normally find themselves in this country. For example, while they were busy learning English, I was busy trying to learn bits of Japanese, Russian, Chinese, and so on. I had problems, for example, with the second vowel sound in the Russian word for the number four, "chetiryeh," and the conjunction of the plosives "ch" and "t" in their word for "what" ("chto"), not to mention all the problems I had with the minute nuances of pronunciation in Chinese. These problems, however, seemed to relieve a lot of pressure from the students, because when they saw me struggling with their languages and could laugh at me, they knew it would be all right if they sometimes struggled with English. This is why the social immersion part of ELI is so important. Not only do students get more exposure to real-world English and

more opportunities to develop it, but they have chances to prove themselves in different ways. We had nine new Russian students this summer, and since I am originally from Montana and sometimes miss even the concept of winter in Southern California, at the height of summer I had a feeling that these Russian students might be interested in going ice skating. After bringing up the idea, I had to rush over to the dorms to recruit someone to help me drive because all of them wanted to go. When we finally started skating, I noticed a change in the dynamics of the group, and noted that the student who could speak the best English had the least developed skills on the ice, and some of the students who were struggling in the classroom were skating circles around everyone else. This activity gave them another outlet in which to prove themselves and regain some of the confidence they may have lost from struggling with a new language. Sasha, a student who had only begun to speak English three months earlier, found that he could communicate a lot easier that evening. Before we all went home, he turned to me and started to speak swiftly in Russian. Then his eyes grew large and he said, "Mark! I sorry. Sometimes I think you speak Russian!" I even noticed a difference in a few of them days afterwards—they seemed much more relaxed and confident, and one of them informed me that "We MUST go skating every weekend!"

Being willing to take risks and put myself in learning situations also directly contributed to the quality of my tutoring sessions. When ELI first began, most of us were baffled by the structure of the Russian students' papers. They opened with extremely broad topics and were developed by scattered points that were usually only made coherent by the conclusion. One student insisted on beginning his paper on friendship with the sentence, "People have some friends." No matter how hard I tried to convince him that he should probably be a little more precise than that—even though the sentence was true—he would not change it. It was not until a quarter to a third of the way through the program that we finally came to a conclusion that this structure was a product of Russian rhetoric. It seems that in Russia papers are structured much like a periodic sentence—the topic accumulates points here and points there, but nothing makes sense

until the end. Without knowing this, we could have been banging our heads against the wall the whole summer wondering why the students could not write logically developed papers. With this knowledge in hand, however, we could help them understand that Russian structure and American structure are two different things, and while they are studying here, they need to learn and use the structure that we use. Incidentally, about two weeks ago my roommate and I rented a Hungarian movie that had done very well at the Cannes Film Festival, and we were ready to be dazzled. However, for the first hour and a half we spent most of our time looking at each other wondering what the heck was going on. Were we missing some profound symbolism in these disjunctive images? It wasn't until the final half hour that things started to come together and make sense. I have since wondered whether William Faulkner was secretly a Slavic rhetorician.

Whatever you can learn about the cultures of your students, learn. Another of the Russian students was consistently having problems with linking verbs, always omitting them. I tried to remember some fragments of the Russian the students taught me, and I remembered that the phrase "What is this?" was "Chto ehto," or, literally interpreted into English, "what this?" When I told him that he says "what this" in Russian and we say "what is this" in English, an immediate flash of recognition flew across his face. I think that if I hadn't have known this small Russian sentence, it would have taken a lot more time and work to help him on his way to understanding why what he was writing was incomplete.

I have tried to recreate little pieces of this summer's ELI program to illustrate that we need to envision our teaching relationships with international students as cooperative learning relationships. While the students are being immersed in English, we should immerse ourselves in the complete experience of education, teaching and learning and learning and teaching. In these types of relationships, both sides can benefit.

There were times when I wondered whether I was getting too close to the students, and whether I was compromising my position as a mentor to them by becoming too vulnerable and too honest about what I

did and did not know and about the things that I personally struggle with in language. My anxiety disappeared when I returned to school this fall and a group of international students caught me in the hall and wondered where I was going to in such a hurry. I told them I had a class. "What are you teaching," they asked. I told them I was TAKING a class. "With other students? Why aren't you teaching the class?" I quickly realized that holding yourself in high esteem as a teacher does not make a teacher; it is only when others hold you in high esteem that you become a true teacher. I'll never forget the time this semester when I was invited to the apartment of one of the former ELI students for a barbecue. Looking around, I found I was the only person who was not an international student in a group of about 30 people. Like the ELI students of the summer before, I had become a minority in a majority culture and felt a little alienated because of all the foreign sounds I heard whizzing around me—Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, German, Chinese. But soon I felt at home, and the host of the gathering brought four of his Brazilian friends who were not in college over to introduce me to them. "This is Mark," he said, putting his hand on my shoulder. "He is our teacher."

Mark Werdin
Pepperdine University
Malibu, CA

Work Cited

- Goldstein, Lynn M. and Susan M. Conrad. "Student Input and Negotiation of Meaning in ESL Writing Conferences." *TESOL Quarterly* 24.3 (Autumn 1990): 443-60.

New Writing Tool Software

Writing Coach is a new software writing tool written by Paul Hagood, a teacher of writing at Linn-Benton Community College in Albany, Oregon. His goal, he says, "was to create something that would give all writers easy access to the main tools we teach in freshman composition courses: a process approach, audience awareness, intuitive and critical-thinking brainstorming strategies, and reader-oriented revision. I also wanted the program to be inexpensive, have a tiny learning curve in terms of operation, and even be fun to use."

The software is used from within writers' own word processing applications. Writers open the worksheet or outline that meets their needs, and they then respond to questions or prompts in the worksheet, using their word processor's normal techniques. They can then save or print out the completed worksheet or outline. There are 62 worksheets, including the following: Brainstormers; "Thinking Outlines" for business, academic, and personal writing; Reader Analysis Worksheets; Integrated Worksheets for brain storming, reader analysis, and organizing; Editing and Proofreading Guides; Writer's Block Exercises; and Writer's Notebook.

There are versions of *Writing Coach* for DOS and for the Macintosh. The suggested retail price is \$89 (though there is an introductory price now of \$65), and the individual academic version (for students and faculty) will sell for about \$45 in college bookstores. It can be purchased and returned within 30 days for a full refund if the buyer is not satisfied. For further information and/or to receive a free demo disk, call 1-800-267-7936. (WritePlace Software, 2852 Willamette St., Suite 125, Eugene, OR 97405; fax: 503-686-3562; e-mail: writeplace@aol.com)

Writing Center Journal

The *Writing Center Journal*, a refereed journal with articles on writing center theory, research, and practice, is published twice a year (spring and fall). The Spring/94 issue was the last for co-editors Diana George, Nancy Grimm, and Ed Lotto, who have completed a three-year term. The new editor is Dave Healy, University of Minnesota, who has been a member of the *Writing Center Journal* Review Board for three years and is the former chair of the Midwest Writing Centers Association. Submissions and subscriptions to the *Writing Center Journal* should be sent to the following:

Dave Healy
Editor, *The Writing Center Journal*
General College
University of Minnesota
128 Pleasant St. S.E.
Minneapolis, MN 55455-0434

Manuscripts submitted to the *Writing Center Journal* should be double-spaced and follow the MLA style sheet (3rd ed.). Send four copies, with identifying information appearing only on the first page.

Subscriptions to the *Writing Center Journal* only are \$10/year. Subscriptions to the *Writing Lab Newsletter* only are \$15/year. Membership in the National Writing Centers Association is \$10. You can mail separate subscription payments for each publication to each of the editors, or you can mail one check for \$35 for both publications and NWCA dues (made payable to the National Writing Centers Association) to the new secretary of the National Writing Centers:

Alan Jackson
Secretary, NWCA
DeKalb College
2101 Womack Road
Dunwoody, GA 30338

Job opening

Visiting Program Coordinator: Manage daily operation of the English Department's peer tutoring Writing Center. Knowledge of theories and research in literacy important. Knowledge of teaching writing to non-native speakers and computer-

assisted instruction desirable. M.A. preferred. Begin July 1. Send letter, vita, and names of three references to William Covino, Department of English, University of Illinois at Chicago, M/C 162, 601 S. Morgan, Chicago, IL 60607. AA/EOE

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations (WCAs)

- October 7-8: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Kansas City, MO
Contact: Jaqueline McLeod Rogers, Writing Centre, The University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B 2E9 or Susan Sanders, 307 East Douglass, Houghton, MI 49931
- October 27-29: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Colorado Springs, CO
Contact: Anne E. Mullin, ISU Writing Lab, Campus Box 8010, Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID 83209 (208-236-3662)
- October 27-29: Southeast Writing Center Association, in Winter Park, FL
Contact: Twila Papay Yates and Beth Rapp Young, Writing Programs, Rollins College, Box 2655, Winter Park, FL 32789 (407-646-2191).
- April 7: Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association, in Newark, DE
Contact: Gilda Kelsey, University Writing Center, 015 Memorial Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716 (302-831-1168)

MWCA Call for Proposals: Extended Deadline

In the May issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* there was a Call for Proposals for the Midwest Writing Centers Association conference, in Kansas City, on Oct. 7-8. The deadline for submitting those proposals was listed as April 30, but the deadline is now June 10. For further information, please contact Jaqueline McLeod Rogers, Writing Centre, The University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B 2E9, fax: 204-786-1824.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Relinquishing responsibility

Since writing center tutors are not able to "pick and choose" their clients, since we can't screen them, we basically have to take them as they come and hope that Johnny Public, or rather, Johnny College Student, will be on his or her best behavior. Inevitably, though, we get those students who are not "model" tutees. These students can present a variety of difficulties for the writing center staff, but two types of students are particularly common, and I've found that the tutor's key to dealing more effectively with both is to relinquish responsibility.

The first difficult tutee is Last-Minute-Lou. This is the student who comes in for help one day, or even one hour, before his paper is due, and in many cases he will hand us what is obviously intended to be a "final copy" due "in five minutes." This type of student was initially a tremendous source of grief, but I have finally accepted that my trying to take responsibility for the problems created by the student's lack of planning helps neither the student nor myself.

I think some of these students come into the writing center in order to get a sort of pre-approval from the "experts" (or maybe even just a forecast of their grade), and others actually think that we can (and will) magically transform their papers for them in a matter of thirty minutes. I suppose it could be considered a compliment that some of our students think we are all-knowing experts, but this appears to be the myth of most non-English majors: that we know everything. I can't very well be upset with these students when I am one of the main propagators of the myth, but with wisdom comes responsibility, and it is my responsibility to concentrate on the big picture. I have come to realize that the tutoring process has to be the same, regardless of the amount of time the student has left for revision. I cannot just "fix" a paper or become an editor because a student doesn't have time to do an actual revision. I cannot take (and do not want) the responsibility of making a student's essay an "A" paper—as if that is an objective, con-

crete something I could guarantee. I would rather put my infinite wisdom to work at helping to create a better writer. And, although this is a goal which requires time, effort, and commitment from both the tutee and the tutor, providing that "quick fix," becoming the directive, corrective tutor these students anticipate or desire, only encourages tutees to commit the act of "slacking" in their responsibilities as students and in their commitment to become better writers. Incidentally, this is not a gender-related disorder; I have seen Last-Minute-Lou-Lou's in the center as well.

In many cases, the students simply have a misconception of what we do. Because of a lack of information, misinformation, or just plain wishful thinking, they think we are an editing service. In other cases, the problem is that they have a misconception of what we are: in their eyes we are tutors, period. We live in the center; we have no life outside of the center; we exist to tutor.

One evening, I was in the center after hours working on the computer, and I heard a knock at the door. Thinking that it was my supervisor, I opened it. Despite the fact that the hours are posted on the door, and despite the fact that we had been closed for over three hours, the young man standing before me requested to see a tutor. I told Lou that we were closed, that the tutors had gone home and that he should come back tomorrow and schedule an appointment. His response to this was, "Well, you're a tutor aren't you?" I had to laugh. "Yes," I replied, "but I'm also a student, and I have to work on getting my own paper finished right now." His paper was due the following morning, and he vigorously pressed me to look at it. If I hadn't been so busy working on my own paper, and if I hadn't had class in half an hour, I probably could have been talked into helping the poor fellow, but that he had the nerve to request I drop everything and tutor him, *after* being assured that we were closed and that I was there borrowing a computer to do my own homework, struck

me humorously as a self-centered request. Behind my cool facade I was chomping at the bit, for I hadn't even run the spell check yet, but I politely urged him to come earlier next time (both earlier in the day and in the assignment) and accepted that maybe he just couldn't comprehend that I could have a life outside of tutoring.

A second common type of student I've come across in the center is the individual who refuses to engage in a session. As with the chronic Last-Minute-Lou's, I'm sometimes baffled as to why they even bother. Some of them, I realize, are required to be there a certain number of times during the semester, and this is part of the problem. Because they really don't want to be there, they feel it necessary to strap on their "attitude problems" just before they step inside the door. In some cases there is aggressive resistance: they take the "I dare you to teach me" stance. These students will, in extreme cases, fold their arms, slide down in the chair with their legs crossed at the ankles, and exhibit a bored or hostile "you're wasting my time" attitude throughout the entire session. Unlike Last-Minute-Lou, who will beg to get in, this tutee would like nothing better than to be let out.

In other cases, the students simply take a passive, non-communicative stance: these students look at the walls, the holes in the ceiling, the floor, the other students in the room, their shoes, and the dirt under their fingernails—everything except their tutor and their paper. When asked a question—any question—the response is inevitably "I don't know." The not knowing is, in most cases, obviously the result of the student not listening to the question or avoiding having to think about it. This bothered me tremendously when I first started tutoring, but now I can endure the long silences just as well as any uncooperative student. The key here, as with the Lou's, is for me to try to put the pressure on the student and take it off myself. It used to be that the silence, if it was longer than a few seconds, would make me

very nervous, and I would start talking, sometimes asking different questions, sometimes giving clues to the one I had already posed. I realize now that I was condoning the tutees' uncooperative behavior by trying to carry on the session by myself. Now, after I am sure that they understand the question, I am determined to "ride out the storm," so to speak. I find that the students are more willing to cooperate once they realize that I am not going to move on to answer the question for them, or be side-tracked onto another topic, until that first question is answered. The students who won't engage in the session are different from the Lou's in that they seem to question the fact that we are able tutors who can actually help them. We can help them though, if we don't "enable" their non-participatory behavior.

Personally, I was unprepared for these types of students, and I'm afraid that I didn't handle them very well when I first encountered them. However, I have discovered that the key in dealing with both of these kinds of students is to not let them put their responsibility on my shoulders. I can't let Lou's lack of revision time pressure me into focusing on the writing instead of the writer, just as I can't let the taciturn student's lack of cooperation pressure me into a taking his or her side of the dialogue in addition to my own. I have to "just say no" to a tutee's dumping of responsibility, and always remember the big picture—caving into the above pressures will not likely create better writers, only neurotic tutors.

Linda G. Peloquin
Peer Tutor
California State University, Fullerton

ASK CARL

"Ask Carl" is a highly irregular column of misadvice, weak puns, and general high jinks for writing center directors, tutors, and chain-saw enthusiasts. Sponsored by "Rhetoric Radio" and the Ask Carl Writing Center Evangelistic Team, this column also appears on WCenter, the electronic forum for writing center specialists. Last fall, I decided to depart from the typical bilge that had emanated from this column and instead initiate over WCenter a serious discussion on the use of figures of speech in writing. As we know, the best way to judge quality writing is by counting the number of figures of speech per page in any given written work.

What's more, being the notorious party animals that we are, writing center workers are in constant need of new material with which to dazzle our friends and amaze our colleagues. I mean, why play charades when a good, old-fashioned figures of speech quiz will make you the life of the party? Why, I've brought several parties to an early close in the middle of my "Metonymy or Synecdoche: Which Is it?" game.

As is often the case on WCenter, the "Ask Carl Figures of Speech Quiz" received mixed reviews. While several folks offered a number of creative but wrong answers, others called for my ouster from the network for jamming their electronic mail boxes with time-wasting trivia and mindless drivel. Of course, that merely confirmed my suspicion that some people just don't like to party.

The following quiz consists of four questions. A "swell prize" will be awarded to the winning entry in each of the following categories: "Correct Answer," "Creative but Wrong," and "Close but No Cigar." If you want to be an instant winner, please enclose \$100 with your entry. Good luck! Identify the following figures of speech:

Question #1: "Time flies like an arrow;
fruit flies like bananas."

Two "Close but No Cigar" answers included "equivoque" by Margaret-Rose

Marek and "hypallage" by Gil Wilkes. In the "Creative but Wrong" category, Joseph Hart guessed that it is a "parallelogrammatic—a marriage of science, logic, math, and content/context...a process thing." In Karl Fornes view, it could be a "'figure eight' of speech, a statement that turns and intersects within itself." Anne Munson, a Madeleine L'Engle fan, thought it might be a "tesseract." According to Joan Mullin, the figure of speech is a "curve," since both bananas and arrows curve in time. Chris Helms thought it should be called a "Groucho," as it reminded him of that famous line from Groucho Marx, "With a camera, I shot an elephant in my pajamas. What it was doing in my pajamas, I'll never know." What figure of speech is it?

Question #2: "In tennis and in life, you can't win without serving."

Joan Mullin took exception to this question because she found the notion of "service" offensive to her feminist sensibilities. She suggested an alternative question for the male readers to answer: "Garbage, like life, ought to be close to the curb." The same answer fits both, although the difference between the two is that mine makes sense.

Question #3: "Graduate student."

This is an easy one.

Bonus Question (25 points will be added to your score if you answer this one correctly.): "What contemporary rhetorician is named after two body parts?"

Please send your answers to me at Dept. of Rhetoric and Writing, Mount Saint Mary's College, Emmitsburg, MD 21727, or via e-mail at "glover@msmary.edu." All entries will be acknowledged and must be post-marked by February 29, 1996, to be eligible for a swell prize.

Warm regards,
Carl W. Glover
Mount Saint Mary's College
Emmitsburg, MD

WRITING CENTER ETHICS

Directive Non-Directiveness: Readers' Responses to Troublesome Scenarios

In my last column (several months ago, thanks to the 4C's and end-of-the-semester craziness), I reflected on the first four scenarios I offered for discussion, each one dealing with a student who had written on the topic of affirmative action. Two of the students in these scenarios wrote inflammatory papers from "extreme" political positions; the other two wrote more "moderate" papers but chose to parrot the instructor's views rather than express their own. In this month's column, I would like to share the responses of readers who were kind enough to send me their views and commentaries on these scenarios. The tenor of the responses I received was mixed, to say the least. In answer to my question about whether tutors should attempt to sway students from the extreme or falsified positions presented in each of the scenarios, Jeanne Simpson stated quite forthrightly,

I would make no direct attempt to alter the content of any of these papers. If I found the positions expressed repugnant, either for content or for insincerity, I would say so and allow the student to choose whether to continue the tutorial. Why would I proceed this way? If as educators we do not abide by the First Amendment, if we believe some speech is more equal than other, then all our trumpeting about "academic freedom" is hypocritical rot. The point of the First Amendment is that all ideas will be heard and that the right of the public to make their own judgments will remain unimpaired.

An anonymous undergraduate tutor from Joyce Hicks' writing center felt quite differently, however, and would have no qualms about challenging the students' positions in the context of a writing conference:

The first and the last [scenarios], in which the students displayed clearly

biased and somewhat ignorant opinions, affected me in the same way. I could understand that the circumstances of each student's background prevented him/her from taking an objective stance on the issue. However, I feel it is an essential part of learning that we develop positions on all issues which consider intelligently a broad range of possible answers. In order to do so, we must get outside of our exclusive set of experiences to consider the responses of those whose past includes experiences vastly different from our own. For this reason, I would suggest to #1 and #4 [the white extremist and black extremist] that they consider alternative ways of viewing the issue so that they might express their strong feelings in a less offensive and hostile manner. . . . [In the case of students #2 and #3, I would recommend that the students] do some more critical thinking about what it is they really want to say, and . . . rework their papers to reflect their own beliefs, regardless of their professors' [opinions].

The basic approach recommended by this tutor for students #1 and #4—suggesting that they consider possible counterarguments or anticipate readers' reactions—was echoed by several of my correspondents. The justifications offered for using this strategy in conferences typically focused on the need to help the students "make their arguments stronger" and "not immediately alienate the reader," both of which sound like admirable, non-directive goals fully in keeping with Jeanne's "First Amendment" stance. But I wonder how non-directive this particular strategy actually is in practice. Even though few people were willing to state (as this tutor does with students #2 and #3) that they

would actively encourage some students to recast their papers completely, I can't help but note that we rarely seem to tell students to "think about opposing viewpoints" in conferences when we agree with what they have to say. Most often, we only ask them to consider counterarguments when we disagree with a paper's stance and have some objections that quickly spring to mind. Some of my respondents were quite aware of this tendency toward subtle, directive non-directiveness and speculated that it might be unavoidable in conferences, no matter how hard we might try to be "objective" and tolerant of others' views. As Karl Fornes wrote,

Someone mentioned something I thought was extremely important—the necessity to treat each situation in the same manner. However, I wonder if that is possible. My hunch is that I am more prepared to defend/argue for the side of the issue which I happen to hold. That is, if I believe affirmative action is a well-designed program for the promotion of social justice, then it follows that, at least in my mind, I have more reasons for it than against it. I'm not sure how I can separate my perceptions, experience and research from my role as tutor. Of course, each tutoring session evolves throughout the session, and I don't mean to imply that I, as a tutor, have any right to impart my "wisdom" on a student writing a paper contrary to my position. However, in such a situation, the first thing I'll do is let the student know where I'm coming from.

Karl's commentary highlights the perplexing, problematic, and paradoxical pair of proverbial horns we often find ourselves on in conferences, and not just with this set of students. On the one hand, we can choose to be "supportive" of students' positions,

whatever they might be, but risk being directive in subtle ways that we might not even be aware of at the time. On the other hand, we can choose to be honest and "upfront" with students about our opinions, but thereby run the risk that our "honesty" might serve to silence student voices, to sanction some views as acceptable and others as proscribed, to stifle student thought and expression when our stated mission in writing centers is to do exactly the opposite. Joan Mullin's tutors began to address some of these very issues when discussing these scenarios at a group meeting, and I will close this column with her report of that gathering:

Most evident was our own discomfort—ultimately, that is—with our own readiness to oppress others, silence others, in the same ways that we SAY we object to. That is, we SOUND like it's OK to take away the rights of those who don't agree with us: it was frustrating to find ourselves ready to be as aggressively oppressive as those about whom we complain. If we want to change the vicious cycle of oppression, we decided—intellectually—we need to work on listening, questioning, and teaching—both ourselves and those with whom we work. That doesn't mean we collapse our opinions or give up our passion (we can't, but it means we search for ways to enter a dialogue with others—and we teach others to enter a dialogue with us. A tutor also mentioned being up front about the consequences of not listening—being up front with ourselves as well as with the writers. We were not all happy with the outcomes of this discussion. While we agreed that this is ideal, many of us agree that our passionate beliefs don't always submit to our intellect—sounds like some of the writers you described, doesn't it?

Michael A. Pemberton
University of Illinois
Urbana-Champaign, IL

Minutes of the National Writing Centers Association Board Meeting March 17, 1994, Nashville, CCCC

Board Members Present:

Byron Stay, Nancy Grimm, Lady Falls Brown, Christina Murphy, Pamela Farrell-Childers, Muriel Harris, Joe Law, Jim McDonald, John Husband, Diana George, Anne Mullin, Robert Murray, M. Clare Sweeney.

Guests Present:

Beth Rapp Young, Twila Yates Papay, Michael Pemberton, Jennie Ariail, Rick Marshall, Dave Healy, Martha Marinara, Kate Latterell, Michael Condon, Sharon Thomas, Pete Carino, Emily Golson, Donna Reiss, Phyllis Kahaney, Molly Wingate. (Note: The attendance sheet missed a portion of the room, so the above list is incomplete.)

Past president Lady Falls Brown called the meeting to order at 6:50 p.m. and, in the absence of president Ray Wallace, turned the meeting over to first vice-president Byron Stay. Minutes of the NCTE meeting in November were approved.

Executive Secretary's Report:

Nancy Grimm, executive secretary, distributed the financial report indicating a treasury balance of \$6088.38. She reminded members of NWCA services, including starter folders, dissertation research support, and regional conference support. Grimm also announced new regional representatives, John Husband of the Midwest Writing Centers Association and Joe Law of the Southeast Writing Centers Association. It was brought to the board's attention that Robert Murray is the new New England representative. Grimm announced the resignation of Clara Fendley and told the board that Jim McDonald and Pamela Farrell-Childers were the top vote getters in the election for two at-large positions. The election was conducted early this year to increase the potential pool of candidates for the executive secretary position.

Announcements and Standing Reports

a. Byron Stay noted that there would be another meeting on Saturday morning to

make final plans for the national conference; he also distributed the conference schedule.

- b. Muriel Harris reported that the *Writing Lab Newsletter* was reformatted last summer and is in healthy condition with plenty of manuscripts on hand. She encouraged members to send her newsworthy items.
- c. Diana George reported that the current editors were preparing their last issue and had selected David Healy as the next editor of the *Writing Center Journal*.
- d. Byron Stay reported that the topic for the NCTE workshop would be "What is a Writing Center? Models for the 90s." To suit the concerns of the audience, the planners will put their primary emphasis on high school writing centers.
- e. Lady Falls Brown reported that WCenter was doing well. She expressed appreciation for Eric Crump's monthly excerpts in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and for Dave Healy's initiation of an e-mail board for tutors.
- f. Pam Farrell-Childers reported that the National Directory of Writing Centers is still available for \$15 and mentioned plans for an update.

Regional Reports

- a. The East Central Conference will be held May 6-7. Joan Mullin is the conference organizer.
- b. Anne Mullin reported that the Rocky Mountain Conference will be held in conjunction with the regional MLA on October 27-29.
- c. John Husband reported that the Midwest Conference will be held in Kansas City, October 7-8, with Nancy Grimm as keynote speaker.

- d. The New England Conference was held two weeks ago with Lil Brannon as guest speaker.
- e. The Mid-Atlantic Conference, held March 1, featured Christina Murphy as keynote speaker.

Old Business

- a. Byron Stay reported that over 200 proposals were received for the national conference. Organizers expect approximately 400-500 people to attend. The Writing Center Directors Symposium will be held at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday. Catalyst sessions will be held on the following days. Eric Hobson was responsible for organizing poster sessions in order to involve as many participants as possible. The poster sessions will be held at breaks in the program. Jim McDonald has coordinated information on hotels, dining, and entertainment. Stay announced that Christina Murphy would conduct the final session that will summarize conference issues and discuss future directions. A Cajun dance band is planned for Friday night. The keynote speaker plans have not materialized. Stay expressed thanks to the members of the conference planning team—Eric Hobson, Jim McDonald, Christina Murphy, and Joan Mullin.

- b. Prior to the election of a new executive secretary, the members discussed issues concerning how elections should be held. The problem of low attendance at the annual NCTE meeting was mentioned and the possibility of holding elections by mail. Another possibility mentioned was holding a national conference every year and conducting elections at that conference instead of NCTE. Members discussed the difficulty of finding regional representatives who could afford to attend national meetings on a regular basis. Farrell-Childers reminded the board that canceling the NCTE regular meeting would exclude high school members and suggested sending letter to the schools regarding the importance of attendance at national meetings. A motion was made and approved to refer the matter to an ad hoc committee. Eric Hobson will head the committee. Byron Stay will appoint additional members including, if possible, one of the original executive board members. The committee will examine the by-laws, determine the

intent of the original members, survey the current board for suggestions, and make recommendations to the board.

- c. In soliciting nominations for the position of executive secretary, it was determined that no current board member had institutional support for the position. A motion was made to suspend requirements that the executive secretary be a member of the executive board. The motion was approved. Alan Jackson was elected to the board for a three year term as executive secretary.
- d. The board postponed the decision about having an annual national conference until after the New Orleans conference in April.

The meeting was adjourned in time for the NWCA Special Interest Session. During that session, Michael Pemberton received the NWCA 1994 scholarship award for his "Writing Center Ethics" column in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*.

Nancy Grimm
NWCA Executive Secretary
Michigan Tech University
Houghton, Michigan

Sharing Online Resources

Those of us who are launching OWLs (Online Writing Labs) need not reinvent wheels—or duplicate resources. By working together, we can share our efforts with each other, with other writing centers, and with Internet users around the world. To explain what I am proposing, I need to report what we've been doing in our Writing Lab at Purdue University. In addition, I hope that by describing our efforts, I will encourage others to send their progress reports to the *Writing Lab Newsletter* so that we can build a collective sense of how and where this new writing center service is developing.

At Purdue, we began by setting up an e-mail account so that students and faculty could send questions about writing and/or request copies of instructional handouts from our files. Slowly, we've been entering our handouts and have many more to add. One limitation, as any e-mailer knows, is that all text is in ASCII characters, with no way to underline, boldface, change fonts, or format in any visually effective way. But

given those limitations, we offered our handouts to anyone who might be interested. A few brief announcements on the Internet resulted in (literally!) thousands of requests for handouts—from school districts in British Columbia; government offices; universities; Internet users in Japan, Korea, Taiwan, South Africa, Mexico, etc.; other writing centers; students in universities around the country; technical writers in businesses; and on and on and on.

Our plans for next year include 1) launching a software program which will do all the e-mailing for the user and which has numerous options that students can use as desktop writing tools, 2) developing hypertext tutorials to help writers learn how to search the Internet for information when writing research papers, and 3) setting up our own gopher site, with listings for our materials. We'd also like to list (or—in gopher terms—point) to listings of resources and services on the Internet offered by other writing centers. Internet users could then, in effect, consult a central listing for online instructional materials being provided by writing centers around the country. Writing centers would thus have an opportunity not only to provide a major outreach service (and gain some national visibility for writing centers in general) but also to continue doing online what writing labs have always done—share resources with each other.

If you have materials online or are about to put some online—or are interested in being listed as an online service, please let me know. If you want to share your online projects with newsletter readers, send a short description to the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, and I'll include progress reports as they are sent in. Finally, if you are interested in seeing Purdue's OWL in action, send an e-mail message as follows:

send to: owl@sage.cc.purdue.edu
subject: owl-request
message: send docs

The "docs" file is our help file and will explain how to get an Index of handouts we now have online and how to request copies of those handouts. This is all on an automatic server, so the subject line has to be exactly as printed above, with only a hyphen and no spaces between the words.

Let us hear about your OWL.

Muriel Harris
Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana
(harrism@mace.cc.purdue.edu)

Southeast Writing Center Association

Call for Proposals
October 27-29, 1994
Winter Park, Florida
"Writing (Centers) in the South: Special Miseries and Extraordinary Possibilities"
Keynote speaker: Lil Brannon

What is unique about our writing and writing centers? How does creativity (some may call it madness) help us solve problems and lead us in new directions? We especially encourage proposals which include peer writing consultants. (Some free housing for students will be available.) Some possibilities for this Halloween Weekend meeting include escaping the usual paradigms, how writing centers save us from madness, ghosts and phantoms in the writing center, finding community in chaos, playing trick or treat with the budget, clients and tutors removing their masks, writing center diversity. Please submit proposals by June 15 to Twila Yates Papay and Beth Rapp Young, Writing Programs, Box 2655, Rollins College, Winter Park, FL 32789, 407-646-2191.

Midwest College Learning Center Association

October 6-8, 1994
Minneapolis, Minnesota

MCLCA invites college learning assistance professionals, faculty, administrators, graduate students and researchers involved in learning centers in higher education to attend. For conference information, contact Rosanne G. Cook, Associate Vice President for Academic Support Services, St. Ambrose University, Davenport, IA 52803 (319-383-8704).

East Central Writing Center Association

Call for Proposals
March 10-11, 1994
Bloomington, Indiana
"Can the Center Hold? Evolving Missions and the Challenge of Writing in the Disciplines"

Interactive presentations are invited on tutor-talk, tutor training, writing center theory and practice, locating ourselves within English departments or other disciplines, writing center administration and planning, research within writing centers, computing tools, liaisons between and collaborations with English departments and writing centers. Please send four copies of a one-page summary and a completed form to Ray Smith, Campuswide Writing Program, Franklin Hall 008, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405 (812-855-4928), joepeter@indiana.edu. Deadline: November 1, 1994.

Young Rhetorician's Conference

June 23-25, 1994
Monterey, CA

The conference will meet to advance the cause of writing faculties in times of budget crunch and academic backlash politics. For conference information, contact Hans Guth, 782 N. 1st Street, #6, San Jose, CA 95112 (408-294-3639). For local information, contact Maureen Girard, English, Monterey Peninsula College, 980 Fremont, Monterey, CA 93940 (408-646-4100).

(continued from page 9)

Participants agreed that our mission includes strengthening communication in all forms, redefining and expanding the definition of texts, and helping shape a new approach to teaching and learning. We need to promote in each of our contexts how our teaching expands learning, how it contributes to important institutional and community changes. In order to accomplish those goals, we need to define our missions within our contexts before we are redefined by our institutions. It is not time to create a new definition of the writing center. It is time to integrate our definitions to create new educational institutions.

Joan Mullin
The University of Toledo
Toledo, OH

Poster Sessions Replace Talking Heads: Practicing What We Preach

Not only did the First National Writing Centers Conference in New Orleans create an international forum from which to discuss issues of vital importance to writing centers, it also broke new ground and set the standard for future professional presentations. Borrowing the idea of poster sessions from the sciences, nearly one hundred presenters in five sessions played with the potential for one-to-one interaction, problem solving, and modeling offered by this type of professional dissemination of knowledge and made these sessions into a focal point—some said, *the* focal point—of the conference.

Covering tutor training, institutional politics and affiliations, research, promotion and development of programs, expanding opportunities, management techniques, computer applications, the poster sessions allowed conference attendees the chance to work closely with an expert to answer local questions. As one attendee reported, "Never before have I felt so free to ask the questions I've really wanted answers to. In typical sessions I'm either too shy or am certain my question is too peculiar to be of much general interest. This time, however, I was invited to ask my questions."

In addition to the chance to work one-to-one, the poster sessions offered more variety than is available at any one time during most professional meetings. Each session contained approximately twenty simultaneous presentations arranged throughout a large

exhibit hall. This arrangement created two important benefits: the opportunity to scan a great deal of information quickly and the chance to prioritize and then zero in on particular types of information while skipping over items of less immediate concern. Choice and variety were heralded as the sessions' most immediately striking features. That variety was reinforced by the fact that writing center professionals from elementary and high schools, community colleges, colleges and universities presented. More importantly for the continued health of the writing center community, many of the most exciting, stimulating, and most rhetorically effective poster presentations were proposed, developed and presented by undergraduate and graduate tutors, many of whom traveled by car and van from as far away as Iowa, Indiana, and Georgia.

These sessions were received well by presenters as well. Although many presenters were unsure of the session format before the conference, that attitude dissipated within minutes of the first poster session's start. What seemed alien at first became a chance to make points more effectively than is usually afforded in formal oral presentations. Said one poster presenter: "Putting this poster together really made me think about what I wanted to say and how I could best make my points while also encouraging folk to stop and ask questions. This working visually and verbally isn't easy, but I think I want to try it in my classes when I get home."

As organizer of these sessions, I wish to thank everyone who took the chance, the leap of faith, and developed such a powerful group of presentations. More knowledge was shared and more connections for future collaboration and sharing created in each of these ninety-minute sessions than happens at many conferences. Although I doubt that the poster sessions will, as one conference evaluator suggested, "be[come] the sole format for the next national writing centers conference," they will be a focal point, a center, for our future gatherings. I even suspect that as the word of their success gets out, we will have started the ball rolling to change such staid and conventional meetings as CCCC and NCTE. That shouldn't surprise us, however; writing center professionals have always been innovators.

Eric Hobson
St. Louis College of Pharmacy
St. Louis, MO

Writing Center Directors Symposium: Defining the Issues

Discussion leaders: Lady Falls Brown, Catherine Dennison, Pamela Farrell-Childers, Paula Gillespie, Emily Golson, Gilda Kelsey, Anneke Larrance, Joe Law, Ellen Mohr, Jeanne Simpson, Sharon Williams, and Sharon Wright

The goal of the Symposium was to define for ourselves an agenda of major issues facing writing center directors and to think creatively and collaboratively about possible solutions and directions in which to head. Our groups focused on the following issues:

- How do we meet the challenges posed by the introduction of online writing labs (OWLS)?
- What issues dominate the concerns of high school writing center directors?
- How do we reorient the image of the writing center from that of a dumping ground for remedial students?
- How do we deal with cutbacks and retrenchment and make a case for restoration of previous staff and budgets?
- How can we respond to the calls for assessment and accountability?
- How do we respond to being marginalized by the academic system?
- How do we get funding to continue and/or to grow?
- How do we talk to/work with administrators to gain administrative support?
- How do we cope with the problems and complexities of implementing major technological change?
- Where should writing centers be situated in their institutions and what are the issues involved in leaving or staying within an English department?
- How do we reach out to serve a wider community and how do we communicate with them?
- How do we become integrated into the curriculum of our writing programs?

When we reconvened as a large group to watch the enactment of solutions we had come up with, the richness, insight, and humor of the presentations made us aware of how creative writing centers folk are. We had defined agendas and actions that can keep us busy well into the next century.

Muriel Harris
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN

Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
April 7, 1995
Newark, DE
Keynote speaker: Byron Stay

Proposals for 20 or 50 minute presentations or workshops should be sent by December 15, 1994 to Gilda Kelsey, University Writing Center, 015 Memorial Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19716 (302-831-1168; e-mail to kelsey@brahms.udel.edu).

Quill Conference on Tutoring

Call for Proposals
October 28, 1994
Lawrenceville, NJ
"Dynamics, Dilemmas, and Dialogues"

Deadline for proposals: June 30, 1994. Contact Dr. Jacqueline Simon, Education Enhancement Program, Rider University, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-3099 (609-896-5244; fax: 609-896-8029, attn: Dr. J. Simon).

THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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