THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Volume 20, Number 6 | Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing | February, 1996

...FROM THE EDITOR...

It might be called a case of "deja vu all over again" if you think you saw the January 1995 issue of the newsletter go by twice. You did. While preparing the January 1996 issue weeks before the new year snuck up on us, I typed 1995 on the first page of last month's issue (but managed to keep touch with reality for the headers on inside pages where you'll find the correct date). My apologies for any inconvenience this may cause. You may want to pencil in the correct date on your issue to prevent any future confusion.

Another repetition you'll note (also unintentional but more interesting) is the inclusion of two articles in this issue, both examining triangular relationships in their topic.

But a new topic—sex in the writing center—is one we rarely focus on in writing center literature and is introduced by Michael A. Pemberton in this month's Writing Center Ethics column. Surely this will provoke some interesting discussion at staff meetings and training sessions, and if you want to carry on the conversation with others in our newsletter group, send your comments and responses to the newsletter. Use e-mail if that's more convenient for you.

• *Muriel Harris, editor*

...INSIDE...

Collaboration as Triangulation: An Apprenticeship System of Tutor Training
• **Toni-Lee Capossela** 1

The Tutor-Student-Teacher Triangle (or) the Three-Way Writing Conference
• **Barbara Wenner** 5

Conference Calendar 8

Tutors' Columns: "I Am a Teacher"
• **Tiffany Jo Ice-Bilbrey** 9

"Tutoring Through Your Curriculum"
• **Paul Lemen** 9

Writing Center Ethics: "Safe Sex in the Writing Center"
• **Michael A. Pemberton** 14

Beyond Record-Keeping: Session Reports and Tutor Education
• **Kim Jackson** 11

Collaboration as triangulation: An apprenticeship system of tutor training

In "What Is This Thing Called Teaching Writing," Maxine Hairston encourages writing teachers to step outside the narrow confines of composition theory, and see how their methodology would hold up under the critical scrutiny of athletic coaches, counselors, and management consultants. Athletic coaches, for instance, would warn us that when we talk about writing we are taking up valuable practice time, which our students should be using to scrimmage with their own and each other's ideas and words. Counselors would caution us that criticizing all aspects of a draft at once is as foolish as issuing a nutshell diagnosis of a client's emotional problems and directing her to come back next week with everything fixed.

To extend Hairston's sensible idea, I suggest that as writing center directors we can learn a great deal from hairdressers. We share the same challenge: how to give trainees hands-on experience without running the risk of a botched job

or a disgruntled customer. There is no substitute for the real thing, but we can't make guinea pigs out of our clients while initiates learn how to get it right.

Since peer consulting is such a complex matter (involving issues of body language, face-to-face interaction, rapport, alienation, power relations, and academic ethics), there is no single analogous activity the practice of which can make one a proficient consultant. Therefore, as coordinator of the Writing Center at Stonehill College, I have come up with a series of activities, each of which allows the trainee to experience one or more aspects of a live session. While triangulating among these activities, the consultant-in-training begins to synthesize his or her own consulting style. This system has the pedagogical advantage of breaking a potentially daunting task into manageable parts, without resorting to reductive or oversimplified models, or wasting the students' time with sterile "dummy runs."

Before I describe the activities I've developed, a brief word about vocabulary is in order. As a group, the undergraduates who staff our writing center decided to substitute the term "writing consultant" for "tutor." As one of them explained, "Since a tutor knows more than you do, you feel your job is to shut up and listen; with a consultant, the final decision is still up to you." I honor their choice of terminology in this paper.

I have the luxury of a three-credit, one-semester practicum course with which to frame the training activities, but most of them could also be incorporated into a briefer training format. The course proceeds on the assumption that in order to be good consultants, students must first be confident, self-aware, and practicing writers, and their first training activity makes use of their own writing. For each class meeting, students produce a piece of writing based on their reading assignment, then critique each other's work in pairs, pretending they are participating in a Writing Center session. There are obvious limitations to the realism of this activity: there is no opportunity to revise based on the session, since the draft will be turned in immediately; the two participants already know each other and so there is no need for establishing rapport; the drafts are more competent and polished than most of those brought to the Writing Center. Nonetheless, this in-class critique includes the physical and social give-and-take of a consulting session, discussion with a writer committed to the quality of his or her work, and—as an extra bonus—observation by someone familiar with the criteria for effective consulting. Finally, it reminds the student what it is like to be on the receiving end of advice, an experience which neophyte consultants must keep in mind so that they don't lose compassion as they acquire expertise. After this reciprocal session, the papers are handed in and I respond to them, writing extensive end-notes as well as marking surface errors. When the papers are returned the following period, consulting can occur again, for finding and fixing mistakes.

Most of the practicum part of the course, however, occurs *in* the Writing Center, using an apprenticeship system supervised by seasoned peer consultants who have already completed the course.

Apprenticeship is a time-honored way of passing on knowledge and know-how. As Roger Garrison observes, "It is better for a student to be an apprentice at your side for five minutes than a disciple at your feet for five months" (69). The efficacy of apprenticeship can be traced to several sources. First, it creates a venue for absorbing essential but tacit knowledge, which eludes explicit presentation. Second, it allows for gradual participation as competence grows. Third, it provides both challenge and support, and the opportunity minutely to adjust the dosage of each as is warranted by the apprentice's progress. Fourth, it includes quality control by virtue of the presence of a more experienced practitioner. Finally, in the particular case of writing centers, peer apprenticeship is a powerful way of reinforcing the principles of social constructivism on which our practice rests.

The apprenticeship system I have developed consists of observation and role-playing. As soon as the course is underway and students are comfortable with the reading/writing sequence described above, I designate a two-hour block of time for each student to go to the center every week. Ideally, the time-slot

The *Writing Lab Newsletter*, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by the Department of English, Purdue University, is a publication of the National Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by Purdue University. Material will not be reproduced in any form without express written permission.

Editor: Muriel Harris; Asst. to the Editor: Mary Jo Turley, English Dept., Purdue University, 1356 Heavilon, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356 (317)494-7268. e-mail:harrism@mace.cc.purdue.edu

Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures. Yearly payments of $15 (U.S. $20 in Canada) are requested, and checks must be received four weeks prior to the month of expiration to ensure that subscribers do not miss an issue. Please make checks payable to Purdue University and send to the editor. Prepayment is requested from business offices.

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. If possible, please send a 3 and 1/4 in. disk with the file, along with the hard copy. 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).

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

straddles the shifts of two consultants: that way the trainee can observe two different consulting styles. For the past few semesters, I have compiled students' final essays, analytic narrations of their most significant Writing Center experience, into an anthology which incoming students read and respond to. When a response suggests strong rapport or identification with a particular consultant, I try to arrange an apprenticeship between that student and that consultant.

The nature of the first component of apprenticeship—observation—is self-explanatory. When a student writer comes for a session, the consultant introduces the practicum student and the writer, explains that the student is a consultant-in-training, and asks if the writer minds having the student observe the session. Only once in four semesters has a writer expressed discomfort. Frequently, the presence of a third party dissipates the anxiety that a writer may feel upon coming to the center for the first time: three people around a table feels and looks more like a conversation and less like a cross-examination.

During the early weeks, the practicum student reads along in the draft, listens quietly as the session proceeds, then discusses the session with the consultant and reads the consultant's report. Even if the session is flawed (aren't they all?), there is much for the student to learn from it: as Walker Percy reminds us, the best way to learn how something works is to study breakdowns.

As students become more confident, they begin to volunteer comments during the consultation, in effect working their way into a co-consulting role, and then essaying solo sessions when they and their peer supervisors decide they are ready. This evolutionary model of competence is more realistic and less traumatic than an all-or-nothing approach tied to a specific deadline by which time all students are expected to be ready to consult.

Just as teachers learn valuable lessons from their students, consultant-supervisors are quick to point out that they benefit from the observation sessions. If a session has gone badly, it's a relief to talk about it at once, and try to identify the source of the problem. Practicum students often offer incisive suggestions early in the semester, and consultants have developed generous and creative ways of involving them in the workings of the center: frequently a session report will bear the name of both consultant and trainee, and will include a detailed explanation of how the trainee contributed to the session. Our most experienced consultant was particularly grateful for one trainee's participation during a lengthy session with an ESL writer whose draft required many surface level corrections. As Colleen, the consultant, pointed out, she had trouble finding alternative ways of explaining an error if the writer didn't understand Colleen's initial statement, but the trainee quickly came up with an alternative, merely by using his own words.

We spend time each week in class discussing these observations, because they are our most accurate source of information about the kinds of problems which our clientele bring to the Writing Center. Our text (Meyers and Smith's *The Practical Tutor)*, although excellent in many ways, tends to idealize tutor-student dialogues, to assume a graduate-school tutor involved in a continuous relationship with a particular tutee, and to present drafts which are more remedial than most of the writing we encounter at Stonehill. The observation sessions are an important reality check. In addition, they remind us of the folly of talking about writers and students—as if they were all the same.

The second aspect of Writing Center apprenticeship is role-playing. For better or worse, this involves much advance preparation on my part, but virtually no participation in the act itself. I feel rather like a choreographer, coordinating all the movements, working the dancers hard during the dress rehearsal, then sitting in the wings and wondering how the opening night performance is going.

First I select a text—usually an early draft from my freshman composition course—which relates to the part of the writing process we are discussing in class. I use my own students' work because it is available in its early stages, and because it can be matched against a well-developed prompt. For the consultants, I write a cover sheet describing the topic of class discussion, a capsule analysis of some of the problems in the draft, and what it's reasonable to expect the practicum student to be able to do at this point in the course. Sometimes I suggest challenges which the consultant might include in his or her role-playing persona, such as trying to manipulate the consultant to do all the work, kibitzing instead of working, or demanding editing assistance when the draft still needs global revisions. For the most part, however, each consultant decides how to use the role-playing materials, since her value lies in her understanding of what a particular trainee can already do, and what still needs to be practiced.

Some students feel uncomfortable with the make-believe aspect of full-fledged role-playing; in this case, the early sessions can consist of a discussion of how such a paper might be handled. Even with a timid and tentative apprentice totally devoid of thespian skills, an alert consultant can slip quickly and discreetly from hypothetical discussion into role-playing, by enacting and posing questions such as "What would you do if I handed you the pen and asked you to fix this sentence for me?" I also encourage consultants to bring in their own drafts for role-playing, because in this case one source of artificiality is removed: the role-playing writer actually *has* generated the text and stands to profit from thoughtful feedback.

Before they end their shift, consultants fill out reports for role-playing sessions, and in class we discuss the role-playing,

comparing the ways in which different students dealt with the challenges of the draft and the situation. By the end of the semester I have a detailed week-by-week account of each student's progress in developing his or her consulting skills.

The final step in the training is a role-playing session with me. I like the poetic justice of closing out a course rooted in apprenticeship, a system which harkens back to the medieval guilds, with the contemporary equivalent of a medieval oral examination.

In some ways, of course, this is a particularly difficult role-playing task, since not only am I not the author of the text, but I am not a peer either. I try to mitigate this problem in two ways. First, I select for this role-playing a draft which is fairly accomplished. Second, I make opportunities to discuss my writing earlier in the course, so that students will have had the experience of commenting on my work.

This session replaces a final examination for the course. I schedule an hour per student, and when the role-playing is done we critique the session, go over the semester's work including the role-playing reports, and clear up any remaining questions. Although it requires a large amount of my time at a pressure point in the semester, I have never regretted this choice. The sessions give me valuable information about each student's consulting style, and help me identify students who need further work before they are ready to consult.

The participatory nature of the course results in levels of enthusiasm that sometimes leave me dizzy, but there is always some grousing about the phoniness of role-playing. I let these gripe sessions play themselves out, agreeing that there are limitations and hollow aspects to everything one does in preparation for that first real consulting session. Invariably the gripes include at least one student's plaint, "I'm sick of all this pretending; I'm dying to have a real session." Although the comment is meant as a gesture of revolt, it makes me smile, because it means that apprenticeship has again worked its magic: triangulation complete, tacit knowledge absorbed, the apprentice chafes under the limitations of an outgrown role, and is ready for promotion to full-fledged practitioner of her craft, and a guide to a new wave of consultants-in-training.

The consultants are much more eloquent than I am in explaining to what extent apprenticeship empowers them. Here is how one of them, Lynette Gajtka, describes the results of a pivotal role-playing session. The final word, I think, should come, not from the choreographer, but from a dancer:

> "When I began the previously described role playing, I was overwhelmed with doubts about my ability to succeed as a peer tutor. At the end I overcame my anxieties . . . . I know I have potential as a peer tutor; now my challenge is to convince my peers to work to their greatest potential, and to appreciate the Writing Center as much as I have learned to. I am eager to begin. . . ." (10)

Toni-Lee Capossela
Stonehill College
North Easton, MA

Works Cited

Gajtka, Lynette. "I Am Eager to Begin." *Stonehill Writes* 6.2 (1993): 9-10.

Garrison, Roger. "One-to-One: Tutorial Instruction in Freshman Composition." *New Directions for Community Colleges* (1974): 55-83.

Hairston, Maxine. "What Is This Thing Called Teaching Writing?" Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition. College Park, PA, July 1986.

Time to renew your NWCA membership dues?

Michael Pemberton, the new treasurer for the National Writing Centers Association, is now collecting membership dues as well as payments for the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and the *Writing Center Journal*. You can send him funds for dues and both publications or funds for dues and one of the two publications.

- $35 for NWCA membership and a year's subscription to both the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and the *Writing Center Journal*.
- $25 for NWCA membership and the *Writing Lab Newsletter*.
- $20 for NWCA membership and the *Writing Center Journal*.

To contact our new treasurer:
Michael A. Pemberton, NWCA Treasurer
The Writing Center
251 Undergrad Library
The University of Illinois
Urbana, IL 61801
tel: 217/333-7014
e-mail: michaelp@ux1.cso.uiuc.edu

For separate subscriptions to either (or both) of the publications or for rates for Canadian and international subscriptions, contact the editors:

Writing Lab Newsletter: Muriel Harris, editor (or) Mary Jo Turley, asst. to the editor, Dept. of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356 (317-494-7268). E-mail: harrism@mace.cc.purdue.edu (or) turleymj@sage.cc.purdue.edu

Writing Center Journal: Dave Healy, editor, University of Minnesota, General College, 140 Appleby Hall, Minneapolis, MN 55455-0434. E-mail: healy001@maroon.tc.umn.edu

The tutor-student-teacher triangle (or) the three-way writing conference

The use of conferences in teaching writing is nothing new. Roger Garrison, Thomas Carnicelli, and Donald Murray have all recommended ways of conferring from holding mini-conferences in a workshop-classroom to dropping formal classes altogether and teaching through writing conferences alone. All the while, writing centers are staffed with tutors who also hold conferences with students. Aside from some standardized forms passing between tutor and teacher, usually the main link between the two is the student. With the student as conduit, both teacher and tutor often get a rather puzzling picture of what happens in the "other's" conference.

In our basic writing classes at the University of Cincinnati we have two professional tutors who are present during class and who also work in the Drop-In Writing Lab. An intriguing triangular interaction exists here between the writer, the tutor, and the teacher, a process which allows for negotiation, yet encourages students to take responsibility for their own writing.

Initially, students experienced some interesting problems as a result of what I have come to think of as three-way writing conferences. First, students were confused about whom to believe. I might give them some advice on a draft, and then a tutor might give them some different advice. Whom should they "believe"? Usually, because I was the teacher, the one with the power to give a grade, they would discount the tutor's advice, sometimes mentioning it to me as an example of the tutor giving "wrong" advice. However, I saw this as an opportunity to explain that writing wasn't always a matter of wrong way/right way and that actually there were any number of different effective strategies they could use to create papers that "worked." With two different "experts," both bringing their experiences to the students, they could accept this concept more easily than my telling them about all the strategies myself.

The varying approaches to writing that my tutors and I have not only give students more strategies they can use to improve their writing, but also these differing—sometimes conflicting—methods help students move out of what psychologist W. G. Perry calls "dualistic thinking." Biologist and educator Craig E. Nelson explains this concept: "Students assume that valid questions have certain answers, that teachers should teach those answers or unambiguous rules for finding them. . . . Having two alternative routes for solving an equation is too much ambiguity (17)." So in having tutors who are familiar with the teacher's area but who come up with different approaches, students make an important move toward independent critical thinking—they learn to accept uncertainty and multiplicity in truths. This seeming drawback of different advice we turned into an advantage as I was able to signal the tutor (who was conveniently on the spot) over to the place where I was conferring with the student. Together we were able to share the so-called "conflicting opinions" and show the student how either way might work.

In her article, Belinda Wood Droll describes teacher expectations as a powerful third force in tutoring sessions. She comments, "Quite often, we see tutoring as the collaboration between two people, the tutor and the tutee . . . . By so doing, we may be overlooking a powerful *third* force—the tutee's classroom teacher" (1). Droll brings up the concern of teachers' expectations, students' perceptions of teacher expectations, and tutors' concerns in a writing conference. She goes on to explain that tutors need to help students with the areas they think their teachers want them to get help with and that tutors should use questioning techniques, assignment sheets, and "model assignments" to find out what teachers really want stressed in their students' writing. Droll warns that students and teachers will have considerably less faith in writing center tutors if those tutors follow their own rhetorical emphases, ignoring the desires of the teacher and student.

With the three-way writing conferences we conduct in our U. C. basic writing classes, many of the communication problems that Droll mentions are resolved. The tutors know what the teachers emphasize rhetorically because they are in the classroom when the teacher emphasizes, for instance, use of concrete details to support a thesis. The tutors have copies of all writing assignments, as well as "model" assignments. These "model" assignments are ones I select from previous student papers to illustrate what I as a teacher view as important for that particular assignment. Of course, the tutors have copies of the syllabus, and informal discussion of what I stress occurs continuously between me and the tutors before class, in class, and after class. Meyer and Smith suggest that tutors request a special three-way conference with the student and teacher, already a regular occurrence in my classroom. They write that in such a conference "comments and grading cri-

teria can be clarified and personal misunderstandings may be straightened out, clearing the way for more positive communication." They also suggest that in a three-way conference "you can converse as equal partners" and that such conferences "minimize authority struggles between novice writer and an expert" because the direction of the writer is negotiated, not The One Right Way (144). A strength of using tutors in both the classroom and lab is found in the regular proximity of tutors and teachers. Students see every day that communication, whether written or oral, has the potential of being collaborative and negotiated and that writers aren't sitting alone in their garrets, pulling pages magically out of their own minds in isolation.

The acceptance of different writing advice, which seems to be addressed in this three-way exchange, is important as is the need for the tutor to know what rhetorical strategies the teacher values most. The informal discussion that I mentioned earlier where the tutor asks for verbal clarification from the teacher concerning which writing strategies to emphasize has brought me to an important point concerning this three-way conference—negotiation. Negotiation is the primary advantage of the tutor-student-teacher conference. Robert Child sees "agendas in the writing center as infinitely more sensible because they are arbitrated among three parties—the writer, the tutor, and the absent instructor" (177). In my basic writing class, these negotiations can be handled more knowledgeably because the tutor has been on the scene in the class. Meyer and Smith discuss the tutor acting as a mediator between student and teacher, letting the student know what the teacher might like, which is a lot easier when the tutor has heard for herself what the teacher likes. In fact, their idea of the occasional three-way conference names the kind of exchange I am interested in: "communication as a *negotiated way* rather than *the right way*" (144).

I can recall times when my tutors approached me and asked how important, for instance, the use of appropriate example was for the students in writing a paper classifying advertisements. The students being helped by the tutors had been using examples that didn't quite "fit" the categories suggested in the assignment. So in this instance of a three-way conference, the students were uncertain what to do, the tutors needed clarification, and negotiations ensued between the tutor and me concerning how important and appropriate we thought certain examples were. The students brought up the problem, and the tutors and I negotiated a way of settling it.

Tutors are also encouraged, as part of the negotiating procedure, to question my direction. In one writing class, I asked students to do some "last minute" in-class revision of essays they fully expected to turn in that day. However, one of the tutors suggested we confer with students on surface editing instead of major changes because students needed to submit final drafts at the end of class. I agreed, and we didn't attempt to work with students on strategies which they couldn't then implement. The tutor clarified for me the goals of the students, goals that might not have been articulated had it not been for the tutors.

However, with this negotiation going on between three people, problems are bound to arise, especially with students trying to align themselves with tutors against teachers. Tutors and teachers more easily avoid this situation when tutors are in the classroom as well as in the lab. But also, I don't think it's entirely bad for the student to have the tutor as a sounding board to make complaints about teacher demands. Many times the tutor can clarify the teacher's expectations and assignments, and certainly the same negotiation strategies mentioned earlier apply here, where the tutor can act as a go-between for the student and teacher concerning problems in writing which a student is reluctant to discuss with the teacher.

I particularly remember a student who was struggling both to write and to contend with me as an authority figure. She didn't want to follow my advice for revising directly, but she was willing to go to the tutor, complain about how unfair I was, and then accept the same advice from a person she perceived as a helper rather than a "boss." Her writing improved considerably during the course because she had the tutor to act as a mediator between her and me, and it certainly wasn't a drawback that the tutor knew what went on in the classroom as well as in the lab.

I earlier mentioned Belinda Droll, who discusses the gap which sometimes occurs between what the teacher wants to accomplish and what the tutor wants to accomplish. She brings up the "practical position that teachers' expectations are a reality student writers confront daily" and that the "difficulty arises because rhetorical elements teachers *say* they value often differ significantly from those elements these teachers *actually* emphasize when teaching and/or reward when grading their students' papers" (2). With the kind of negotiating which can go on in a classroom with tutors, the tutor and teacher focus on mutually agreeable elements to emphasize, and the tutor doesn't need to feel that her suggestions are eclipsed by rhetorical emphases and values she may not subscribe to. Also, this mediation causes teachers to rethink their emphases and justify them. Interestingly, the mere presence of the tutor and teacher in the same classroom seems to have the effect of more closely aligning their rhetorical emphases.

Although the tutors and teachers work together to deal with invention strategies and production of rough drafts with students, revision is the site where tutors and teachers do most negotiation or interacting with each other and the student. Students resist revision because it is hard. If they revise at all, it usually involves editing concerns—spelling, typos, an occasional subject-verb agreement error or sentence boundary problem—but these only if specifically marked by me. With tutors both in the class and in the lab, we run additional risks along with the additional help. The students want the tutors to help them "fix" these surface-level errors; occasionally students

want the tutors to basically take over their papers.

A tutor who has close classroom connections with the teacher is much less likely to appropriate a student's paper and "fix" it, particularly a tutor who has experience working in a writing classroom. The tutors who work in my classroom and the lab know the recursive nature of the writing assignments we are doing and realize that students need to take responsibility for their own writing. One of the biggest concerns about our basic writers entering freshman English is that they know how to write independently and recognize the kinds of revision moves they need to make. So our dilemma as two tutors, one teacher, and sixteen adult basic writers is how to help without taking over student papers.

I don't claim here to have the best solution to tutoring students. We still have students who resist revising, tutors who do occasionally take a student's paper and "fix" it, and—maybe more unsettling—a feeling among students that they have professionals there at all times to help them with their writing. These are issues we are still working on. I would, however, like to offer a scheme we use in our classroom/lab setting which helps students to take responsibility for their own writing while encouraging greater communication within the writing triangle we've established.

A student who wishes to revise a paper for a higher grade must submit a Revision Communication Sheet which facilitates both tutorial assistance and ultimately student responsibility. The steps on the sheet encourage global revision on the student's part, emphasize what I value in writing, encourage students to note communication problems with me as the evaluator and plan the conference with the tutor, rather than allow the student to go into the lab passively to "get the paper fixed." Students need to articulate the problems they perceive themselves as having before they can begin to revise for them. They are asked to write down the difficulty they might have with the teacher's evaluative remarks. For instance, one student asked, "Why do you want more information about my sister and me when we weren't communicating?" This question on paper can provide some thoughtful dialogue between the tutor and student writer about why a huge gap in a narrative about personal relationships might cause a reader to be confused.

I want to know what the tutor discussed with the student as well, so that I know what issues were called to the student's attention. The section to be addressed by the tutor is relatively brief because I realize that the tutor has enough to do and that the sheet is ultimately the student's responsibility to complete. Finally, the student needs to enumerate the changes she's made to let us both know that something happened as a result of her lab visit. When the student submits all her drafts and the completed Revision Communication Sheet, I can then fairly easily compare drafts to see what improvements the student has made. This form differs from others I've seen—ones which the tutor fills out and the student rarely ever sees. This is the written document of our three-way communication triangle.

For some final insights on how the three-way conference works, I offer my tutor's commentary:

> Certainly there are advantages to working together with a student both in the classroom and the lab. Most immediately, it cuts down on the orientation time if I'm already familiar with the instructor and a certain assignment and if I know the kinds of prewriting or brainstorming the class has done, the specific focus of that particular essay. It's nice to continue working without a lag for orientation. It also gives me the advantage of greater familiarity with a student's writing if I can work with them over an entire quarter and I can target the areas that I know are the most challenging for that particular student.

And from a teacher in the program:

> One thing you can do as a tutor that you can't do as a teacher is try to figure out the dynamics more between the student and the teacher. I know as teacher, I have suggested "good cop-bad cop" so the tutor could be "good cop" to the teacher's "bad cop." As a tutor, I would try to be coach or cheerleader. As a teacher, you want to be those things, but primarily you want to be more the heavy. As the tutor, you want to be more the student advocate, interpreter.

I asked the tutor about conflicting advice to the student, and she had this to say:

> Often I find that what the student reports the instructor is saying doesn't always match what the instructor is actually saying, so if there's a conflict, it's usually a matter of decoding for the student what the teacher is saying and thus showing that there is far less conflict in the advice they're given.

The teacher responds:

> I tell the students, "Of course you get different advice. Different readers are going to react in different ways. It's not math class where 2+2=4. You have to balance out and take in advice from many audiences. I hope you get other students to read your work and think what's best for you, which method of organization would work best. That's what writing is, a very flexible, dynamic thing, not a static thing."

Both tutor and teacher agree that they talk about student concerns. They generate a lot of talk and, with that talk, the multiple perspectives on how to deal with the students' work. In the three-way triangle, the teacher becomes decentralized in the classroom and students interact and respond to each other more, as they see the tutors giving different feed-

back on their writing. The lines of communication drawn by such a triangle, tied together with a written communication sheet involving all three sides of the triangle, is the main way we in our basic writing classes help students write better, as we still push them towards becoming self-critical, independent writers.

Barbara Wenner
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, OH

Works Cited

Child, Robert. "Tutor-Teachers: An Examination of How Writing Center and Classroom Environments Inform Each Other." *The Writing Center: New Directions.* Eds. Ray Wallace and Jeanne Simpson. New York: Garland, 1991. 169-83.

Droll, Belinda Wood. "Teacher Expectations: A Powerful Third Force in Tutoring Sessions." *Writing Lab Newsletter 17:9* (1993): 1-5.

Meyer, Emily and Louise Z. Smith. *The Practical Tutor.* New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Nelson, Craig E. *Enhancing Critical Thinking in the Sciences.* Washington, D.C.: Society of College Science Teachers, 1989.

Conference Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

Feb. 1-3: Southeastern Writing Center Association and South Carolina Writing Center Association, in Myrtle Beach, SC
Contact: Phillip Gardner, Writing Center, Francis Marion University, Florence, SC 29501

Feb. 29-March 2: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Austin, TX
Contact: Elizabeth Piedmont-Marton, Undergraduate Writing Center, FAC 211, G3000, The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX 78712

March 1: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Turlock, CA
Contact: Ann Krabach, English Department, California State University, Stanislaus, 801 W. Monte Vista Avenue, Turlock, CA 95382. (209-667-3247).

March 1-2: East Central Writing Centers Association, in East Lansing, MI
Contact: Sharon Thomas, The Writing Center, 300 Bessey Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI (517-423-3610).

March 2: New England Writing Centers Association, in Amherst, MA
Contact: Mary Bartosenki, Writing Center 402, Neville Hall, University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469

March 8: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in Brooklyn, NY
Contact: Kim Jackson, Writing Center, Harris Hall Room 015, City College of New York, 138th & Convent Ave., New York, NY 10031

April 13: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Chestertown, MD
Contact: Gerry Fisher, Writing Center, Smith 31, Washington College, Chestertown, MD 21620 (410-778-7263).

Oct. 24-26: Rocky Mountain Writing Center Association, in Albuquerque, NM
Contact: Anne Mullin,Writing Lab, Campus Box 8010, Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID 83209 (208-236-3662).

Association for the Teaching of English Grammar

Call for Papers
July 19-20, 1996
College Park, Maryland
"Grammar for the 21st Century"

Proposals are invited for all papers related to the teaching of grammar, though the conference chair is particularly interested in computer programs related to the teaching of grammar. For more information, contact George Oliver, Writing Program/English Department, 3119 Susquehanna Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. 301-405-1426; e-mail: go5@umail. umd.edu

Tutors' Column

"I am a teacher"

Tonight, I went to see *Man Without a Face* with my roommates, three fellow education majors. As they sobbed through the touching scenes of the film, I focused on one particular line, "though I make my living otherwise, I am a teacher." Since then, I have had a knot in the pit of my stomach, or soul (I am unsure which), keeping me simultaneously on the verge of anxious tears and explosive inspiration.

Do the students I tutor know how much they give me just by needing or wanting my help? The students I tutor, weekly or daily, add fuel to the fire of my desire to teach. I never dreamed that my job as a peer tutor in the Writing Center at Ball State University would be so rewarding and fulfilling. Working with my regular student, whom I will call Patty, has confirmed something I have felt for a few years now—I, like the main character in the movie, am a teacher.

Patty is a non-traditional student referred to me by her freshman composition instructor. She has many obstacles standing firmly between her and her well defined goals. She is an African-American mother of three with a nearly complete loss of vision in her left eye and several financial worries. She simply "slipped through the cracks" of basic English education.

In our first meeting, we talked about, defined, and applied the terms "noun" and "verb." I had expected to look more at her first essay for her English class, a diagnostic essay, than at parts of speech. But after reading through her first few paragraphs, I realized Patty did not have the slightest grasp of the basic needs of a sentence. I resigned myself to the fact that we would have to start at the beginning. This was a lesson I expected to encounter in neither peer tutoring nor high school level English instruction. I just assumed that any college English student would naturally know enough of the basics of grammar to write complete sentences. I have since changed such expectations and cannot begin to express the immense scope of the insight I carried away from the first session.

Each time Patty and I meet, some new tutoring dilemma seems to surface; however, we both seem to walk away with some sense of accomplishment, be it mine or hers. I have learned, through tutoring Patty, to change speed and direction at amazing rates, tackling her before she strays too far from the task at hand. Also, I have learned how beneficial humor can be in helping her recognize the "obvious," and in making writing and grammar enjoyable for her.

Patty now uses a nick-name, Tiff, when addressing me, bounces new topic ideas off me weeks before she needs one, and tells me how much better she feels about her work. These seemingly insignificant facets of our relationship are what get me through feelings of uncertainty for my future. Patty gives me strength and encouragement. She has transformed me from a bashful and insecure tutor trainee to a confident and, I feel, competent educator.

I thank Patty for creating a "new me." Likewise, she thanks me after every meeting for giving her the strength and encouragement she needs to become a better student. She makes me feel positive about my work and abilities as both a writer and a tutor. The trust she has instilled in me to help her over the rough spots helped me over my own, reminding me that though currently "I make my living otherwise, I am a teacher."

Tiffany Jo Ice-Bilbrey
Peer Tutor
Ball State University
Muncie, IN

Tutoring through your curriculum

I greeted the student at the door and asked him how his week had been. He responded in the typical fashion. He was not happy with his work and wanted me to help him iron out some of his major problems. I went over his work as he presented it to me and discovered some major flaws that needed to be addressed. Throughout the course of the session, we focused on these few problems. When our time had run out, we agreed that he had accomplished some of his goals and had learned something. He then packed up his trumpet and went home.

Yes, I said trumpet. What I have described here is not a tutoring session in the writing center. I have described a typical private lesson for a music student. Why is this important? Very simple. Allow me to explain.

When I first started out as a tutor, I really had no idea how to help other students with writing. I did, however, have a great deal of experience in giving and receiving private lessons in music. After all, I am a music major. I decided, after a few bad tutoring experiences, to apply some of what I knew about music lessons to my tutoring.

As I did so, I began to gain confidence in my ability as a tutor. I no longer hoped that my students would call and cancel, and when they did show up, I felt that I taught them something in a manner that was conducive to learning. I could, for the first time call myself a "tutor." The analogy is pretty elementary. In a private music lesson, students strive towards a primary goal: proficiency in playing an instrument. However, as anyone who has ever played a musical instrument knows, they must first master smaller goals that contribute to the main goal. For instance, musicians must work on tone or technique before they can play a concerto. The small things add up to make them a better player. In a lesson, they typically work on one thing. In the next lesson, they might work on some other element. Sound familiar?

What I had done was simple; I took what was foreign to me, tutoring writing, and related it to what is very familiar and comfortable to me, music. So what does this have to do with anyone else? I believe it has everything to do with all other tutors (especially new tutors who are not English majors). But in all of the meetings, conferences, electronic bulletin boards, and conversations I have attended since becoming a tutor, I really haven't heard much on applying our own expertise to our tutoring experiences—I call this "Tutoring Through Your Curriculum."

I think we are so determined to have people learn in the "correct way" that we forget that we can interrelate the disciplines and create new ways of looking at tutoring. I constantly look for analogies in areas of personal expertise when tutoring (and occasionally ask for analogies from students in their areas of expertise). For example, a very restrictive assignment might be compared to a jazz piece. Although there are obvious restrictions (the chords and melody), the soloists can be creative in what they play. In the same way, writers can be creative even though an assignment might be restrictive in its topic, length, purpose, or audience. Both have taken something that seemingly leaves them with little freedom to be creative and produced something truly original. In other words, the writer must develop a voice or style in writing much like the musician develops a sound in music.

I wish I could share examples of how to relate other disciplines to tutoring (of course, if I had that kind of expertise in all disciplines, I doubt I would be a starving music major), but I cannot. I can only relate my personal experiences in incorporating music to my work in the writing center. Through music, I believe I have become a much better tutor, and I believe others can benefit in a similar way. After all, how can we become the best tutors possible if we ignore our strongest talents?

Paul Lemen
Peer Tutor
Ball State University
Muncie, IN

A reader asks. . . .

We staff a writing center satellite connected with a WAC program in the Electrical and Computer Engineering Department of the University of South Carolina. Are there other writing center satellites that coordinate writing programs in engineering departments or colleges? We would like to know the names of such programs if they exist. Please contact me:

Elisabeth M. Alford, Senior Writing Consultant
ECE Writing Center Satellite
Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering
Swearingen Center
University of South Carolina,
Columbia, SC 29208.
phone: 803-777-5446
e-mail: writing@ece.sc.edu.

Special ACE issue on writing centers

Volume IX, number 4, of the Assembly on Computers in English (ACE) newsletter will focus on computers used in writing centers. It contains articles about On-Line Writing Labs (OWLs), e-mail, and computer-assisted conferencing. The articles cover middle school through college. The newsletter is expected to be available by the end of February. Issues will be mailed to all members of ACE (an NCTE assembly). Membership in ACE is $10/year. For information about the availability of additional copies ($3.00) contact the membership co-chair Rae Schipke (after February 1996) at Department of English, Central Connecticut State U., New Britain, CT 06050-4010, e-mail: SCHIPKER@CCSUA.CTSTATEU.EDU

Beyond record-keeping: Session reports and tutor education

Many of our procedures have evolved over the past three years since I became the assistant director of the City College of New York (CCNY) Writing Center. I emphasize "evolved" because many of our practices are still "in-progress"—we expect to revise them as we continue to reflect on our Center's goals and philosophies. One area where the evolution of our thinking is evident is in our session follow-up practices and how we have addressed this issue with our tutors. While I want to underscore that I don't believe there is an "ideal" format or practice, I do believe that the follow-up approaches used by a writing center must be in line with the aims and goals of that particular writing center. In other words, writing centers need to respond to their local communities and constraints while maintaining their integrity and, to some extent, their autonomy.

Two years ago, when the new director and I began mapping out the types of forms we would use in the CCNY Writing Center, we knew we wanted to keep the record-keeping procedures fairly simple. Yet we also wanted our forms to reflect our philosophy and the image we were attempting to create for the writing center we were now in charge of. First established by Mina Shaughnessy in the early 1970s, the CCNY Writing Center has always served a population of students that reflects the astounding cultural, social, and linguistic diversity of New York City. However, much of the focus of the tutoring had been on modules, error analysis, and grammar instruction, with some emphasis given to completing worksheets in regular weekly sessions. Students were diagnosed and referred by instructors and required to sign up for a series of appointments for the semester. We decided to shift the focus to an approach emphasizing collaboration and discussions about the writing in progress that a student might bring in. We also decided to promote the CCNY Writing Center as a place where students could bring writing from their composition courses as well as other courses. Primarily, we wanted the writing center to be seen as a place where writers meet to discuss writing, a collaborative space where students learn to be better writers and readers of their own writing—probably what many of you try to do in your own writing centers.

At the CCNY Writing Center, we employ undergraduate and graduate students as tutors. In Fall 1992, we switched to a drop-in/appointment center; a typical session lasts about 50 minutes. Currently, we conduct 40-50 sessions a day (20- 25 on Fridays), around 200 sessions a week. By the end of a semester we will have seen almost 600 students and conducted over 1800 sessions. (Many students come more than once for different classes, and some students visit us only once.) Like most writing centers, we have to collect this type of data for reporting purposes, especially since some of our money comes from a federally-funded equal opportunity program. But more importantly, we wanted our forms to be useful for the writer and the tutor. Very little recording of what happened in sessions between students and tutors had been done in the past.

The front side of our form combines the information needed for reports with our belief that students must take responsibility for what happens during a tutoring session. We wanted students to take an active part in their learning and we wanted their answers to provide the tutor with some initial guidelines for the session. These questions were also designed to emphasize to the tutor the need to assess the rhetorical situation of the writing and the writer before proceeding. The back side of the form is used by the tutor at the end of the session. Tutors write a short narrative or summary of what happened, an overview that indicates what the student writer and tutor focused on during their time together. The tutor records the main things he or she helped the student writer with, and includes any other information about the student writer that the tutor thinks should be recorded. These reports are then filed for each student. We also recently added a place on our session reports for the tutor to indicate what the writer brought to the session and what the genre of the writing assignment was.

Tutors are encouraged to summarize the session so that another tutor would have an idea of what happened during the previous meeting. The next tutor, or the same one, can then use the session report to see what has been discussed with the student writer, perhaps reviewing certain areas, and also to see what progress has been made. By looking at previous reports, tutors can urge writers to explain what they have done since the last session and why, helping them to see the process of revision in action. In this way, we are trying to encourage students to take responsibility for their writing and their learning.

Since we view the written report as a way of offering continuity between sessions, we think of ourselves as the primary audience for these session reports. One of the tutors told me she sees the session report as a way of "continuing the conversation" about writing that she has had with a student writer. Ideally, the session reports can help us begin to build a profile of developing writers and their progress over time. In addition, the information can also offer us a way to help student writers become more aware of their particular writing processes. So, the writer, then, becomes the secondary audience for the session report—we can use it to help student writers see their development as writers.

We do not send these reports to professors; but we do keep a file on each student writer who visits us. In the years that I've been here, only three instructors have ever visited us to look over our reports—and all three were outside the Dept. of English. I have had a few informal conversations with instructors, usually adjuncts, with whom I have a personal relationship as well. Mainly, they've told me that they noticed improvement in those students who took advantage of our services. Interestingly enough, as a colleague pointed out to me, no one has ever asked us to provide a written report on a student's visit either. [I haven't made up my mind whether that is good or bad.] It may be the issue of time. Like many universities these days, almost two-thirds of our composition classes and close to half of the other required first year courses are taught by adjuncts who also teach at other schools in the area—many are only on campus a few hours each week.

However, a situation that occurred during a past semester prompted us to reflect more seriously on the purposes of our follow-up practices. This event involved a well-intentioned history instructor who was so taken with our services when he heard about them that he wanted to encourage all of his students to come and see us—so he offered them extra credit if they visited us. Trying to be an efficient administrator, I told the tutors to merely copy the session report and hand it to students who wanted proof that they had visited us. The tutors complied. This practice seemed to work for a little while. But, what many of you probably see coming, happened. I, naively, was not reading over the reports before they were going out. Shortly thereafter another instructor called, not irate, but concerned. He had received a report on an ESL student in his class who had come to the writing center with his paper. Unfortunately, the report he received from the tutor had a grammatical error in it, and he wanted to know how this tutor could work with a student who was having language problems if the tutor was also having some difficulties with the language. While I explained that the tutor had to write the report in haste, it forced us to re-examine and to clarify the role of session reports.

In the initial workshops for the first group of tutors two years ago, discussion about these reports was quite limited as to how to do them and why. We did not give explicit directions as to what should or should not be noted, but we tried, by educating the tutors about the purpose of the session report, to help them see what information would be useful to record. As a general guideline, we told the tutors to consider what they would want to know about what happened in the previous session that would help them in the present session with the student writer. In short, we gave the tutors a great deal of freedom as to what to write on the session reports; we decided that the tutors would learn how to write these session reports by writing and reading them.

In the tutor preparation course that I taught for the first time last fall, my intentions were to be somewhat more directive as to what to write and why, especially since I had more time to devote to this issue. More particularly, I had intended to use the incident as a way to focus our discussion about the purposes of the session report and what information we should include. To my surprise, however, the tutors quickly turned the discussion into a debate about the audience issue. Many were concerned with the very practical matter of how they would manage to write up what had happened in a tutoring session in the scant, and at most, ten minutes between appointments or heading off to class. (A few do write the reports later, but I've also found that many don't get written with this practice.) One of the veteran tutors, who had worked with some students from the history class, specifically noted how much more difficult it was to write everything up when the student was anxiously waiting for the report, which must then be copied, to take to their professor. Not to mention how anxious the tutor felt knowing something she dashed off would be used as proof of her ability, especially given what had recently happened.

So, while I hadn't yet approached this part of a tutor's responsibilities, the new tutors, and the few experienced ones who were also taking the class, had already begun to seriously think about who might read these reports and why. They had already become aware that these session reports not only revealed what they were doing (or not doing) in a session, but at the same time, could only reflect a small part of what happened in a session. And the veteran tutors had also come to understand how the session reports could be used to evaluate their abilities as tutors. Together, we began to explore, or I guess more precisely, debate, issues connected to the purposes of the report. Who should be the audience for these reports? Why? What is or isn't written on the session report? What is the value of sending the report to faculty? Why should we? Why not? Issues of trust entered the discussion, the idea of gaining it from the student and not betraying it. Some tutors wondered if students would reveal as much if they felt what they were doing would be reported back to the instructor, especially if they expressed frustration with their instructors. One tutor commented on how timid some students are to reveal what they don't know, and how they would or might be embarrassed if their instructor were to know they don't know "some of the basics." Other tutors wondered about how to write up the other issues that often get discussed in a tutorial session—issues that affect how a writer responds to not just the assignment, but to school and education in general.

Our consensus, after much discussion, was to continue to keep the session reports in the writing center, with ourselves as the audience, and not send them to faculty. Our compromise was to create an official-looking piece of paper that confirmed the date and time of a student's visit to the center. Many of the tutors were quite candid in expressing their discomfort with the idea of the instructor as the main audience. One tutor

felt very strongly that writing the session report specifically for an instructor damaged the tutor-student relationship. For her, it would mean changing the role of the peer tutor to that of an informant since she is very protective of her role of being there to help the student. While some thought it might help to create a dialogue with instructors, others worried that the tutor's role might be seen as too aligned with the instructor's position. But here's the argument that eventually persuaded me: Many of the tutors said that they wanted the session report as a place where they could write about their work with a student writer and question it (even address questions to me or the director) in safety. They wanted to maintain that "communication space" where they could record and reflect on what they were doing.

Using the session reports as a communication space appeals to me, especially since I want the tutors to see the session reports as a vehicle for helping them to develop their tutoring abilities. To accomplish this goal, during the tutor training class I now require the new tutors to copy three to five of these reports and write a paper about their tutoring sessions. I ask them to consider two major questions when they look over their session reports: What worked well in this session with this student? Or in several sessions with different students? and What will you do differently next time? My objectives for this assignment are both to push the tutor to see the importance of summarizing what happened in a session with a student writer, and to help the tutor begin to reflect on his or her own development and effectiveness as a tutor. More importantly, I view the assignment as a way to push tutors into thinking about what might be important to record about a session. In other words, I want them to see how writing the session report can help them to become a better tutor.

Consequently, when we have reviewed these reports, we see a wide range of reporting styles—almost mirroring the variety of tutoring styles of the various individuals working at our writing center. Some tutors write very informative narratives about a session while others write very cryptic notes; others reflect on things they did that either did or did not work, sometimes even directly questioning their methods on the report; and still others will record what the student writer plans to do next. Something else I've also noted in looking over the session reports of the past semester: Those tutors who participated in the course tended to write more substantive comments than the tutors who had been with the writing center for over a year and did not attend the fall class.

Here's what Claudia, a tutor who participated in the class, wrote when I asked for her views on the session reports:

> I really use them! I write them for myself and for other tutors, so that we can use them to help students better. For example, if one subject comes up more than twice in the reports of the same student, maybe we are not really communicating with the student or we ought to be more creative or to get help from you. Also, it is helpful to read the reports of the students and see their progress.
>
> Sometimes I think that I am also writing the report for you because I know that you read them. I like that because I know that in case something is not working well, you will help me. However, if I knew that other professors would read them, it would add some anxiety to my reports because I will be very aware of my writing. But from the professional point of view, I think it would be wonderful if the professors knew what happened in the process of writing of their students. It would be like coordinated work.

I think Claudia really captures some of the mixed feelings that I and many of the tutors have about how we view our session follow-up practices. While Claudia knows that they are useful in her work with students and that faculty also might find them useful, she also realizes the pressure it would place on her when she writes these reports.

Which brings me back to looking again at the issues concerning session follow-up practices and educating tutors about how to write these reports. Our methods are both a reflection of our philosophy and a response to our situation. I know we will continue to discuss the session report, especially in the preparation course we now require all new tutors to take. I also know I like the idea of allowing the tutors to discover what needs to be in a session report by doing them and reading them—and talking about them in class. Providing tutors with the opportunity to reflect on what they are doing and why is in my view, the best way to educate tutors—and it is a method that works for us.

However, our follow-up practices may not be right for another writing center. I don't see a "right" answer in terms of who the audience for these reports should be. Your answer will depend on examining your writing center, its mission and goals, and its location in the university setting. It will also probably depend on the type of administrator you are, and how much time you have to prepare tutors for tutoring. In other words, like most of our practices, we have to give much careful consideration to how what we do reflects on who we are, and what constraints our practices must operate within. Here, we view the CCNY Writing Center as another educational site within the university—for both the students who work here and the students who come here to talk about writing. I view the tutor preparation course as a way of educating students to educate others, and I view the session reports as part of the educational process for *all* of the students who use the writing center. While I do recognize some of the positive aspects of writing reports for others outside the writing center, particularly faculty—and perhaps we may do so in the future—we are comfortable, for now, with our decision to keep the reports in the center, for our own educational purposes, which includes educating ourselves about what we do and why.

Kim Jackson
City College of New York
New York, NY

Writing Center Ethics

Safe Sex in the Writing Center

Don't tell me that title didn't grab your attention.

Are you tantalized? Ready to read on? Well, then, let's go. I'm game if you are.

If people talk about the subject of ethics long enough, sooner or later someone's going to use the term "morality," and then it's only a matter of time before someone starts talking about sex. Good sex, bad sex; safe sex, unsafe sex; moral sex and immoral sex; ethical sex and unethical sex. Human beings can't help talking about sex or at least thinking about it fairly often (I read once that the average male has a sexual thought on the order of once every fifteen seconds), so it should come as no surprise that sex—or sexual tension anyway—has the potential to be a big influence on writing center conferences.

Let's face it. Writing conferences are really quite intimate. Two people—often of different genders but just as often similar in age and experience—spend a half hour or an hour sitting close together and collaborating intensely on a written text. They ask questions of one another. They come to know one another better. They share experiences and learn how each other's mind works. They laugh. They cry (sometimes). The tutor is compassionate, helpful, and nurturing. The student is inquisitive, somewhat vulnerable, and appreciative. In some writing centers, relationships between student and tutor can be developed in regular meetings that take place over a period of a semester, a school year, or longer. But even with shorter or less frequent meetings, feelings of sexual attraction and/or emotional interest may arise in one or both of the parties involved.

If you think about it in a kind of twisted way—one of my strengths, I must admit—writing center conferences are a little like a cross between *College Bowl* and *The Dating Game*, or, to use slightly more contemporary references, *Jeopardy* and *Love Connection*. Tutors and students are randomly matched, depending upon which tutors are available when the students make their appointments. They are brought together by institutional circumstances—the need to write a paper for a particular academic class—and those circumstances also provide an exigency for conversation. Student-tutor talk is framed by the rhetorical needs of an academic paper and the requirements of the assignment that prompted it, and though this conversation is certainly bound to be rather dry and less than romantic, the tutor and the student nevertheless have the benefit of a shared point of reference and a clearly defined subject to talk about. Right away, that makes writing center conferences a lot better than most blind dates, where both parties spend a lot of their time groping around for something in common so the evening doesn't lapse into a prolonged period of uncomfortable silences. And while the student and the tutor may talk about the benefits of aspirin for preventing heart attacks or the dangers of growth hormones in commercially-raised cattle, they have the opportunity to touch subtly on other, more personal topics that involve their own hearts and hormones as well.

Now, I must admit I'm engaging in a bit of lighthearted hyperbole here. I don't think of writing centers as steamy, lust-filled hotbeds of unrestrained libido where tutors hang around waiting to see who their next potential conquest might be. Not often, anyway. Most conferences remain gloriously platonic, and any spark of sexual attraction that gets lit is quickly snuffed out by the realization that brief, focused encounters in the writing center are unlikely to lead to anything more, and a similar pressing awareness that real work needs to be accomplished in the short time the conference allows. But conferences are icebreakers, introduction services if you will. They set the groundwork for future encounters and provide a context—and excuse—for later contacts.

It's funny that we don't talk much about this aspect of writing center work, except when we raise the specter of a student or a tutor who is so forthright and aggressive about his or her sexual impulses that the behavior becomes disruptive or abusive. Writing center lore is filled with stories and training scenarios about students who ask inappropriately personal questions of the tutor and tutors who do the same with the students they see. Tutors are taught strategies for dealing with sexual harassment—either in their own tutoring sessions or as revealed by students in their writing—and they are sensitized to many of the subtle misunderstandings that can arise as a result of gender differences in communication. But there is not a lot of discussion about appropriate policy when and if the attraction between student and tutor is natural, normal, and as can sometimes happen, mutual.

For the most part, I think writing center directors (myself included) manage to convince themselves it doesn't happen all that often, and then we find a way to discreetly ignore it when it does (unless it becomes a "problem," that is). We es-

tablish a rather vague policy of conduct to the effect that writing centers are professional workplaces and that the people who work there should conduct themselves in a professional manner. That means tutors shouldn't proposition their clients, and they shouldn't let their clients proposition them. But when you think about it, that's hardly a realistic policy. How many long-term relationships in this world have begun because two people, employed by the same business or institution, were brought together to work on the same project? Millions, I imagine. It happens all the time. Why should writing centers be any different? Is there anything wrong with two people meeting in the writing center and one asking the other to meet for coffee sometime later? Should writing center tutors hold themselves to higher moral standards? (Tsk, there's that word "moral" again.)

The problem is exacerbated, in fact, by our very philosophy of teaching. We try to establish ourselves as "peers" or "collaborators" with the students we see rather than "teachers" or "authority figures." (In many cases, such as when undergraduate tutors meet with undergraduate students, this peer-peer relationship may be especially close.) By doing so, we remove one of the traditional strictures against teacher-student involvement: the unequal power relationship. What makes it unethical for teachers to become involved with their students—in part, anyway—is the fact that teachers wield the power of the grade. Teachers can coerce. Students can feel pressured to accept unwanted advances out of fear. But writing center tutors don't hold that kind of power, and they generally resist any characterizations of their stance as "authoritative," at least in the traditional sense of the word. (I know tutors have some degree of textual and rhetorical authority, but that's a very different beast from the kind of institutionally-granted authority that allows instructors to pass official judgment on students' abilities and achievements.) In short, writing centers are designed to be friendly, comfortable, relaxed environments, and tutors are supposed to be colleagues, peers, collaborators, and sympathetic ears to their students.

So why not potential mates?

Perhaps the ethics of writing center romance are tied to matters of degree. While it would be unethical, not to mention disruptive, for a tutor to make advances toward every student that struck his or her fancy in a conference, it might not be unethical for that same tutor to ask one particular student out after having met with her (or him) five or six times during the school year. Yet, even as I say this, I realize I'm simplifying and essentializing. Is it sincerity that makes the difference? Considered reflection? Dogged persistence? What if the student doesn't have the option of meeting with a different tutor or vice versa? Will an expressed romantic interest by tutor or student do irreparable damage to the conference relationship? Will it damage the reputation or status of the writing center? Is it best just to forbid tutors to make any kind of romantic overture to the students they see? Or is it best just to set general guidelines like, "You're here to do a job, not to get involved with your students," and then just sit back, not worry too much about it, and handle any problems as they arise?

Years ago, when I was working as a tutor in the learning center at Long Beach City College, I met regularly with a female student who was trying to improve her English. She was a single mother from Cambodia who had recently immigrated to the U.S., and she was also a wonderful, friendly, attractive woman with a fine sense of humor. We developed the beginnings of a friendship as we worked together, and toward the end of my employment at the college, the two of us went out for lunch and talked about things that had nothing to do with research paper formats or how to determine which preposition to put where in a sentence. In the course of this lunch time conversation, it eventually became clear to me (I'm kind of a sluggard about these things) that she wanted our friendship to become "something more"—even though she knew I was already married. I was quite flattered and not a little embarrassed by the offer, but I politely declined, and neither one of knew exactly what to say after that.

Our next official meeting—the last of the school year—was uncomfortable for the both of us, and not particularly productive. We both tried to keep up a facade of outward friendliness, but the whole conference was colored by what had happened in our previous meeting, even though neither of us ever referred to it explicitly. I think we were both relieved in some ways that we would never see each other again after the final conference was over.

Could anything have prevented this? I doubt it. No formal policy could have kept me from making friends with anyone I chose, and no externally-imposed set of ethical guidelines could have prevented my student from feeling what her heart told her to feel.

But it turned out badly, and it mucked up a perfectly good working relationship.

And that saddens me.

Michael A. Pemberton
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Position Announcement

Washington State University invites applications and nominations for the senior position of Director of the Writing Program, available Aug. 16, 1996. The Director will have responsibility for the campus and system-wide writing program with teaching responsibilities of one course per semester in the English Department. This is a new position in an innovative undergraduate program. The Director reports to and assists the Director of General Education, supervises the activities of the Writing Lab, the Office of Writing Assessment, and faculty development.

Minimum qualifications: Ph.D. in composition and rhetoric or related fields; experience directing a writing program; and a strong record of scholarly publication and teaching appropriate for tenure at WSU; excellent communication and personal skills; record of innovation and successful collaborative projects required.

Preferred qualifications: Expertise in one or more of the following areas desired: rhetorical theory, cultural rhetoric, ESL, writing across the curriculum, writing assessment, writing pedagogy, writing centers.

University: Washington State University is a land-grant institution, classified as a Research II (Carnegie), with an enrollment of 17,000 students on the Pullman campus. There are eight colleges, a graduate school, and the Intercollegiate Center for Nursing which is headquartered in Spokane. The university offers over 100 major fields of study with master's and doctoral degrees available in most. WSU is one of the largest residential institutions in the West; Pullman offers a friendly, small-town living environment. Branch campuses are located in Spokane, Richland, and Vancouver.

Send application letter, C.V. with professional references, dossier commenting on both administrative skills and tenurability in WSU's English Department, and writing sample to:

Susan McLeod, Chair
Director of the Writing Program
Search Committee
422 French Administration
Washington State University
Pullman, WA 99164-1046

DEADLINE: March 1, 1996

Inquiries can be directed to Mrs. Donna Clark at 509-335-5581. Complete job description available on request. WSU is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action educator and employer. Members of ethnic minorities, women, Vietnam-era or disabled veterans, persons of disability, and/or persons age 40 and over are encouraged to apply.

THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
Purdue University
1356 Heavilon Hall
West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Purdue University

Address correction requested