

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

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

November, 1993

...FROM THE EDITOR...

You'll notice that much of the discussion in this issue is about bridges, spaces, and relationships between ourselves and the variety of people with whom we interact and intersect. There are also inanimate objects to connect to as some of the writers of these articles remind us, for even the textbooks that influence students' writing and the paper they write on enter into—and influence—the tutorial setting.

You'll also notice that there is a page of job announcements for those looking for positions as writing lab directors. Even if you are not in the market, you might find that page of listings interesting. While we seek to define ourselves and our work, these announcements define the skills being sought and the responsibilities being included in such positions. What do you make of it all? What tasks and what kinds of program development do others see as included in the position of a writing center director? Are we appropriately helping to prepare a future generation of directors? Your comments are invited.

You'll also notice that there is a conference announcement for the first National Writing Centers Association Conference, in April, with the Secretary of Education as keynote speaker. The conference is being planned as an interactive one with some innovative ways for us to network and share our views. Stay tuned for more details....

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Bridges between faculty and tutors: An honest look at teacher/tutor relationships

Imagine this (all too familiar) scenario in the campus writing center. A student comes into the center, waving a paper that obviously has a large D on it. She maintains loudly, "This just isn't fair!" Clearly, as a trained and experienced tutor, you know that students often have to complain when their evaluations by professors don't match their own opinions of their writing, and you know from experience and training that you as a tutor must get the student's attention off the grade—and the teacher—and onto more productive things. But you as a tutor wonder about the legitimacy of the complaint. This is the third complaint from this class this week, and frankly, as you glance at the work, you wonder about the grade too. What should you do? Agree with the student? Take your quandary to the writing center director? Should the director, in turn, talk to the instructor? Or go to the composition coordinator?

The time is long since past when we can ignore the necessary "meeting of the minds" that must occur when collaboration becomes important in the English department in gen-

eral and the composition program in particular. The day of the student at one end of a log and the teacher at the other, immortalized by Mark Hopkins as the ultimate teaching situation, no longer fits, since collaborating and cooperating with the teacher and student are the writing center tutor, the director who trains and supervises the tutors, and the program director who somehow manages to pull together the composition program and its often large and diverse staff. It is no wonder that puzzling, often tricky, situations appear, requiring delicate and humane treatment, especially when we remember that at the base of all activity is the requirement that we help students become comfortable and competent writers in the university.

Because students who come to the writing center often have problems that go beyond editorial skills or poor organization, we must as tutors and directors decide how we will work within the collaborative framework in

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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 self-addressed envelopes with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

which we find ourselves. We need to discuss openly and frankly the many situations we so often find ourselves in and arrive at some consensus about how we will meet them. Often at staff meetings we bring up such scenarios we have encountered and discuss how we might ameliorate—if not solve—them. A few of the situations we have discussed follow:

Situation I: A friend of yours wants you to tutor him privately and has even offered you payment to do this work. The problem is that you know this student has Dr. Uther, and Dr. Uther has let the center know he does not permit or want a tutor to work directly on an ungraded draft. Although this policy applies only to work brought to the center, you are uneasy. Should you agree to help your friend?

Our first impulse was to say that we should not be reluctant to tutor outside the center, especially for our friends. After all, tutors don't take an oath of allegiance to the writing center when they are hired. But after further thought and discussion, we saw some real ethical problems begin to surface. What if the friend told Dr. Uther that he was being tutored by someone who worked in the center? Would the professor then discourage his students from going to the writing center altogether, even with graded drafts? Would the center's credibility and effectiveness with the faculty be in question?

Most of us finally agreed, after much discussion, that we would volunteer to help our friends, but we would instead encourage them to come to the center for tutoring. Friendship means helping in whatever way we can, but that help should not exceed the limits the professor has established.

Situation II: A student comes in for help with understanding or interpreting the assignment she has been given. She has the written directions for the assignment from Dr. Blackstone with her. You read over the assignment, but you are reluctant to help the student because you too are unsure about the assignment Dr. Blackstone has given. How would you handle the situation?

We felt that the best way to handle this situation is to send the student back to her instructor for clarification. We agreed that the instructor is the best (and quite possibly the

only) person to explain the assignment and that a tutor and the writing center itself could be held responsible if the student failed the assignment because she did the wrong thing. If this were to happen, the writing center's reputation could be damaged among students and faculty alike, thus preventing the center from helping as many students as possible.

Situation III: A student comes into the writing center with a graded paper that he wants to go over with you. After you have read through it, the student tells you, in confidence, that he had not written the paper but had turned in another student's paper and received credit for it. The student begs you not tell the instructor who had given the paper a B. What should you do in this tricky situation? Where does your responsibility as a tutor lie?

We thought that the first step should be to explain to the student that he has plagiarized and to explain as well what plagiarism is and the university's policy concerning plagiarism. Thus, the student should understand the gravity and the possible (indeed, likely) consequences of his actions. After this explanation, we thought the tutor should try to persuade the student to tell the instructor that the paper was not his own and to try to work out a mutually acceptable arrangement for dealing with the situation. However, if the student refuses to see the instructor himself, a very difficult situation arises. The group, in fact, was split on how to handle such a situation.

Some of the group felt that their sole responsibility was to the student; they said it was the teacher's responsibility to be aware of the dangers of plagiarism and those who teach would perhaps even resent being told by the writing center that a student had plagiarized. Others maintained their responsibility was to the university, of which the writing center is a part, and for the university's good, the case should be reported. Other tutors countered by saying such reporting could lead other students on campus to tell students that the writing center personnel could not be trusted or that the tutor's actions were not helpful. Such rumors, false though they might be, could prevent honest students from coming to the center for help.

Many in our discussion group felt the student had no right to put a tutor in such an

awkward position. Although the tutors feel loyalty to students is paramount, it is not in this student's best interest to let him cheat. Also, it is important that faculty members support and trust the writing center. As a result, we would tell the student he has put the tutor in a very awkward position, and since the student will not go to the instructor himself, the tutor will go to the writing center director, who may go to the composition director or the department chairperson or the instructor. Once again, the tutor should give the student the option of going to the instructor himself.

Situation IV: A student comes in for assistance on a paper and announces she is a member of Mrs. Johnson's composition class. You remember Mrs. Johnson has a policy statement on file at the center, outlining what tutors should and could do with the student's work. When you take a look at the policy, you discover it is so ambiguously worded that you cannot determine how much assistance you are permitted to give on this paper in progress. You try phoning Mrs. Johnson at her office, but she is out of town for a meeting. What should you do with the student now?

As we discussed this case, we could not avoid discussion on the helpfulness of policy statements we ask teachers to submit. We agreed the best thing about the procedure we have in place is that it provides a clear avenue of communication and interaction among all the people involved—the teacher, the student, and the tutor. For this reason, and because we cannot interpret the statement clearly, we thought the fairest and most helpful thing we could do for the student at the moment was to have her write a short diagnostic piece on which they could work until the tutor could contact Mrs. Johnson and clarify the extent of help the tutor could give. Caution, then, in the immediate situation while not destroying the good-faith agreement between faculty and center would be the best avenue.

There are, unfortunately, few concrete and definitive answers to the problems that may arise when writing centers and instructors act, as they should, as partners in the learning situation. As we know, each student who seeks academic support at a writing center is a separate and unique individual, with very different academic problems and often emo-

tional problems which underlie poor performance. So the answer to the questions may simply be what was intimated here: conversation *about* the problems *by* the people involved. Those of us who have faced and tried to cope with these very real dilemmas have no magic answers, although our experiences in our own writing center and composition program have led us to offer some guidelines and suggestions we have found useful. We conclude by passing these pieces of advice along for consideration:

1. Try to circumvent as many problems as possible by establishing criteria for selection of tutors (e.g., good GPA, good grades in composition, good writing sample, ability to analyze strengths and weaknesses of sample papers, good interpersonal skills) and carefully screening applicants for tutoring positions. Then, conduct training sessions for those you select.
2. Weekly staff meetings provide a nonjudgmental atmosphere for the writing center director and tutors to discuss what has happened during the week. Help the staff solve "little" problems before they become big ones. As tutors realize that frequently there are no clear-cut answers, they may be willing to discuss their own concerns more readily.
3. Clarify the "chain of command" *before* problems happen. Make it clear which kinds of problems the tutors should take to the writing center director, which (if any) they should take to the composition coordinator, and which (if any) they should take directly to the instructor.
4. Hold regular meetings of the writing center director and other administrators such as the composition coordinator and department chair to improve communication among those responsible for composition and writing center programs.
5. Establish and give to tutors and instructors a "generic" writing center policy sheet indicating what tutors may do, in the absence of direct instructions from the individual instructor, to help students.
6. At the beginning of each year, ask instructors to fill out individual policy sheets indicating what they do and do not want tutors to do for the students from

their classes. May tutors help students with rough drafts of papers that have not yet been submitted? May tutors help students organize material for a paper? May tutors point out mechanical and grammatical errors in a paper that hasn't already been graded? And so on. File the policies, and make sure all tutors are aware that they should consult the policies before tutoring. If the instructor does not have a policy on file, tutors will follow the generic policy mentioned in number 5.

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Are you about to lose touch with the newsletter?

Check your subscription expiration date on your mailing label (see the back page). Subscription information is included in the box on page 2. Please renew soon. We don't want to lose you!

Grammar hotline

The 1994 Grammar Hotline Directory is available to anybody who sends a first-class SASE (business letter size) to Grammar Hotline Directory, Tidewater Community College Writing Center, 1700 College Crescent, Virginia Beach, VA 23456. More than 60 services in the U.S. and Canada will be listed, most of them at colleges and universities and many of them in writing centers. We hope to be able to offer multiple copies for a small charge next year as a result of many businesses having requested copies for all their staffs.

The writing center as ethnographic space

When the writing center was an exciting new pedagogical "wonder drug," capable of curing sick papers across the curriculum, our confidence in its power was based on our certainty that individual instruction is the ideal—elusive, often frustratingly impractical—but nevertheless ideal. Stephen North states that "all writing centers—or all places that can be called writing centers—rest on this single theoretical foundation: that the ideal situation for teaching and learning writing is the tutorial, the one-on-one, face-to-face interaction between a writer and a trained, experienced tutor" (North 28). However, even though many peer writing centers are designed to offer individualized consultation, and some of what happens in these student-to-student exchanges achieves this one-to-one interaction, we hypothesized that the client and consultant are not really an isolated pair. Tutorials do not occur on a Platonic cloud where two autonomous individuals enjoy a communing of souls.

What is in fact happening in these interactions involves a strong connectedness to a much broader discourse within the college community and even beyond. Moreover, these interactions are affected by a variety of socially and culturally determined expectations. The writing center is one setting for the patterned interaction we call conversation, behavior that, as Muriel Saville-Troike explains, "is now recognized as a manifestation of a deeper set of codes and rules" (7). We set out to examine more closely the ways in which the writing center governs the dynamics of tutorial conversations, with the ultimate goal of training our consultants to maximize their effectiveness as conversants in a complex space.

Our first objective was to discover and describe the elements of interaction as they occur within the frame of the writing center space. We used the ethnographic method of recording observations of "communicative situations, events, and acts" (Saville-Troike 27). Our consultants were asked to act as participant-observers, filling in observation

sheets as quickly as possible after each conference. They were prepared in advance with questions to guide their observations, questions about their physical environment, the interpersonal and psychological space, and the conversational space. We also asked our writing center trainees to observe and record what they saw, and we did the same. Once recorded, the responses were analyzed to determine whether there were any obvious patterns. And there were. We found five different kinds of space, the variations of which could form numerous configurations. There were also many verbal and non-verbal ways that consultants and clients used to facilitate the opening and closing off of these spaces as conferences developed. Some of these were obvious; others were almost subliminal.

The first and most obvious is *interpersonal space*, two people sitting and conversing, which includes the physical distance between client and consultant, posture, and the psychological relationships. *Textual space* includes dimensions opened up on paper, such as the client's draft and, in some cases, a scrap of paper used for mapping the client's ideas or otherwise making notations for discussion. *Intertextual space* comes into play when a textbook is used as a reference during the conference, creating space between the student text and a professional text. The *environmental space* includes not only the amount of physical space in the writing center, but also the adjacent space with its noise and distractions of passersby. The writing center's location on campus also impacts on the interactions that take place. As ours happens to be located in the library building at the center of campus, that spatial factor elicited many interesting observations from all observers, mostly comparing our center to a fishbowl or a train station.

Less apparent, perhaps, but just as powerful in its influence, is the *writing community space*. This brings to the conversation input about the assignment from the teacher and the class, discussions about writing that cen-

ter on conversations that have taken place earlier in the dorm or at home, with concerns about audience and purpose that may reach well beyond the classroom. Written reports of the conference that will be sent to the teacher constitute yet another space affecting the interaction within the conference.

As we suspected, these observations indicated that the writing center involves not just a simple, one-on-one, private conversation. In fact, the typical writing center conference is a complex, multi-directional, dynamic conversation: the consultant who understands the extent and power of the possible configurations of such an interaction can more thoroughly exploit its inherent advantage. Indeed, it can be crucial to a successful conference that the consultant know when and how to broaden the writing center space beyond the narrow confines created by the one-on-one space—in effect to knock down the walls of the writing center and open up the conversation to other participants. For example, it is often important to remind clients of their assignment or to relate shared experiences as writers within the college writing program, reminders which lift the conversation out of the narrow writing center space and broaden the discussion to include the wider space of the college writing program.

Effective use of space, however, is not simply a matter of opening up space for clients: at times situations call upon consultants to close off space, and it is up to the consultant to know which treatment of space is most useful at any given moment. In one observed interaction, the consultant, Joy, successfully opened up her conference with Amy to allow the teacher to enter in by suggesting that the student double-check with the teacher on the assignment. Joy quite properly left that space open. Later she opened up intertextual space by introducing a textbook into the discussion, suggesting that the client take it home and review a chapter appropriate to their talk. In this instance, Joy would have gotten better results by moving into that

textbook space with Amy, reading the text passage with her and discussing its relevance to Amy's problem. This would have circumscribed the intertextual space, guiding the client to relevant places in her draft which the text might help her revise. Instead Amy opened up a huge intertextual space by merely giving the text to the student, leaving this space entirely open for the student to draw her own conclusions.

In cases like this, consultants are probably trying to avoid acting like teachers, but when things are left too open a conference often takes on the appearance of two people endlessly circling one another around a space neither is willing to cross. We've often heard students in our composition classes return from the writing center with this complaint: "The consultant did not give me any real help." When valid, this complaint may be the result of a consultant's allowing too much space in a conference.

The boundaries of a conference are constantly changing as the need arises. Helping students locate them can be another valuable activity. For instance, when Amy suggested that Joy consult her teacher to calm her feeling of anxiety, she closed off part of her interpersonal space, deciding that she had reached a boundary of usefulness with the student, and opened up new space outside the writing center at the same time. Writing conferences engage three major categories of space, each with its boundary: the interpersonal space of the writing center itself, the broader space of the campus community, and the yet wider space beyond the campus in which relatives, friends, writing specialists, and the clients' ultimate audience reside. Clients need to be clear about these writing boundaries, and often need to redefine boundaries and redraw maps; consultants need to know the territory of academic writing in order to serve as effective guides.

We can gain insight into the movement from one spatial arrangement to another by reading conversation analysts who talk about the rules for turn-taking which govern conversation (e.g., Gumperz). They note that conversants signal to each other when they are finished talking and want the other person to take her turn. Consultants repeatedly close off particular topics, drawing bound-

aries by stopping talking or by asking questions and signaling to the student that it is her turn to talk. In effect, the consultant is creating space for the client to talk. The consultant inappropriately closes off space, however, when both consultant and client try to speak simultaneously. Of course, it is quite natural for people to interrupt each other, particularly when the excitement of capturing a profound idea and the fear of losing it take over. The consultant must recognize that she can get so caught up in thinking about a client's paper or planning a line of reasoning in her head, that she might forget to create the client's space. To avoid this, the consultant must be taught to remember that the client's concerns always take precedence: No matter how important the consultant's idea, the focus of the conference must be the client's train of thought.

Texts can also become traps, closing off the consultant or the client from reshaping or rethinking a problem. One or both of them can become attached to the form and substance of the paper in front of them, and fail to see alternative possibilities. In this case, what really needs to happen is for the conversants to leave the paper draft—to close off that space—and to open a new space for discussion. Or another solution is to turn to a different textual space by working on scrap paper.

These are just a few of our findings so far. What seems to emerge is a description of the fundamental system, or set of codes and rules, which operate in the writing center, a system which can be used more effectively if better understood. There is, of course, a great deal more to discover and analyze. For example, how do participants of different ages, sexes, or cultures interact? How do they negotiate the spaces between them and the spaces they inhabit together? How do they draw borders and invite each other to share space? There is a wide expanse of new territory to explore.

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Some readers ask. . .

We are currently conducting research concerning writing centers in pre-schools, elementary schools, middle schools, and junior high schools. If you know of any such writing centers or someone who may have information about these centers, please contact us. Thank you.

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VOICES FROM THE NET

Sharing records, part II: Political considerations

Last month this column consisted of excerpts from discussions on WCenter* regarding student record retention and the ethics of sharing records, particularly with faculty. The conversation was intense enough and lengthy enough to justify continuing it this month, giving more viewpoints and rationales a chance to be read. The level of involvement in this discussion indicates how important the relationship with the "rest" of the institution is for writing centers and how delicate the negotiations of those relationships can be.

Student reports, ordinary stuff at one level, become a kind of pressure point when looked at from a perspective that includes institutional political environments and the tensions that move in the undercurrent of the mundane.

Below is Part Two, which picks up right where we ended last month.

Thursday, 8 July 1993
From: Sharon Strand

I am wondering why people are reluctant to let English department instructors know what goes on in tutoring sessions. I see that communication we do with the instructors as part of our PR. I also see it as representing the three elements that are present in any tutoring situation: the student, the tutor and the instructor who has provided the assignment and will give the final assessment to the piece of writing. Our tutors fill out a notification form after each session. [...] It is a three-part form, and one section of it goes to the English composition instructors. We will send it to any instructor on campus if the student requests it or if the instructor has sent the student and requests notification. We have had no negative repercussions from this and in fact find that it established a good rapport with the instructors.

Thursday, 8 July
From: Lady Brown

Sharon,

In reading the comments, I too have noticed a kind of them/us attitude toward instructors. Since I am an instructor as well as a director, I don't see instructors...as enemies. I am [one of] them, as it were. Although our primary goal is to help the students as best we can, an equally important goal to me is to assist our colleagues as they (we) try to help students become better writers. Thus, I don't have a problem with notifying instructors that students have come to the center.

Thursday, 8 July
From: Molly Wingate

I have never sent a report to a faculty member. I have records of each appointment [and]...I encourage the staff to put on any extra notes about odd appointments so that if any question arises, we have some information. A faculty member will call now and then to ask about a student. I am very protective of the writer and ask the faculty member to make clear what kind of information he or she wants and why. I give the information I think they need.

This writing center is primarily a service for students. If a faculty member wants the kind of control over the wc that getting reports implies, then that person should go hire a teaching assistant. Meanwhile, I'll help the students and help the faculty help students. Usually when I get a call, the faculty member is genuinely concerned about the student's progress, not worried about the wc and its work. These conversations have led to some fun collaborations.

Thursday, 8 July
From: Jeanne H. Simpson

I always thought it was a good idea to keep instructors informed about their students' relationship with the center. Good PR, but also a way of reminding everyone (including ourselves) that this was a collaborative effort.

Thursday, 8 July
From: Steve Bray

I have to agree with Joan and Sharon; not sharing reports with faculty limits our ability to influence how they look at student writing.

We use a conference form based upon the one Joan developed, which allows for tutors to write comments on one side. [...] These comments provide many faculty a look at their students' writing processes they never get to see. Faculty have commented that it is helpful to gain a new perspective on student writing and that writers tell things to tutors they are reluctant to communicate to faculty. Faculty gain a stronger sense of how students write and how they may assist it. Nothing personal is communicated to faculty and the tutors don't evaluate the writing. They merely include comments which they feel might be of interest to faculty.

Thursday, 8 July
From: Susan Callaway

It's late in the day and I want to head home, but I thought I'd respond quickly to the issue of why we would want to keep sessions confidential.

Basically, my reasons are because I want to represent to the tutors and the students, as well as the faculty, that the conversation which takes place in the writing center is be-

tween the tutor, the student writer, and the text. Period. Any comments the student writer makes about her teacher or the assignment is done only in this context—the tutor may or may not have had that teacher or know about the assignment outside of the center, but basically the student's version or own understanding of her situation outside the session, in the classroom or whatever, is the focus. There is no comparing of notes. I vehemently discourage any tutor to talk to the instructor about the student. And I'm with Molly Wingate on this—I like to talk to instructors and find these discussions important, but I'm not revealing anything about the student or the session.

Thursday 8 July
From: Mickey Harris

While I really respect all the emphasis on guarding a student's privacy and not sending notes to teachers, we do send those notes out for reasons that we hope are helpful to students. [...] Since instructors generally tend to see that extra effort on the student's part as worth something in terms of grades, we ask the student if a note should be sent and suggest that it just might mean some extra credit. Sometimes it does. The summary of what was covered should also alert the teacher to look for improvement in that area, not a whole perfect paper. (We used to vent a lot of steam at staff meetings when a student really labored with a tutor over some aspect of the paper and a teacher seemed disappointed that the student hadn't shown any improvement in another area. It helps to alert the teachers too that one or two sessions does not mean instant total improvement.)

Another rationale for our notes is that we are helping to enlarge some teachers' vocabulary about writing. For teachers in other disciplines, we hope to raise a bit of consciousness about need for revision, etc.

Friday, 9 July
From: Joan Mullin

Context. The various perspectives on confidentiality still seem to have so much to do with context. [...] The reporting we've developed comes from the frustrations many of you have mentioned. I don't have teachers demanding to know if students have come here because NOW (it took a couple of years for us to figure out how to do it) our policy is very clear—and new faculty are often initiated into it by other faculty or our contact

with them. I don't have professors writing nasty notes about the incompetence of the staff in the center because they can see not only what the students worked on, but how hard they worked—they also have the option of communicating with us and making suggestions (which by now they know we take seriously). IN OUR CONTEXT we found that working ONLY with the students' view of a class or only with the students' description of an assignment put the center and the student at a disadvantage. We solicit faculty syllabi and assignment sheets each quarter, and faculty input widens our view of the context in which the student operates—but we also know we can only always see part of the picture (pardon the take-off on Derrida).

Friday, 9 July
From: Judy Kilborn

I guess I'm puzzled that most responses focus on concerns about student confidentiality. I require notes be sent to teachers—even though I occasionally get flack from tutors about sending them, usually overprotectiveness when students feel that teachers will see them as dumb if they come to the center. Generally, I find that this provides an opportunity to discuss with students how the notes will enable us to collaborate with and get feedback from teachers. It can also be a time when fears about teachers (most unfounded) can be discussed and tutors can talk with students about appropriate ways to interact with teachers to make the most of their classroom experience.

Generally teachers really appreciate the information we provide, gain a better sense of what we do and don't do, have the opportunity to provide feedback to the students and the tutors about what students are learning, set the stage at times for productive discussions about assignments, pedagogy, student learning styles, etc. I guess that I, like many others, see the notes as a PR tool as well as an educational tool for faculty. And I guess that I am as concerned as much about faculty's right to know as I am about student confidentiality.

Monday, 12 July
From: Dave Healy

It seems to me that the recent discussion about reporting to teachers gets at the very heart of the mission and purpose of a writing center. What is the writing center? Is it an

extension of the classroom, or is it an alternative to the classroom? How does a writing center go about establishing a client base? What responsibility does the center have to those who refer clients there? Was Steve North right when he wrote "... teachers, as teachers, do not need, and cannot use, a writing center; only writers need it, only writers can use it. . . In short, we are not here to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum"? And if North is right, what stance does his idea of a writing center suggest for center personnel with respect to classroom teachers?

Monday, 12 July
From: Molly Wingate

I've been grateful to read the messages that remind us of our contexts. I am a non-report sender, and I have good reasons. But that does not make my view more or less than another's view. We don't have to agree, and we shouldn't all do things the same way. As one of the student tutors here is always quick to point out, there is no universal tutor mode.

This discussion, however, has provoked some abstract thinking on my part. I've thought for a long time that writing centers reflect their staff. If the director isn't worried about tenure (for instance, is an administrative staffer like me), then the center's policies may be less concerned with the faculty. Just an idea. Another bit of context.

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** The comments in this column were posted to WCenter, an electronic forum for writing center specialists hosted by Texas Tech University. The forum was started in 1991 by Lady Falls Brown, writing center director, and it is managed by Fred Kemp, director of composition. Anyone who has access to Bitnet or the Internet can subscribe to the group by sending e-mail addressed to: LISTSERV@TTUVM1.BITNET Leave the subject line blank and in the first line of the note, put: SUB WCENTER Your Name and if you have problems, write to Fred Kemp at: YKFOK@TTACS.BITNET*

Spellbound by a clean page

"I know I need to work on this, but I just don't know where to start," Debbie told me. She shuffled the two pages of her rough draft.

This wasn't true of course. She knew that she needed to revise, for she'd blurted that out when she walked in, but she didn't want to change anything on the page. Why should she? Fresh off the laser printer, her paper looked clean and neat—why would she want to mess it up? Like many of the writers who come into Colby's Writers' Center, Debbie was a firm believer that if a draft looks good you shouldn't mess with it. Problem was, her professor had sent her down here, so she had to suspect something was wrong. "Let's look at what you've brought," I suggested. "Why don't you read this draft to me?"

"Okay," she said, and eagerly started in. Almost immediately, she ran into trouble with the sentence "I felt like a junior with senioritis, who was able to return next year." She stumbled and stopped.

"What's the matter?"

"I'm not sure. Something doesn't sound right."

It took us a few minutes but Debbie eventually realized that she hadn't explained "senioritis," that she flipped back and forth between junior and senior year, and that the key to her thought was trapped in a phrase, unable to be fully explained. She was trying to do too much with that one sentence. "So, what could you do to revise it?" I asked, confident that since she'd recognized the problem she could solve it.

Silence.

Debbie chewed the cap of her pen, twirled a strand of her long black hair around her gold school ring, started toward the paper with her black Bic pen, sighed, pulled the pen away before it could touch the paper, looked out the window and said, "I don't know."

"Why not try writing down what you were just telling me about what you wanted to say? There's some room here in the margins."

"Okay," Debbie said, brightening. "Like the stuff about how senior year just felt like another junior year, with the same routines and difficult classes. And when you're a junior you feel like you shouldn't have to return for another year, but when you get to be a senior you just feel like it's a continuation of junior year."

"Exactly," I told her. "Write that."

Silence.

Debbie chewed the cap of her pen, sighed, and asked, "Just like that?"

"Sure, just jot it all down. Like notes."

"Okay." After two more *long* minutes, she actually managed to write in the margin. As I watched her write, I realized these were the first marks she had made on the page. I couldn't miss how painful they were for her to make. She wrote lightly, in small, cramped letters, stopping frequently, but she did eventually manage to get those thoughts down. "There," she announced. "What now?"

"Now, try to get them into your sentence. Or rewrite the sentence using some of these ideas."

"I'm not too good at combining sentences," Debbie said doubtfully, "but I'll try."

"It's only a rough draft," I assured her.

Silence.

Debbie chewed the cap of her pen, whirled a strand of her long black hair around her gold school ring, started toward the paper with her pen, sighed, and pulled the pen away before any black ink touched the paper.

It was then that I realized this wasn't a rough draft for her, that as I had suspected from the beginning, Debbie felt each sentence had to be perfect before she could write it down. The natural corollary was that each sentence became perfect once it was on the page; thus, the revision she'd been considering only involved verb tense and misspelled words. She was too tied to the *surface* of her paper, because it was clean she had a hard time messing it up (something that Peter Elbow believes is necessary before true revision can occur). But how could I get her to make a mess with this draft when any marks she made on it were painful to her?

Obviously I needed to get her away from the essay. So I grabbed some scrap paper from our recycling bin and chose some felt tip pens from the desk.

"Try writing on this," I suggested, giving her a piece of scrap paper. "Take the first part of that sentence for a start, and use this." I handed her a light blue marker.

Debbie took the felt tip pen and started to rewrite the problem sentence. Again she stopped, this time scratching out part of what she'd written. She dropped down to a clear space, looked at her margin list, tried another few words, scratched two out, then started again. A moment later she chose a new space, this time writing an entire sentence. I almost shouted "hurry," but I sat on my tongue and waited, listening to the scritch, scritch of the felt tip pen. Crossing out words and adding others, Debbie slowly wrote two more sentences. Then she looked up at me. "I'm not sure what to do now."

"So what have you got?"

She read off her sentences, adding "but that's not the right order."

"Try numbering them." I handed her a green felt tip pen. "Here, this might show up better."

"Thanks." She reread her new sentences,

commenting on them as she figured out their order. When she finished, I asked her to read the section through, this time starting with the lead-in sentence from the draft. Debbie began reading slowly. Then her voice gained momentum when she realized that the sentences she'd written not only made her point clearer, but also fit in with what she'd already written. "Hey, this makes sense." Without any prompting, she continued reading, arriving at a sentence two lines down that had become redundant as a result of her additions. "Wait a second," she said, while I held my breath, "this doesn't sound right here." She stared at it for a moment, and I waited for the silences and procrastination routine to resume. Instead she scratched out part of the sentence, then read it through again. "Wait, I've said this before, so I don't need to say it here." She drew a green line through the entire sentence.

"Terrific," I told her, unable to stay quiet

any longer, "That's just what you need to do—keep going like that, and you'll have this paper revised in no time."

Debbie smiled, then went back to her paper, green pen held ready as she read.

Our session showed me once again how spellbound writers can be by the words that they've written. Debbie knew something was "wrong," but she had put so much effort into getting *those* words down that she couldn't change them. For her, revision was physically possible, but mentally painful. So she'd fall back on her procrastinating techniques, avoiding the issue. Writing is *always* a process of revision, a never-ending recursive cycling between getting a meaning down and refining it. Even when papers are passed in, the process continues. Tutors understand this, but too often writers in composition classes only see the paper as a product. Thus, Debbie could not be "freed" by

freewriting—writing for her at this point isn't play, it's work, and to even suggest otherwise frustrates her. But by moving her away from what she considered finished, as well as giving her pens that were more playful than the black ink she'd been using to correct her essay, I was able to get her to start considering writing as something that can be used to explore ideas; more importantly, she began to experiment with different sentences to express those ideas. Once those sentences were in a form she felt comfortable with, she put them back into her paper, finally performing the revision that could not at first take place on the page. Only when she'd *moved away* from the essay could she *come back* to it; only when she'd broken the spell of the clean white page could she finish revising the rest.

Mary Bartosenski
Colby College
Waterville, Maine

National Writing Centers Association

Call for Papers
April 13-16, 1994
New Orleans, LA
Keynote speaker: Richard Riley, Secretary of Education

Types of presentations: individual papers; three-speaker panels; five-speaker round tables; two-speaker debate sessions; and individual and institutional writing center poster sessions. For individual presentations: submit a one-page abstract. For panels: submit a two-page abstract outlining all speakers' proposed topics. West of the Mississippi, please send proposals to Ray Wallace, Dept. of Language and Communications, Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, LA 71457 (318-357-6272; fax: 318-357-5942; e-mail: Wallace@Alpha.nsula.edu. East of the Mississippi, please send proposals to Byron Stay, Dept. of Rhetoric and Writing, Mount St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, MD 21727 (301-447-5367; fax: 301-447-5755; e-mail: Stay@msmary.edu Deadlines for proposals: 1/15/94

Computers and Writing Conference

May 20-23, 1994
Columbia, Missouri
"The Global Web of Writing Technologies"

For more information, contact Eric Crump at LCERIC@mizzou1.bitnet or LCERIC@mizzou1.missouri.edu. Please include somewhere in the subject line: CWC94. Or by mail at Learning Center, 231 Arts & Science, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211

Southwest Missouri State University

Tenure-track assistant or associate prof. of English. Ph.D. in composition and rhetoric, and record of achievement in teaching, writing scholarship, and program administration required. To teach courses in rhetoric and composition, direct the campus-wide writing center, and assist in developing a writing-across-the-curriculum program.

Send letters of application, vita, and three current letters of reference to Dr. Rosemary Keefe Curb, Head, English Dept., Southwest Missouri State U., Springfield, MO 65804-0095. Screening will begin Nov. 15 and continue until the position is filled. Preliminary interviews at MLA. SMSU is an EO/AA employer.

Fairfield University

Tenure-track, beginning Sept. 1994. Position entails administrative responsibilities and reduced course load in the English Dept. Ph.D. in English with specialization in Rhetoric/Composition. Administrative experience and expertise in ESL, WAC, and CAI desirable. Salary highly competitive. Send detailed letter of application and C.V. by Nov. 15 to Prof. Betsy A. Bowen, Chair, Search Committee, English Dept., Fairfield U., Fairfield, CT 06430. An EO/AA employer.

Troy State University

Writing center coordinator/instructor. Duties include planning activities and programs including tutor training seminars and writing workshops; developing instructional support programs; supervising and maintaining tutorial staff; maintaining instructional programs for English tutoring, speech articulation, ESL, English language proficiency testing, developmental writing labs, the professional library, and journalistic and expository writing.

Qualifications require at least a bachelor's degree (master's degree preferred) in English, Education or a related field. Preference given to applicants with teaching and writing experience. Salary negotiable, fringe benefits incl., 12-month position available fall 1993.

Send letter, resume, three references, and transcripts to Personnel Services, Troy State U., Troy, AL 36082. Review of credentials will begin immediately and continue until the position is filled. TSU is an AA/EEO employer and encourages applications from blacks, females, and other minorities.

Eastern Washington University

Director of university writing center and assistant/associate professor of English. This is a tenure-track position at the associate or upper assistant professor level:

60%: Director of the Writing Center. Direct all aspects of a campus-wide Mac-equipped center. Will take leadership role in supporting WAC. Director will work with faculty from all areas in improving student writing and fostering critical thinking and learning.

40%: Assistant/Associate Professor of English. Will teach and conduct research in one or more of the following: developmental writing, rhetoric, composition, computers and composition, English linguistics, or ESL.

Required: Ph.D. in hand. Three years of administrative experience in writing centers and/or writing programs. Experience in WAC and faculty development. Demonstrate evidence of leadership and initiative in relevant areas. Record of research in one or more of the academic areas listed above. *Desired:* CAI experience, knowledge of writing assessment, publications, and a background in literature.

Starting date: no later than Sept. 1, 1994 (could start as early as March 1, 1994).

Review of applications begins Nov. 1, 1993 and continues until position is filled. Send vita, at least three professional references, and letter of application describing your qualifications to: Chair, Search Committee, Office of the Dean, MS-174, College of Letters and Social Sciences, Eastern Washington U., Cheney, WA 99004-2490. EWU is an AA/EEO employer. Applications from members of historically underrepresented groups are especially encouraged.

TUTORS' COLUMN

The writing center: Friend or foe

After being offered a Writing Center Scholarship the spring before coming to college, I spent the summer following high school graduation unsure of just what I felt. Every time I thought about the Writing Center, I wondered whether it was a friend or a foe. When I visited the Writing Center in my senior year of high school, it was equipped with a couch and coffeepot, making it appear like a home instead of an office. As the summer unfolded, however, I began to think more seriously about the position. The idea of proofreading older students' papers, along with the concept of becoming independent, scared me more than I could have ever guessed. I kicked myself mentally for accepting the scholarship position which was causing me so much anxiety. Never did I dream that this Writing Center position would allow me access into an entirely new world of knowledge.

In high school, I was a quiet, insecure student. Anything I learned about writing came from interaction between my teachers, books, and myself. It was a rare occasion when I could be found helping another student conjugate verbs or discussing the best approach for introducing the subject matter of a paper. I was insecure about my writing and, therefore, did not share my ideas concerning papers. Perhaps my attitude towards my own writing adversely affected how I felt about helping others write. Before the Fall Term began, I attended a Writing Center Retreat/Training Session. We took several vans to Wisconsin and spent two days learning about our co-workers and our job. The returning staff gave several presentations intended to initiate those of us who had never worked in the Writing Center. Despite their excellent intentions and advice, I knew none of this training would prepare me for the experiences that lay ahead. Entering the Writing Center the next week brought with it a whole new wave of fear. A comforting security had been available when living 100 miles from the source of my anxiety, but once in direct contact with the source, I

could do nothing except struggle to stay afloat.

I'll admit that as a freshman, away from home for the first time and reading older students' papers in a college ten times the size of my high school, I was intimidated. I had nightmares about being attacked by upper classmen upset with me because I could not recognize comma splices. I would awaken with vivid memories of upper classmen beating me with dictionaries and thesauruses. I now realize my fears were silly, but at the time, they were all too real to ignore. My anxiety about being in college, coupled with my insecurity about working, caused me to become paranoid about my future.

My first day in the Writing Center did little to alleviate my fears. My hour began with a student wanting to learn how to use WordPerfect, a word processing program for the computer. I was immediately frantic because I had not yet learned the first thing about the system. Fortunately for both of us, I was on duty with an experienced consultant who taught both of us how to use the program. I shudder now, after having used WordPerfect for countless papers, to think of the student's first impression of both the Writing Center and me. I learned a lot from that first day, quickly discovering that the Writing Center would not only be a place for me to teach others, but also a place for me to learn.

As part of my scholarship, I was required to take a one-hour composition class, which also served as the Writing Center staff meeting. These meetings allowed me to become better acquainted with my co-workers and discuss how to manage the problems that arose at work. Among our various assignments, three particular exercises helped me learn to overcome my fears as a writing consultant: giving staff presentations, observing other consultants work, and scheduling personal conferences on our own papers.

Each consultant was required to give a presentation focusing on some issue concerning the Writing Center. The presentation given by another consultant and me dealt with the use of a tape recorder in the Writing Center. We noted many benefits of using a tape recorder, such as taping the ESL (English as a Second Language) conferences so those students could take the tapes with them and refer back to them when needed. We also talked about the benefits of using a tape recorder for playing background music, perhaps reducing the discomfort some students felt when entering the Writing Center. Other students did presentations on a wide variety of topics, including writing poetry, aiding students who have not followed the assignment, and helping ESL students. Several presentations were helpful in reminding us how each conference must focus not only on the paper but also on the student who wrote it.

Among the other helpful requirements of the course were the conference observations. We had to watch conferences conducted by two other consultants and write our reactions to them. In one of the conferences I watched, the consultant asked the student many questions about the paper. Before I viewed this conference, I did not realize how much the student could profit from questions. By simply asking what point the writer wanted the paper to convey, the consultant caused the writer to re-evaluate the essay. Once again, the Writing Center proved to be a center of learning not only for the students, but also for me.

For the final requirement, I had to take my own papers to the Writing Center and discuss them with another consultant. While writing my Modern American Fiction essay, I had found it difficult to express my ideas and was not sure whether I had followed the assignment. The consultant began by asking me questions about the topic of my essay, James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues," and we proceeded to discuss at length my insecurity

ties about it. She suggested I write more about the character of Sonny, and my paper would then become clearer. When I went back to my dorm room to revise, I began by re-reading the paper. I found myself referring back to the comments she had made and adding more characterization to the essay. Once again in my job, I became student rather than consultant.

Friend or foe? I consider a friend to be someone from whom I can learn and with whom I can feel comfortable. The Writing Center provides me with both of these qualities. The Writing Center is a friend.

*Nancy Klosterman
Coe College
Cedar Rapids, Iowa*

"Hands-off" in the writing center

Although we seem to do two very separate things in The Writing Center at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock—teach fellow students to use a computer (Apple IIe's and Macintoshes) and help them with papers—there is a basic principle that lies behind both of these activities, as I have discovered since coming to work here.

Teaching someone how to use a computer requires patience, an understanding of what the student fears, and the ability to share the sense of confidence we have when using the computers. Our goal, when someone new comes to The Writing Center to learn the perceived complexities of the computers, is to instill a sense of power. Some students come reluctantly, perhaps fearfully, to these machines, but more and more professors, knowing that computers are readily available all over campus, are requiring papers be word processed. Here, at The Writing Center, there is always someone available to guide and prompt a fledgling computer user. Those of us who have been around computers for quite some time have to remember that it does take time to learn and feel comfortable using a computer. And a student cannot learn if we do all the pushing of keys that is required. For example, to help a student learn to save, print out, move or delete text, we should stand behind the student and guide her through these activities, *but we have to keep our hands off the machines*. If we are to achieve our goal of building confi-

dence, then we cannot take the necessary practice away from the student.

This same principle guides us when we work with students on papers. Again, our goal is to build a sense of confidence that they can do this, and to achieve this, we cannot take the work away from them. Some students come to us in a damaged state; they have been told in the past and believe that they cannot write, that they do not have this magical gift called "good writing." They are afraid of our initial reactions as we read through their words. But we are not critical, and we find something good to say about each paper. We are in the business of building up, not tearing down. There is something good in each paper, and even if it's something small, it may not be so small to that particular student. And when we find that small thing we have given students a brick with which to build their wall of confidence. We have given them a beginning point, but if we move in on a student's work and try to take it over, we are doing him or her a disservice. We do not know what that student wanted to say or how she wanted to say it; we can only know what we thought the student wanted to say. It is not our paper. We must leave the student with a sense of owning the work. We can only suggest what we think would be best and leave the student enough room to accept or reject our suggestions.

Some of the suggestions we might make to students are ways of getting a paper started: "treeing," or listing ideas as they occur, and brainstorming (either alone or with someone else). After the paper is written, we can show her how to proofread. All of these strategies reinforce the student's independence, preventing over-dependence on us, and giving the student a sense of confidence, encouraging her to continue.

So what it all comes down to is that we are in the business of building confidence, whether we work with a student on the computers or assist with papers. It is a matter of saying to the student, without using the actual words, "If I believe in you and show you that I believe in you, then you will be able to do this for yourself." We are here to help, but the best help we can be is to give confidence, which builds the sense of power that comes to a student when she knows, "I can do this for myself."

*Briget Laskowski
Undergraduate Assistant
University of Arkansas at Little Rock*

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations (WCAs)

- March 4: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in Brooklyn, NY
Contact: Lucille Nieporent, English Skills Center, Kingsborough Community College—CUNY, 2001 Oriental Blvd., Brooklyn, NY 11235 (718-368-5405) or Steven Serafin (212-772-4212).
- March 5: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Baltimore, MD
Contact: Tom Bateman, 3708 Chestnut Ave., Baltimore, MD
- March 5: New England Writing Centers Association, in Andover, MA
Contact: Kathleen Shine Cain, Writing Center, Merrimack College, North Andover, MA 01845
- April 13-16: National Writing Centers Association, in New Orleans, LA
Contact: Ray Wallace, Dept. of Language and Communications; Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, LA 71457 (318-357-6272) or Byron Stay, Dept. of Rhetoric and Writing, Mount St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, MD 21727 (301-447-5367)
- May 6-7: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Toledo, OH
Contact: Joan Mullin, Writing Center, U. of Toledo, 2801 W. Bancroft, Toledo, Ohio 43606-3390 (419-537-4939).

Book Review

The Bedford Guide to Tutoring Writing. By Leigh Ryan. Boston: St. Martin's, in press. 75 pages.

As coordinator of the Modesto Junior College Writing Center, I coordinate the tutoring of over 700 students a semester, and I also facilitate the training classes for nearly forty tutors. Because tutors deal with so many students, they must be carefully and thoroughly trained; therefore, I am always on the lookout for new and effective training material. Recently, I had the opportunity to read and respond to a draft copy of Leigh Ryan's *The Bedford Guide to Tutoring Writing*. I find it more than suitable for my tutors at the community college level, and I can hardly wait to use it. (Publication is scheduled for Spring 1994.)

Previously, our first-semester tutors were required to read *Writing Without Teachers* (London: Oxford UP, 1973) by Peter Elbow, and our second-semester tutors read *Talking About Writing* (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1985) by Beverly Lyon Clark. Clark's book is much better received by the tutors than Elbow's book, for the Clark book offers more concrete strategies for dealing with the diverse student population we serve in our writing center. Still, neither text is entirely adequate, and I am looking forward to using Ryan's text instead. Our tutors need Ryan's specific, practical strategies in their tutoring sessions.

The tone in Ryan's text is comfortable, and its language is the kind tutors can understand and relate to. Furthermore, unfamiliar diction is explained and clarified. Ryan even includes "A List of Common Writing/Editing Terms" for tutors to compare to their own and each other's lexicons (11). The prose is lively, and one can almost hear Ryan's enthusiasm for tutoring. From the beginning, Ryan lets tutors know she is a seasoned veteran of the classroom.

Ryan's brief explanation of tutor behavior in her chapter titled "Ethics and Manners" is also helpful since some of my tutors become too familiar in the cordial atmosphere of the writing center. Ryan lists five specific ethical principles and suggests they be reviewed "periodically" (4). These include such ad-

vice as "Never comment negatively to students about a teacher's teaching methods, assignments, personality, or grading policies," "Never suggest a grade for a paper," and "Honor the confidentiality of the tutoring relationship" (4-5). She also discusses expected conduct for professional behavior. In this section of the text, tutors are advised to report "for work on time" or to call if something is preventing them from arriving on schedule (6). She reminds tutors that telephones are business tools. Moreover, tutors are in the center to be of service to students who often lack confidence as writers, so the tutor's positive attitude about tutoring is important (6).

In one of my favorite chapters, "The Actual Tutoring Session," Ryan guides the tutor through the tutoring session and points out "activities that might occur at various points of the composing process and the role the tutor plays in those activities" (36). She puts emphasis on writing as communicating meaning (so ideas count the most) and writing as recursive and not linear.

The "For Discussion" questions and the other assignments can be used as discussion topics at tutor training sessions or as journal assignments. One thought-provoking assignment asks tutors to think about the students they have tutored and discuss what "besides their assignment," they brought with them to the session. "How did they express these issues or concerns? How did you respond?" (25). Another assignment asks tutors to make a list of writing terms they know and then discuss these terms with other tutors (16). The purpose here is to allow tutors to develop a common list of writing and editing terms to make communication between tutors and tutors, and tutors and students consistent. These parts of the book reinforce tutoring skills and increase self-awareness, and awareness of others. Communication and bonding among tutors and between tutors and students are also reinforced.

As for improvements, I would like *more* emphasis placed on suggestions that tutors

keep the pens and pencils out of their hands and in the hands of the writers, keep the paper in front of the student, and let the student write in the changes on the paper. I would like the examples or strategies expanded. Charts, lists, and numbered suggestions clarify concepts and give tutors something to hold onto. Numbering the suggestions and tutoring strategies would also help. Ryan does so occasionally, and I have made some suggestions and comments where this clarification could be repeated.

I believe a director or coordinator could use *The Bedford Guide to Tutoring Writing* without a teacher's manual or guide; however, the tips offered in such a text would be helpful, especially to a new director or coordinator. The guide could include a brief explanation of the types of writing centers in use, like those that offer drop-in and scheduled tutoring. This guide might also cover ways to help tutors bond, how to keep morale high, and how tutors can deal with one another during their mid-terms and finals (when occasionally a tutor turns into a flake).

The guide might also offer a section on giving writing center tours to classes, administrators, and community members. I would also like to see a section (probably a small one) on how to get faculty to increase their interaction with the writing center. For example, we invite English instructors to hold office hours in the writing center, and this practice has improved communication a great deal between us and those who actually see and feel what we do in the writing center community.

I would definitely use *The Bedford Guide to Tutoring Writing* as a required text, and I am grateful to St. Martin's Press for giving me the opportunity to read and comment on it. I'm especially grateful to the author, Leigh Ryan, for crafting it. It is a treasure!

Barbara Rebecca Jensen
Modesto Junior College
Modesto, CA

Peer tutors' evaluations of the tutor training course and the tutoring experience: A questionnaire

Colleges and universities typically create writing centers when they perceive a need to serve large numbers of students who write poorly. Given the financial considerations, they would seldom, if ever, fund a writing center primarily to provide a superb learning experience for a small cadre of student-tutors staffing the center. Although educators involved in tutoring programs know well the benefits that accrue to student-tutors, administrators generally measure the worth of a program by the number of tutees served and the effects of tutoring on retention and classroom success. Experience in our relatively new tutoring program suggests that a writing center with a carefully planned, rigorous writing and tutor-training course at its core benefits the tutors at least as much as tutees. In addition, we have found that students who come to Dutchess Community College with an interest in a teaching career or who develop one while attending especially profit from their tutoring experience.

Our Advanced Composition/Peer Tutoring in Writing course (ENG 218) offers students both a second year, four-credit writing course and intensive training in tutoring skills. Our students are registered primarily in the liberal arts program, but some come from the departments of business, computer science, commercial art, early childhood, and others. Their career objectives range as broadly as one would expect of a group of college students, and many have named teaching as their goal. We believe tutors in the Writing Center have benefited richly from their tutoring experiences—intellectually, psychologically, socially—and assume certain experiences aid students who aspire, or might be inspired, to become teachers.

The questionnaire

To test our beliefs, I developed a questionnaire and mailed it to the fifty-four students who had completed ENG 218 and worked as Writing Center tutors since it opened in

January, 1989. I wanted to gather a large sampling of students' opinions to find out the degree to which they felt the tutoring program had served as a strong general education experience and had provided a theoretical background, skills, and practical experience if they were interested in teaching. A review of literature on the benefits of tutoring specifically for the *tutor* and for the potential educator informed many questions. Also, I wanted to learn from students' written comments specific influences their tutoring experiences might have had on their continuing academic work, their career development, and on intangibles they could identify. Background questions (not reported here for the sake of brevity) solicited information about students' gender, age, high school and college grade point averages, academic programs upon enrollment and graduation, and career objectives. Additional questions asked students to consider their feelings about a teaching career and about whether their tutoring experience influenced their feelings in any way.

Results of the questionnaire

Forty of the fifty-four students responded to the questionnaire, a return rate of 74%. Fifteen students (38% of the sample) named teaching as their current career interest; 47% of those students intended to teach in secondary schools, 13% planned a career in elementary education, and 40% wanted to be college teachers.

In the Leikert-scaled, multiple-choice section of the questionnaire, a majority of those who responded (53%) to all of the questions registered the belief that their abilities, understanding, and skills were "strengthened somewhat" or "strengthened considerably" in a variety of areas. In fact, for half of the questions, over 90% of the students noted a strengthening influence by their tutoring experience. The 90% rate applied in particular to three areas covered by the questionnaire,

first, to subjects under the general heading of writing and overall academic skills: the ability to organize material for writing, to write with greater fluency, to control one's apprehensiveness about writing, and to read critically. Second, in the category of understanding different student groups, 90%+ of the students expressed the belief that their tutoring experience had strengthened somewhat or considerably their understanding of the problems and strengths of low-achieving students and of ESL students and non-standard users of English. Third, the 90% rate appeared for questions relating to the influence of their tutoring experience on potential teaching skills: awareness of people's different learning styles and of teaching approaches that are more student-centered and individualized; ability to comment effectively on the writing of others; awareness of potential problems in grading written assignments; and understanding of how writing can be used informally, for purposes of exploration and discovery, and how it can be used in different subject areas.

A 75% to 90% rate of students noted a strengthening influence in personal skills: feelings of personal confidence; ability to cooperate with others to achieve shared objectives; ability to "think on your feet"; ability to work with groups; and ability to interview others. High marks for the strengthening influence of tutoring applied to the following: "your acceptance of cultural differences in students" (78%), "your feelings of comfort in an atmosphere of racial and cultural diversity" (68%), "your acceptance of varying and conflicting points of view" (55%), and "your willingness to take on responsibility" (70%). For each of these questions a significant number of students (23 to 45%) offered a "did not affect" answer. For all questions using the Leikert scale, almost no students answered that their tutoring experience weakened their abilities or understanding in any areas.

In their additional written comments, students offered insightful observations about the impact of their tutoring experiences. Many students remarked on the degree to which they felt their tutoring experience accelerated their intellectual, emotional, and social growth. One wrote, "The Writing Center provided concrete experience to help me realize my ability to help others." Another believed, "Tutoring brought me in contact with others like me—non-traditional older students making changes in their lives; education has a great deal to do with those changes." He added that "tutoring brings students together for a constructive purpose, a new way of learning. Tutoring has made me a better communicator and person. Its lessons are character-building measures that will stay with me always." Another student put into words what has been evident to me in day-to-day activities in the Writing Center: "For the first time at college, I found a place where I fit in and belonged—I had a home on campus." This benefit is particularly important to a commuter, community college campus.

Some of the students' observations drew connections between their tutoring experience and its positive influence on career and occupational skills not directly related to teaching. One student felt that tutoring was valuable for one planning to go into the helping professions; developing patience, identifying the best approaches to understanding, and appreciating cultural diversity were, for her, abilities nurtured in the Writing Center atmosphere. Another student is already employed as a family advocate. She felt that her experience in the Writing Center was a great benefit, not just for her writing skills as she deals with voluminous paperwork, but also for her communication skills. One student who plans to enter the business world wants to be able to motivate employees. She wrote, "I know I will have to be able to explain processes to people, solve problems, and interact on a business and social level with diverse groups. My tutoring experience has helped me be better prepared." A student now majoring in speech pathology wrote the following: "My tutoring experience made me aware of research on collaborative learning and different classroom environments. It prepared me to see different schools of thought in speech pathology,

where collaborative learning is being applied; in fact, clinics are coming right into classrooms." Another student found that tutoring helped her see problems and strengths in her writing and boosted her confidence—enough that she submitted short stories that were accepted for publication.

Some of the most exciting comments came from students who declared their own interest in a teaching career. They cited their exposure to an alternative approach to learning, the opportunity to overcome fears about working with people, development of their own sense of worth and confidence, and satisfaction from helping others. One student was "overwhelmed by the influence I could have on another's life." A prospective teacher believed that being a tutor helped her to feel a part of the English Department's work. Two older students who enrolled in the College for personal satisfaction, without career objectives, now want to carry their tutoring skills to adult literacy programs. Another older student may apply as a substitute teacher.

Student-tutors in ENG 218 learned valuable lessons about classroom dynamics, differences in learning styles, grading systems, and the personal courage of dedicated students and teachers. For one student who entered Dutchess planning to teach, her experience "opened my eyes to problems and realities I will encounter." On a positive note, she wrote that "my feelings of accomplishment when tutees improved, coupled with their gratitude, helped me understand why teachers continue to teach despite the lack of financial reward." However, she also found herself now with "little patience for teachers who penalize writing because it comes from a point of view different from their own." She also saw that "every student doesn't respond to one particular method. . . . A student-centered approach to teaching may be an ideal that is difficult in the practical world, but it should be a goal that is understood and accepted as a hope for the future."

One student benefited by the awareness that "even when I didn't get anywhere with a tutee, I came to realize that did *not* make me an inadequate tutor. Tutoring helped me see reasons why some people have problems with writing." Another student was made

"acutely aware of how difficult it can be to teach something you tend to do without difficulty, and I was aware of the authority you are given by other students. Now I realize that . . . I should not be ashamed or embarrassed for not knowing everything." This student wanted to "give people the tools they need to *learn*, not get along. . . . I don't want to see people ignorantly give away their own personal power to society or anyone else." One student learned well Carl Rogers' lesson that a teacher's most important quality may be "realness or genuineness" (106). She found that she could change the learning atmosphere dramatically by "being at ease with myself." No students offered negative comments about the impact of the tutoring experience.

Conclusions

The fact that 46% of the students felt their tutoring experience did not affect their performance in other courses (54% felt it *did* strengthen their performance) surprises me. Perhaps some students believed their tutoring experience, with its emphasis on collaborative learning, to be so different from their other classes that they viewed it as an experience unto itself. Alternatively, tutors' cumulative grade point averages suggest that "A" work was the norm for many students in their classes. "Performance" may have been interpreted by students to mean "grades" or "general academic abilities" (my meaning). In the future I will consider closely students' attitudes about their tutoring experience and its relationship to academic performance.

Also, the significant number of "did not affect" answers for questions relating to acceptance of cultural differences and to comfort in an atmosphere of racial and cultural diversity poses a puzzle. How many tutors felt, as one student wrote, that they began the course *already* comfortable with diversity, yet believed that the tutoring experience in general certainly has the power to influence their feelings? If the results for these questions were somewhat ambiguous, there was no doubt about students' belief that their tutoring experience had strengthened their understanding of the problems of ESL students and non-standard users of English. Also, students' end-of-semester evaluations (not part of this survey) have consistently

pointed to the exposure to different cultures as one of tutoring's primary rewards. The literature on the subject of peer tutoring's impact on students' interracial attitudes offers mixed research findings (Cohen 181). Our Writing Center's future studies of tutoring's influence on intercultural and interracial feelings will need a more precise tool to explore this complex subject.

Students who are aware of differences in learning styles, who recognize the value of student-centered teaching approaches, who understand the value of writing and the challenges of using it effectively in classes, and who have sat for many hours, one-on-one, with tutees who grope for answers and try to maintain dignity and authority—these students will make better teachers in the future. Our community college graduates who transferred to education programs expressed thanks in their questionnaire for the opportunity to learn in the Writing Center. Recognition of the tutoring program's value has led to administrators' plans to make the peer-tutoring-in-writing course a key elective offering in a new pre-education program at

Dutchess Community College. At the same time, I feel it is important not to let the tutoring courses become a class offered only to pre-education students, nor to tailor it to expectations of an education curriculum. Following a tutor-training model based largely on the concept of collaborative learning, we do not encourage students to see themselves as apprentice teachers working within a careful hierarchy of status levels. Students consistently wrote that tutoring gave them significant opportunities to learn as they simultaneously gave support to others; they saw great value in their peer relationships.

In the few years since its development into a larger operation, our Writing Center has produced unanticipated benefits for the College. Although our initial purpose in expanding the tutoring program was to provide students with tutors who were better trained and more effective, a consequence of our changes has been the creation of a program for tutors that has been a defining educational experience for many of them. It seems clear now that the program has special rewards for tutors who may become teachers.

Although the Writing Center's funding will not be justified solely because of its value to student-tutors, its full range of benefits—including the valuable writing assistance given to students visiting the Writing Center—will become an ever more attractive and compelling rationale for institutional support.

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[Readers who would like a copy of the questionnaire described here may write to me, c/o Writing Center, Dutchess Community College, Pendell Road, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601.]

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