THE WRITING LAB

NEWSLETTER

...FROM THE EDITOR...

The topic that dominates the discussion in this month's newsletter is professionalism, viewed through several prisms. Betty Moore explores the defining features of professionalism among tutors while Jim Upton raises the problem of volunteerism as it impacts on— and clashes with—a variety of professional concerns, from questions of compensation to job descriptions.

A particularly troublesome aspect of professionalism is our tendency to continually add new items to our job descriptions. We do so because of a willingness to expand services in the name of making our writing labs more effective or to explore new opportunities that may help students and make the center more essential and less vulnerable to budget cuts. Unfortunately, as new responsibilities get folded in, nothing else is removed. Among these types of creeping job expansion, one that rarely enters our conversation is the appropriation of classroom teaching, a problem addressed by Kathy Evertz.

If the articles this month alert you to similarities in your own situation, you might spend a few minutes today identifying one thing on your to-do list that can be permanently eliminated. Good luck!

• *Muriel Harris, editor*

Writing across the curriculum and the writing center: The problem of appropriating teaching

At the University of Wyoming Writing Center, we, like many of our writing center colleagues across the country, want our student visitors to take responsibility for and ownership of their ideas and their writing. In the ideal conference, we ask questions and elicit responses about their assignments and their texts. The ideal conference is collaborative: the give-and-take between student and tutor encourages the student to take charge of and make decisions about his or her own writing. We are very aware of the problems associated with appropriation of student texts.

In our work with faculty in a variety of disciplines (ranging from marketing to engineering to accounting), we have realized that our work with them has sometimes resulted in the appropriation of their teaching. The University of Wyoming is committed to the notion of writing across the curriculum. As a re-

sult, writing center staff give numerous workshops to teachers and classes across campus: we are asked to speak to all manner of classes about writing. We have also worked with faculty across campus to develop writing and writing-intensive courses. The situation, though, has not been an entirely happy one. While faculty across campus have become aware of the importance of writing—not just as a "skill," but as a way to teach and reinforce content—we at the writing center have some-

times been uncomfortable with or annoyed at the extent to which we're regarded as "writing experts."

Put simply, we have discovered that, like those students who visit the writing center with the sincere hope that a tutor will do the work for them, some faculty across the curriculum have asked us, in effect, to take over some of their teaching. This makes us uneasy, although I hasten to add that individual tutors have their own tolerance and annoyance levels, and I believe I am the most sensitive of the bunch.

In this article, I want to try (emphasis on "try") to define what I mean by "appropriation of teaching." I will discuss a few examples that illustrate how the writing center has become a place where (to which?) instructors have willingly surrendered their teaching. Then I'll describe how the University of Wyoming Writing Center has developed and implemented outreach policies and programs that require collaboration between writing center staff and instructors at all levels. Finally, I will reflect, in a rather confused way, on the sometimes perplexing relationship between the different "orientations" of writing-to-learn folks and learning-to-write-in-the-disciplines folks.

Before I launch into my discussion of "appropriation," I will describe very briefly the relationship between the U.W. Writing Center and the Writing Across the Curriculum Program. An official relationship exists between the Writing Center and Writing Across the Curriculum in that one person directs both programs. The theory behind this is that the writing center is a support service for WAC. Wyoming has a "vertical composition requirement," which occurs from the freshman to the senior years, and students can fulfill their three writing requirements by taking writing and/or writing-intensive courses. Because students are doing a lot of writing at different levels, the writing center must become a support for students and faculty who need help.

But there's an unofficial relationship, too. Many faculty members are requiring a lot of writing: the idea of "writing across the curriculum" has increased writing outside of official writing-across-the-curriculum courses. We believe this is a good thing, but there are plenty of folks doing experimental things with writing, and they're not clear as to what they want their students to learn about, or through, writing. Sometimes it's at this point that faculty become frustrated by what they regard as "poor writing," and they send their students to us. In our writing center, as we were talking about all of this, an important question was raised: are writing center faculty "employees" of the WAC program? The answer is a crafty "yes" *and* "no."

I'd like to move to the intimidating "Go ahead, I dare you to define it!" part of the discussion. I've been thinking about this "appropriation" business for several years now, whining about it, complaining about it to and with my colleagues. And it's a terribly slippery term that I now realize I've come to apply to all sorts of situations.

A few examples. Recently, a student came to the writing center for help. "What are you working on?" I asked. "A poem," he responded. "Where are you in the writing process?" I asked. "I haven't started," he said. "I don't understand the reading. I don't know how to read a poem." Keenly sensitive to this issue of teaching appropriation, I told the student that it's best to go to the teacher with questions about content. "I did," said he. "But she told me to come here and have you explain it."

Earlier this semester, I collaborated with a professor in range management. He'd had problems with senior-level papers last year, and he wanted me to visit his class and give a presentation about organization and thesis. Fine: I was delighted to meet the professor in the writing center and work out a game plan for my talk. When he showed me a copy of his assignment, I could see real prob-

lems. His instructions were not clearly organized, information seemed "clumped" together in unusual ways, and his evaluation criteria didn't seem to fit the requirements of the assignment. I told him he might want to re-clump information and instructions, because, I said, "If I were a student, I might not be able to see how these things connect." "It's too late," he said. "I've already handed out the assignment. I just need you to tell them how to organize the paper." I decided to play along—there was no way to stop the train wreck—and visit his class, but I vowed to ask questions about the assignment in front of the class because I suspected that his students' writing problems last year stemmed from a poorly written assignment. Two days before my talk, the professor called me to say that he would be out of town on the day of my visit. I became, in essence, a substitute teacher, and the students asked me questions—very cogent questions about writing within the discipline of range management—that only the instructor could answer.

A colleague was asked by a freshman-orientation instructor to visit his class and talk about how to write a letter. That request has been the only contact between my colleague and the instructor. My colleague has tried on numerous occasions to contact the instructor, but the calls are never returned.

I've mentioned only a few examples, and I hope readers will be able to think of similar instances at your own writing centers. (And I hope this article stimulates further discussion about these dilemmas.) So what are we appropriating? Here's where it gets tricky, and in some ways it's like the Supreme Court justice who defined "pornography" by saying, "I just know it when I see it." In some situations, I've felt that instructors were abdicating their responsibility for teaching content. In others, I've had the feeling that they've been implicitly begging me (and my colleagues) to appropriate the teaching of writing in content courses. I know I've found myself in many situations—in outreach presenta-

tions and in individual conferences with students in the writing center—where I've had real troubles with questions of form and format (that is, writing in the disciplines). We have come to realize that we're increasingly telling students, "You just have to talk to your instructor to get that answer."

So what's going on? Why is this happening? We think some of it has to do with a lack of confidence. Instructors in the disciplines know how to write to their professional colleagues, but they're not sure how to teach writing to their students. They *assign* writing, but we all know there's huge gap between assigning and teaching. We also think—no, we know—that many instructors see writing as a skill that's best left to the "experts" at the writing center. So the instructor's "contribution" to writing instruction consists of inviting a writing center tutor to make a "cameo" appearance in class—to drive home the point that "errors make you look bad" and that "writing is important." And sometimes the cameo appearances become occasions for the instructor to go somewhere else.

Certainly, we all believe that some writing instruction is better than none, but what message is being sent about writing when a teacher can't bring himself or herself to attend the guest lecture? I think we all know the answer: that writing is a set of unchanging rules about correctness, that writing is somehow divorced from content—and that a visit to the writing center is the last step toward what the instructor hopes will be a flaw-" lite" paper.

One of my colleagues wonders if there's "good" appropriation and "bad" appropriation, and I think she's right. I think that part of what I'm advancing is the notion that instructors ought to appropriate more of our teaching. In "What the College Writing Center Is—and Isn't," Richard Leahy writes that writing center tutors everywhere need to "learn to avoid the role of 'little teachers' (extensions of the classroom instructor) . . . ." (44). I think it's a very good point, but

in a university configuration in which the Writing Center supports Writing Across the Curriculum, it's important to cultivate a fluid, mutually responsible exchange. It's important that classroom instructors become extensions of us, and that they do so in a substantive, conscious, well-informed way. And we need to take into consideration their needs, and their students' needs, as well.

The question I continually ask myself is: why does it make me uncomfortable to appropriate another teacher's teaching—in different ways, to different degrees? Why do I believe that we shouldn't simply regard ourselves as "writing experts" and enjoy that curious status? I think it has to do with our situation as tutors in a place where writing happens in a place where we regard writing as a collaborative, social act. It upsets me, I have to admit, when my belief in writing as a collaborative, social process butts up against the belief of an instructor who regards "writing" as a final draft that's the result of a linear operation. Put another way, I'd like to see the writing center become a place that classroom instructors view as part of a recursive process of teaching, not just writing.

The University of Wyoming Writing Center has made significant progress in communicating the importance of *collaboration* between the Writing Center and instructors across the curriculum. In 1992, the Writing Center, which is now part of a bureaucratic entity called "The Center for Teaching Excellence," was awarded a grant to develop courses and curriculum material for teaching research and technical writing in Computer Science, Mechanical Engineering, and the Medical Technology Program. Writing center staff worked with faculty in those fields and stressed the value of collaboration between those who adhere to the philosophy of writing-to-learn and those interested in teaching writing-in-the-disciplines. To be sure, we've had mixed success, but we're working on it.

At the beginning of the fall semester, the writing center distributed a flyer that

was the result of much talking and arguing amongst writing center staff, who felt exploited by instructors needing someone to "fill in" while the instructors were gone; and instructors who, however misguided, wanted to stress the importance of good writing. The flyer sets out outreach policies underscoring the need—*our* need—for collaboration, and we're making good progress.

As I've been thinking about the appropriation problem, I've realized that the University of Wyoming Writing Center is a place where the conflict between the champions of "writing-to-learn" and the proponents of "writing-in-the-disciplines" is regularly being played out. In conceptualizing this problem, and hoping to think about real, long-term solutions, I've been influenced by a recent essay by Judy Kirscht, Rhonda Levine, and John Reiff, "Evolving Paradigms: WAC and the Rhetoric of Inquiry," in

which they propose a social constructionist solution to the conflict within writing-across-the-curriculum. They write that "[social constructionists] are taking the 'learning' in *writing-to-learn* beyond the assimilation of content into questions of how knowledge itself is constructed . . . . Writing becomes a way. . . to learn *how* knowledge has been constructed as well as *what* that knowledge is. WAC thus becomes a way into the inquiry practices of the fields" (374).

I'm still puzzling this out, but I wonder if it might help all of us—writing center and teachers-across-the-curriculum alike—if we *start* thinking of *both* the writing center *and* those "content" disciplines (e.g., range management, mechanical engineering) as, to borrow from Kirscht, Levine, and Reiff, "centers of inquiry rather than as banks of knowledge, and [where] disciplinary conventions are presented as emerging from

communally negotiated assumptions about what knowledge is and about the methods for shaping it" (374).

Maybe we need to find a way to promote the writing center not so much as a place for answers, then, but as a place for inquiry.

Kathy Evertz
University of Wyoming
Laramie, WY

Works Cited

Kirscht, Judy, Rhonda Levine, and John Reiff. "Evolving Paradigms: WAC and the Rhetoric of Inquiry." *College Composition and Communication* 45 (October 1994): 369-80.

Leahy, Richard. "What the College Writing Center Is—and Isn't." *College Teaching* 38 (Spring 1990): 43-48.

Conference Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

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).

October 4-5: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in St. Paul, MN
Contact: Ginger Young, Central Missouri State University, Humphreys 120, 320 Goodrich Drive, Warrensburg, MO 64093

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).

"Ask not what your center can do for you . . .": Volunteers in the public school writing center

I discussed the idea for this article over a year ago with the *Writing Lab Newsletter* editor, Muriel Harris, and I continue to be involved in on-going discussions and debates about the issue since then. Perhaps the length of time spent on discussion, writing, and revision reflects both the quantity and quality of feelings created by this issue.

I suspect that the use of volunteers is not an issue in college writing centers; however, the issue of volunteer work in creating and/or operating a public school writing center remains the most contentious topic in my own building/district, in my work as a consultant with other districts, in discussions after conference and convention presentations, and in on-going communications with teachers around the country. Volunteerism in public school writing centers involves issues of professional compensation, formal bargaining and contractual concerns, professional competence, friendship, politics, morale, and money.

The issues of student volunteers as tutors/coaches and of non-certificated staff as tutors/coaches are also most important and complex, and these deserve consideration in a separate paper. In this piece, I will focus on why volunteerism is an issue and the possible implications of such work.

I want to make clear at the beginning that volunteerism does not mean occasional work or occasional sharing of professional time and talent. Most teachers, administrators, and members of the pub-lic with whom I work in my own district and whom I have met as consultants in other districts and at conferences are most dedicated and supportive. As part of their commitment to children, almost all teachers perform heroic efforts above and beyond their contractual duties. For example, our local center sponsors a "Study Skills Night" each year, and teachers from all disciplines willingly share their time and talent in an evening of mini-presentations for students and parents. I know of many similar volunteer programs, and my experience has been that most teachers are truly dedicated professionals and truly compassionate human beings.

Volunteerism in a public school writing center involves sustained professional work for either the time and effort needed to explore writing center issues and/or develop a plan for operation of a center and/or actual operation of a center within or outside of the contract day without professional compensation. Such work often involves the use of scheduled preparation time, contractual time before and/or after the students' day, and/or time during the evening or weekends devoted to writing center work.

Class sizes are already too large, preparation time is too limited, there are too many administrative duties within the classroom, and other school-related duties take up too much time, so one of the most often asked questions about such work is the obvious: "How could a teacher be placed in a position to have to resolve such issues?" The answers are equally obvious, but the implications are not as easily accepted.

The most obvious scenario involves staff members, departments, buildings and/or districts which have chosen to explore, develop, and operate a center on a voluntary basis. Another scenario involves the voluntary exploration, development, and operation of a center as a "trial" to prove or justify that such a center will be used, and if it is, then the staff and operation will supposedly be funded. Sadly, the most common scenario is tied to declining financial resources. Centers which have been fully funded throughout their exploration, development, and operation are often the first casualty of budget cutters. Most of the powers-that-be and many staff are not aware of the work and value of a center and see center work as a luxury which cannot be sustained if funding is limited. Even members of a language arts department will often vote to abandon a center if the choice involves larger class sizes in order to allow for assignment of staff into a center. Under such budgetary bludgeoning, the choice then becomes to continue to operate the center on a voluntary basis or to cease operation. And regardless of the decision, unless the vote is unanimous, the vote creates intense intra-departmental hostility.

Regardless of how a teacher comes to face the issue of volunteerism in a center, the perceptions of others about such work become crucial. At one extreme are those who see such efforts as the true epitome of professionalism; true profes-

sionals should willingly donate their time and talent to help students in the greatest number of ways. However, there are those within and outside the profession who see any such efforts as exactly the opposite of professionalism. The argument is that as long as teachers are willing to donate time to educational activities, teaching will never be considered a profession. Many argue that professionals should be compensated for all professional work, and if teachers provide professional services without compensation, school boards and the public will continue to expect such work and will not compensate professional educators adequately. Such work often creates contractual problems, and even more difficult is the controversy and bitterness created among the professional staff regarding such work. The issues often become personal, and all of those interested in centers must be aware of what the possible consequences of voluntary work may be.

The current financial condition of many states and districts makes funded exploration, development, and operation of a center financially impossible and often makes the continuation of existing centers equally impossible. The issue of volunteerism is often forced upon those who believe in the value of a center, and the controversies are innumerable.

Assuming the value of a center is recognized and the commitment to establish a center is made (or even discussed), the first controversy regarding volunteerism begins even before the center opens. Center design is a massive undertaking. The research into the theory, pedagogy, and design, the determination of the goals and activities within a center, the development of a mission statement, the clarification of the logistics of center operation, and a myriad of other vital decisions have to be explored and evaluated, and a fundamental question is "Who is going to do this, especially on a voluntary basis?"

Further assuming that people are willing to do such work on a voluntary basis,

the issues to be resolved in establishing a center are many: "Who is going to work in the center?" "Who will the center serve?" "What services will be offered, and where will these be offered?" "Where is the center to be located?" "Will the center be computer equipped?" "Is the center to supplement language arts and writing instruction and teachers, or is the center to supplement all classes and instructors?" "Will the center provide writing-to-show learning and writing-to-learn theory and strategies for staff?" . . . and on and on and on . . . . These issues must be resolved in exploring and developing any center, but if done by and for volunteers, the solutions seem more difficult to achieve.

If the research and design are to be done with volunteers, we must understand that those involved will have their own professional, "political," and personal expectations for having done this work. I do not mean that those involved have some hidden agenda, but all involved will have their own expectations regarding the operation, use, and view of the center. However, more important than the expectations of those involved is how those not involved see these motives and actions.

If the decision is made to explore, develop, and eventually operate a center with volunteers, the criticisms of the motives and efforts will often begin immediately, and they sound like this:

> • "The only reason you do this for free is to suck up to the administration; you just want to ensure you have a job."

> • "If you were doing a good enough job of teaching writing, you wouldn't need a writing center. You don't see the math and science people asking or volunteering to set up a math center or science center, do you?"

> • "You're just doing this so you get a good evaluation."

> • "If you do this during your preparation time or conference time, then the administration and board will expect me to give up my preparation period to do volunteer work."

> • "I don't have the time or interest to do volunteer work like this, and if you do this, it makes other teachers look bad to the administration and the public."

> • "It is people like you who harm the profession most. Teachers will never be treated like professionals until we start acting like professionals, and that means being paid a professional wage for ALL of our professional work. The more volunteer work you do, the more difficult it is for all teachers to gain recognition and respect as professional educators."

In some cases, the issue has truly important contractual and legal ramifications. I have been the chief negotiator for the local Education Association for almost fifteen years, and the issue of volunteerism has been brought to the table on several occasions. The stance of the administration has often been that preparation time and non-contact time before school cannot be that important if some teachers are willing to voluntarily give up this supposedly important contractual right. The suggestion has been made that either preparation time be eliminated or that all teachers should be required to perform some "extra" work during this time. Those of us who have volunteered in the center have been forced into providing written statements that our volunteer work is done by free choice and is not a precedent or past practice to be used to remove contractual preparation time. Our Master Agreement specifies that preparation time is to be used to work on school-related activities, and we have used this wording as an actual part of our letter to the board. However, the contractual and "political" reaction of some administrators, board

members, and the public must be anticipated and answered.

Even more traumatic for many volunteers are the negative reactions of colleagues to such work. The concerns and criticisms often begin as professional ones, but unfortunately, they often end up having adverse effects on personal relationships. The negative reactions are occasionally very public and heated, but most often, the negative reactions are not voiced and are manifested in many subtle, destructive ways. Teachers have dropped membership in the professional Association for its refusal to condemn such volunteer work; teachers have refused to send students to such centers or to avail themselves of center services; teachers have belittled such efforts to students, staff, administration, and the public; and professional and personal friendships have been destroyed.

This issue of using preparation or non-contact time during the day for voluntary center work is often the most crucial. The question "Should professional educators volunteer their time during their preparation or conference time to provide center services?" must ultimately be answered by those involved.

As I indicated, I believe the most important function of a public school writing center is to be a clearinghouse for writing-to-show learning and writing-to-learn sharings. However, the function leads to the other area of most heated controversy. This new paradigm of writing is most difficult even if fully supported and funded by the district, but when done by volunteers, it is the cause of the most defensive reaction to the idea of a center.

Too many teachers are threatened by any suggestion that their teaching philosophy and methods may be improved, and if such suggestions come from those who are volunteers in a writing/learning center, the reaction is often what kids call "ballistic." Rather than understand the quality of commitment and the sincerity of intention by the volunteers, they see any suggestion of a new approach to learning (as opposed to "teaching") as a threat from the "do-gooders." I have literally been told that: "You people in the center are trying to tell me that I'm not a good teacher because I don't use this writing stuff. Maybe if you spent more of your time worrying about what happens in your own classrooms, you wouldn't need this center."

Again, I do not want to suggest that even a significant minority of teachers, administrators, or citizens react negatively; however, a small vocal minority of "not-sees" can seriously damage the most carefully developed center and the most unselfish of efforts. I know of truly heroic teachers who have gladly volunteered time in a center to work with students but who have stopped their voluntary efforts because of the harassment by other staff.

Most disheartening is that because of such reactions, the services which are offered are not fully utilized by students or staff. The center does not receive the support and encouragement for use which it should, and students do not benefit as much as they could.

I continue often heated and extended discussions about volunteerism in the center, and I have long ago quit offering advice to those who choose or find themselves facing this issue. I can only share what I and several of my colleagues have done and continue to choose to do. Our center was researched and developed with district funds, was operated with volunteers for two years to demonstrate the use and value, was then funded for a year and a half, and since the 1989-1990 school year has been operated with volunteers. The number of staff volunteers has continued to decline, and we no longer have the professional personnel to offer the variety of services we have in the past and would like to continue to offer. We continue to use more and more students for center services, but there are significant legal and insurance issues involved in student-managed centers in public schools.

Those of us in the center have received much praise and thanks from some teachers, parents, administrators, the public, and most importantly, from students. We have won state and national awards for our efforts (ironically, the more awards and positive publicity we receive, the greater the quantity of criticism we hear), and we continue to be invited to share our ideas, strategies, and materials. We have a quiet sense of pride and accomplishment, and we believe our efforts do make a positive difference.

We also continue to receive some vocal criticism from some of our colleagues and other non-educators. Some of our professional and personal relationships have been damaged or destroyed because of our choice to volunteer, and we have come to accept this as part of the outcome of our decision.

> **"The issue of volunteerism is often forced upon those who believe in the value of a center, and the controversies are innumerable."**

We are not heroes or martyrs: we have simply chosen to define "professional" in terms of the most we can provide for students.

Jim Upton
Burlington High School
Burlington, IA

A reader asks. . . . .

I am a high school English teacher, currently building a writing lab for our school. I have one 486 computer and 19 old pc's with double disk drives. I am looking for good grammar, punctuation, and composition computer-aided instructional software. I would appreciate advice regarding any experience you may have had with software you found successful or unsuccessful.

My student body is grades 9-12. We are a small Catholic college-prep school. The purpose of the lab is as a resource for the regular English teachers. It is not manned by any staff during the day, except the one period that I have a writing class there, and during lunch and after school when we stay open for students to use the word processing. We are currently using Microsoft Works as our only software program.

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URL correction

In last month's newsletter, the World Wide Web address for the National Writing Centers Association's Web page was incorrect. Please note the correct address should be as follows: http://www2.colgate.edu/diw/NWCA.html

My apologies for the typo and any inconvenience it may have caused—such as delaying your visit to an informative, well crafted Web site, developed by Bruce Pegg from Colgate University Writing Center.

Writing Across the Curriculum Conference

Call for Proposals
February 6-8, 1997
Charleston, SC
"Preparing for 2000—27 Years of Writing Across the Curriculum"

This conference provides an opportunity for faculty and administrators to reflect on the history of the movement, to review current practices, and to plan for the future. Proposals are invited from faculty and administration in all disciplines and from all academic levels. We also welcome proposals for discipline-specific sessions, and we encourage proposals that include student participants. For guidelines on submitting proposals and conference information, contact Carl R. Lovitt, Clemson University Pearce Center, 401 Strode Tower, Clemson, SC 29634-1504. Fax: 803-656-1846; tel: 803-656-5418/656-1520; e-mail: lcarl@clemson.edu Deadline for proposals: May 15, 1996.

Midwest Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
October 4-5, 1996
Minneapolis/St. Paul
"The Place of the Writing Center in the 21st Century"

Request a form on which to submit proposals for individual and panel presentations, workshops and demonstrations, think tanks on issues and strategies from Ginger Young, Central Missouri State University, Humphreys 120, 320 Goodrich Drive, Warrensburg, MO 64093 Proposal Deadline: April 14, 1996.

𝒯UTORS' COLUMN

Circles and cycles: Community and collaboration in the Rollins College Writing Center

When new Rollins writing consultants gather for their first training session of the fall semester, they are, of course, scared to death. Picture this: you'll remember! You're faced with this group of new people, new surroundings, and four hours squeezed into a small, hot room. In the middle sit a group of people called "senior consultants," and you wonder how anyone could ever seem that confident about working in the Writing Center. You and the other new consultants go around the circle, introducing yourselves, trying to memorize which face goes with which name and major. And you discover, while you may not be aware of it yet, those people who will become some of your closest friends and colleagues this year.

During this training, as well as the sessions to follow, the new consultants hear one word repeated over and over again: "community." In fact, many begin to wonder if there is any meaning behind these four syllables. But over time, the consultants come to realize that they are part of *numerous concentric communities of writers.* Through collaboration, they expand the reaches of those writing communities.

The new writing consultants do start off frightened. It's not easy to learn everything there is to know about writing and consulting in sixteen hours of initial "crash" training. But as the hours pass and the training continues, the consultants start to relax; to joke around with one another. Slowly they learn that these other trainees are people they can trust. This trust is important because it means the new consultants will become comfortable enough with one another to collaborate over time.

The first writing assignment of the year long training course is to collaborate with another new consultant to interview a senior writing consultant. Last year, I was assigned to work with Kristen. As I am not in a sorority, I was pleasantly surprised to find that I had a lot in common with Kristen, an active Kappa and someone I probably would not have met outside of the Writing Center. Not only did we hit it off personally, but we also were able to write well together, taking turns at the keyboard, excitedly sharing ideas about our interview with senior consultant Carter, who also turned out to be surprisingly friendly! And once you learn to work well with another consultant, that bond grows over time. Kristen and I still turn to one another for writing advice and consultations. In fact, she even helped me with this essay.

The new consultants also place some personal entries into our collaborative journal to be responded to by other consultants. Reading these thoughts and feelings can create bonds, sparking discussions and even friendships when consultants find out, "Hey, I am not the only one who enjoys writing about my dog, . . . or has had an interesting consultation with a client recently, . . . or a traumatic experience in my past that I never could talk about before now."

But sometimes new consultants collaborate spontaneously. The four- to six-page journals that consultants must turn in every Friday can sometimes be difficult to complete. But this problem can often be conducive to collaboration and to the development of bonds between consultants at the end of the week. You see, on just about any Thursday night, you can find a group of writing consultants crowded into the Writing Center computing room, tapping away at the keyboards, sometimes well into the early morning hours. And we all know that when students are tired and under pressure silly things can happen. But great writing can also happen. When these consultants are thrown together they might complain about their work, then start discussing other things, but eventually they begin to talk about writing and their consulting. Without even realizing it, they begin to collaborate, and two important things happen: their writing improves, and a circle of friends who have similar fears, anxieties, and interests in writing takes shape.

Thus the new consultants help each other become better writers as well as more effective consultants. And effective consulting is important as this group draws the Rollins College campus together as a community of writers. Our Center exists, after all, to serve the communities encircling us. Through the "adopt-a-faculty" program, consultants exchange information and ideas with faculty across the curriculum. Consultants also conduct Writing Center tours and model consultations for freshman composition classes. Invention sessions and computer training are offered to the Rollins freshman conference classes and a variety of upper level classes across the disciplines. And just this year we have developed a series of Writers' Studios to help first-year students with discourse analysis, time management, research skills, study skills, and of course their usual writing problems.

We also bring students into the circle when we receive feedback from clients, both through evaluation forms that students fill out after each session, and through the consultations themselves. If things go really well, the client just might be convinced that successful writing is possible or even fun. When students come back a second or third or tenth time, the consultant knows that the community of writers has grown.

By their second semester in the Writing Center, our consultants are ready for the greater community. Consultants may participate in several service learning projects. Last spring we facilitated personal journal groups for female prison inmates, economically disadvantaged teens in the Upward Bound Program, and emotionally distraught children from the Edgewood Children's Ranch.

And, of course, we send consultants to represent Rollins at regional and national conferences. By sharing our ideas, failures, experiments, and successes, we hope to draw other tutors into our circle of writers, even as we learn from their expertise too.

• • • • • • • • • • • •

So picture this: now you are a senior consultant. You have written journals until your fingers bled, you have gotten to know the innermost secrets of your fellow consultants. You have worked with Rollins faculty and students from all disciplines and areas of the college and you have encouraged them to share ideas and communicate through writing. You have met with people from the community and been amazed when you spoke with great confidence on the power of writing. And, you have trav-

eled across the nation to meet with other consultants and find out how they have survived it all. Now you are ready to begin your second year as a consultant.

So, you enter a hot, cramped room, and you sit in the middle of a circle of strange new faces. You are struck by the fear in the eyes of these people who want to hear stories from you and learn from YOU. And you relax, starting this cycle all over again. But this time you have a new perspective: you are at the center of the circle, ready to help the new consultants all around you.

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Taking responsibility

I always thought that students who come for tutoring are those who are dedicated and interested in improving their writing. In fact, they are so interested in writing that it compels the tutor to work 110 percent to help that student. Of course there are students like that who come to the writing center and these sessions are great. But, what about those students who arrive at the Center for help, yet, you get the feeling that they really don't want to be here, but are under strict admonitions from a professor. Now, what can a tutor do in this situation? I personally don't think we can force anyone to be helped if they're not prepared or willing to be helped. I know, I've tried.

I remember a time, late in the evening, and I had had a rather trying day. A student came in and asked to see me (she had scheduled to see me from the day before). Her professor had repeatedly told her to come to the Writing Center, but she had never done so until that day. She proceeded to fill out the appointment info form (or at least she wrote her name

on it) and then sat down and stared at me. So I asked her to show me her writing—you know—the usual questions: " What do you need? How can I help you?" etc. She, of course, couldn't or wouldn't answer me since she didn't want to be here in the first place. I can tell you this session was particularly difficult. Every question I asked was answered with an "I don't know" or "my professor just sent me here." Finally, at the end of the session while I felt I almost had to literally pull anything out of her, she turned to me and said, "Okay, I'll see you tomorrow." Oh no! I suppose something must have been done or she wouldn't be returning, but for the life of me I didn't know what. It wasn't my idea of a great session.

Throughout the tutorial I had tried everything to make her interested in her writing. At times I had even deviated a little from the topic to raise her interest and then brought her attention back to her question. For a time it did work, but I believe she really just wasn't interested. So, what I'm saying is that as tutors we

have to realize that there's just so much we can do to help students and no more. Students have to have incentive and be motivated to accept help with their writing. Tutors shouldn't feel bad if the session doesn't go the way they would have liked or the student didn't do as well as we would have hoped. We are here to help them, but the first responsibility is with students to want it for themselves.

Fortunately, this finally happened with this student. I was surprised that she came back, but she did. Even though this session was almost as painful as the first one, I could sense that something was different—a spark of interest. Eventually after ensuing tutorials she became more and more interested in her work and came willingly twice a week. Perhaps all these students need is a big push, I'm not quite sure. I do know that she finally realized that she needed to take an interest in her own work, to help herself so that we could help her.

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Toward a definition of professionalism for writing center tutors

When I first considered the idea of defining professionalism in tutoring, I felt very sure that I could easily produce a clear definition without spending an inordinate amount of time and certainly without going through seven draft revisions. After all, I tutored for several years and now, as a graduate assistant, I teach a freshman composition course of which individual conferences are an integral part. I have worked with writers at all levels of ability and interest and with writing center tutors who successfully employ widely varying strategies in tutoring. This rambling explanation may already have led you guess that I found it impossible to nail down a precise, concrete definition of professionalism in tutoring; hence, the title of this article, "*Toward* a Definition . . . ."

Approaches to tutoring vary with individual philosophies and personalities, as well as with the physical space and administrative policy of each writing center. While it may be impossible to define professionalism in tutoring, we can identify some traits common to those who tutor in a professional way. We know they have an understanding of people and how they learn, and they have a thorough knowledge of the process of writing and of how to talk about that process. Perhaps it is the melding of the ability to understand and work with people and the intellectual curiosity about tutoring methods that produces a professional tutor. Coming to an understanding of how to adopt behavior that most effectively and efficiently incorporates and integrates all that we know of people and of our subject is the most important aspect of tutoring.

One trait that distinguishes the professional tutor is the ability to work with people in situations we feel ill-equipped to handle. This ability permits us to be poised, flexible, and able to carry on under less than ideal circumstances; in other words, it both allows and prepares us to work productively. As we tutor, we gradually learn that there are very few unrelated externals in learning situations and that we must take the whole person into the tutoring session; we cannot separate the mind and the hand holding the pen from the rest of the person. We learn to ask a student, "What problems are you having with this writing assignment?" Usually the student answers honestly, but the answer may not be the one we expect or feel prepared to address. For example, we've all met the first quarter student who rushes in late for the appointment, out of breath, clutching a rough draft, and moaning, "I've got soooo much to do and I'm swamped and I've got two other papers due tomorrow besides this one and I have to pass this English course and you've got to help me." Or maybe one of your students was caught off guard by an experience similar to one an ESL student of mine had. During a required oral report in a government class, the student suffered continuous interruptions by his professor who felt obligated to correct the student's pronunciation. "I wanted to tell the class about the city council meeting I attended in Valdosta," he told me. "I'd never seen anything like that in my life. But I don't think they understood much of what I said."

Both of these students needed to talk first, to hear possible solutions second, and to be tutored third. These are the easy problems we can help students learn to manage. And problems like these help us understand that tutors must know when to listen and sympathize, and when to steer the student back to the writing assignment. Sometimes a tutor's job includes assisting the student to gain perspective and set priorities. The frustrated first quarter student began to manage her time more efficiently after I helped her block out a daily log that included her various activities and assignments. The ESL student, a poised and confident young man with a sense of humor, stopped by his professor's office to voice his concerns; he also began to read his papers aloud to me and other tutors.

Just as we must learn how to tutor and when to begin instruction, so we must learn when not to tutor at all. Professional tutors develop their ability to recognize the times when they are not the ones a student needs. Fortunately, we can learn to listen and to understand a good bit about the person who is speaking to us. This knowledge, which we gain gradually as we learn about how people learn, is extraordinarily valuable. It is the basis of a principle we can apply to all aspects of our lives: take each person as and where he or she is. Students face distractions just as everyone else does, and they sometimes suffer the debilitating effects of crisis and loss: they are stalked, they are assaulted, they experience the sudden deaths of parents and close friends. When life events such as these collide with academic endeavors, the resulting derailment of even the best intentioned efforts necessitates assistance from counselors with specialized training. As tutors, we must respond to problems like these immediately, directly, and with tact, and we must follow through with the appropriate referrals.

In addition, tutors become professional when they know their subject and can assess a student's need for their expertise.

Through conversation and observation, the experienced tutor learns about the writer's requirements and formulates a strategy for instruction. For instance, the quiet student who rarely makes eye contact often benefits from low key and informal sessions which focus on building trust first and honing writing skills next. This sort of approach requires of the tutor the patience to critique the writer's assignments honestly, but with diplomacy and sensitivity; and the flexibility to develop instructional techniques that capitalize on the student's willingness and ability to participate in sessions. On the other hand, the exceptionally articulate student who always prefers talking about an idea instead of writing about it might well respond to a more structured approach designed around accomplishing specific short term goals like creating a workable thesis and developing a suitable structure. Professional tutors, then, ask about the student's current assignment; listen to the writer's assessment of instructional needs or note the lack of such an assessment; and observe students as they talk and write. Analyzing their observations helps tutors identify specific problems and establish the order in which to address those problems.

Another trait of professional tutors is the ability to assure students right away that peer tutoring has nothing to do with limiting options and everything to do with broadening them. Because of misconceptions about what tutoring is, many students see their requests for assistance as public declarations that they are unable to do college work and are, therefore, candidates for remedial courses. This misunderstanding inhibits students' requests for assistance and also, when they finally do come in for tutorials, it diminishes their ability to absorb and retain the information tutors can provide. Sensitive tutors keep this fact in mind and remain conscious of the way they treat each student. We must be certain writers realize that as we demonstrate strategies for generating ideas from assigned reading, for organizing and structuring an essay, and for revising and editing for grammar, we offer them the tools they need to develop their own techniques for successful writing of all kinds. We must remember that we can perform a crucial function in helping the student find the path to an essential survival skill: independent and critical thinking.

Awareness of students' concepts about themselves and their abilities should lead us to consider another trait of professional tutors: they know how to act in appropriate ways to foster students' receptivity to the tutoring setting and the learning atmosphere it engenders. In the tutor-student encounter, as in any professional encounter, it is essential to begin the relationship with an understanding of who the other person is. We need to put aside the assumptions that a quiet or tentative student cannot write effectively and interestingly, or that an articulate and entertaining one can write easily and with panache. And certainly, we should not assume that students come without assumptions of their own. We think of ourselves as intelligent, open, and welcoming individuals who are passionate about reading, writing, and lively discussion; in other words, we believe we are regular people. We should not assume student writers see us that way. Their definition of regular people may include those who actively avoid all thoughts of how to place words on a blank page in response to talk or text. You and I may think of ourselves as students who happen to tutor in writing centers. Student writers may see us as casually dressed, undercover English teachers, and posit in us all the negative English teacher images they have collected over an entire academic career.

A fact that professional tutors know is that the peer tutoring concept sets up a paradoxical condition: a peer tutor is both a fellow student and an authority. Though we want to appear approachable to students and to remain peers and classmates, we also want our demeanor to inspire confidence in students. Personal appearance is an extremely important way to establish a professional image; so, too, are the ways we conduct ourselves with students and with other staff persons in the writing center. At Valdosta State University, situated in the subtropic zone of South Georgia, we dress casually and approach life in what often appears to be a relaxed manner. The same attire and the same attitude might well be totally misconstrued by student writers at a different institution. Each writing center staff must necessarily establish some guidelines about appearance and behavior. Having stated that, I hasten to add that attention to the dress of tutors and the furnishings of the center, while essential, is of little value unless tutors understand professionalism and endeavor to become professionals.

So, who or what are professional tutors? They are people who cultivate innate ability and channel it into a specific discipline and who, combining abstract philosophy and practical technique, develop ways to assess a writer's needs and then meet those needs. As we work toward a greater understanding of people, we devote time and energy to pedagogy; we desire to learn how to tutor successfully and to stay abreast of and experiment with the current methodology. Such an attitude toward learning and hands-on application is an approach to life that involves curiosity, research, interpretation, and practical application. This habit of thinking critically encourages flexibility and innovation; it makes possible not only problem solving, but also solution implementation.

As I have discussed professionalism in peer tutoring, I have been concerned somewhat with physical behavior, but more so with intellectual bent. In an effort to work toward a definition, then, I submit this idea: that the professional tutor is one who embodies certain traits, including the desire to understand and work with people, the ability to identify problems both within the scope of instruction and outside it, the knowledge of when to move aggressively forward and when to pull quietly back, and, of course, the curiosity to ask the questions and the passion to share the answers.

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The twenty-minute solution:
Mapping in the writing center

In 1979 when I established Newberry College's first writing center, I was about as lonely as the Maytag repairman, at least for the first couple of months. Eventually, students discovered that real help was to be found in that ground-floor room, and they began to trickle in. Before too long, the trickle had become a steady enough flow to keep three tutors busy, but never did we find ourselves so deluged that we had to set a time limit on our sessions with students. Today, of course, in writing centers across the country, the situation has changed so drastically that the twenty-minute tutorial has become standard in many centers. I can satisfactorily address most students' writing problems in that length of time; however, I have found two types of problems to be particularly resistant. The first is the sentence-sense problem. A student with this difficulty writes such tangled constructions as, "For those who find parallel parking difficult, a test most people wish to avoid, is about the only way you can park in the urban areas," or "Being a commuting student has disadvantages that only apply to the commuting student such as the experience of college life." Explaining logical syntax to these authors may take hours or even days. The other type of problem that does not readily lend itself to the twenty-minute solution is the essay-sense problem. Students lacking essay sense do not know what a thesis is or where it comes from. They are equally baffled by topic sentences, and they have no idea how to go about effectively organizing and developing ideas for their body paragraphs.

The pedagogical method that has revolutionized my work with the second group of students is a technique I call "mapping." This rhetorical strategy is at least as old as Aristotle and is immediately recognizable to many writers as the mental process they themselves go through before they commit their ideas to paper or computer screen. Dr. Thomas Cooley of Berry College is the first composition teacher whom I have observed apply the technique on a large scale: his suggestions in his *Rhetoric Handout for English 101* are the basis of the entire composition program at Berry and of a forthcoming textbook. I adopted mapping in my own classroom in the fall of 1987; students responded to it by writing better developed, more analytical essays with sounder organization and clearer theses than their predecessors had written. At the same time, I began to use mapping in my writing center tutorials with similar results: students who came in with no notion of where to begin an essay left with an approach to writing that worked and a new confidence in their ability to succeed in their composition classes.

The mapping I model has nothing to do with the circles and diagrams called mapping in most textbooks. Nor is mapping related to outlining since outlining technically cannot take place until a text exists. If the reader does not believe me, she might remember what she did in high school when required to submit an outline several weeks before her senior research paper was due. She wrote that paper first; then she outlined it; then she felt guilty (probably to this day) because her teacher had insisted that outlines precede texts. In fact, a thing must exist before it can be outlined: to outline a hand, one first needs a hand. For this reason, many students find outlining to be more useful as a reading and study strategy than as a writing strategy. Mapping, on the other hand, recognizes that the writer's problem is to invent a text in re-sponse to a writing assignment; the completed map is the result of that invention process.

In mapping, the student's first step is to formulate a simple, straightforward assertion prompted by the essay assignment. My task as a writing center tutor is to help the student make this assertion by presenting him or her with several practice options requiring a response: Do you have a positive or negative view of lawyers? Should computer literacy be required of all college students? How does a person make a good first impression in an interview? What childhood game taught you an important lesson about yourself, other people, or life in general? Most students catch on immediately: "I have a negative view of lawyers," they reply; "computer literacy should be required of all college students"; "there are four things a potential employee can do to make a good first impression in an interview"; "the childhood game that taught me an important truth about myself is *Monopoly*." The next step is to have the student formulate a statement that answers a question based on the topic she has been assigned. Once she has done so, the student is elated to discover that she has just written the first sentence of her essay—an accomplishment that usually suffices to overcome writer and thinker's block.

Because color is a useful visual cue to help a student focus on concept similarities, I keep a set of highlighters or crayons on hand for the third step, which entails working from the statement of the main idea to the major and minor support material in the ensuing map sections. First, I encourage the student to identify and highlight the portion of the central statement that clearly needs fur-

ther elaboration through definition or analysis. In the four examples just cited, the student might use a yellow marker to highlight "negative view of lawyers," "computer literacy should be required," "four things a potential employee can do to make a good first impression in an interview," or "taught me an important truth about myself is *Monopoly*." She then brings the same phrase down to the next line, highlights it again in yellow, and uses the equal sign to link it to material that either defines the idea or explains it.

To illustrate, the student might write, "negative view of lawyers = the way television and the movies portray members of the legal profession." At this point, I tell the student that the equal sign can mean either "is" or "because," depending on whether the problem demands a definitional or a cause-and-effect approach. In the preceding example, the equals sign obviously indicates cause-and-effect: "I have a negative view of lawyers *because of* the way television and the movies portray members of the legal profession." Then I encourage the student to see that she has just generated, not one, but two new ideas that need further elaboration—the way lawyers are depicted on television and the way they are depicted in films. Immediately we highlight *television* in blue and *movies* in green and on the next line isolate the phrase, "the way television portrays lawyers." After highlighting this phrase in blue, we follow it with the equal sign and leave a big space. On the line following the space, we write and highlight in green, "the way films portray lawyers," again following the phrase with the equal sign. By this time, the student has usually caught on to the extent that she recognizes that the equal sign now means "is." For instance, if her complete equation reads, "the way films portray lawyers = *The Philadelphia Story*," it will mean something like, "A film portraying lawyers in an unflattering light <u>is</u> *The Philadelphia Story*." Bringing *The Philadelphia Story* down to the next line and linking the title to "dishonest lawyers, heartless lawyers,

and ignorant lawyers" via the equal sign will prompt the student to generate specific film support relevant to "dishonest lawyers =," "vicious lawyers =," and "ignorant lawyers =."

The process I have just described takes about fifteen minutes to demonstrate to the average student, twenty at the most. When the student is at a point where she must decide how best to develop a topic area, I leave her to her own devices for a while. Only when she has fully and relevantly developed one section of her map do I sit down again to help her with her next section. We return to her "yellow" idea, "negative view of lawyers," bring it down to a new line, highlight it once more in yellow, and follow it with an equal sign and a different reason, perhaps the student's own experience with an unsympathetic or incompetent attorney. We highlight this idea in pink and isolate it on the next line, and the student proceeds as she did earlier. When the student has returned to her yellow idea at least three times and created at least three clear-cut, fully illustrated divisions in support of her original statement, she is ready for the next step in mapping, writing her analytical thesis.

Helping a student in the writing center to discover her thesis after she has struggled to produce her first map is the most satisfying part of the whole process. Quite simply, I encourage her to look back at the map material she has highlighted in yellow (italicized below):

- *Negative view of lawyers* = the way television and the movies portray members of the legal profession
- *Negative view of lawyers* = my recent experience with an attorney
- *Negative view of lawyers* = two news-magazine stories that appeared this week

Once the student has expressed these equations in one, two, or three sentences, she will have her thesis. Moreover, when she combines this thesis statement with the first sentence she wrote—that is, her statement of her main idea—she will have crafted a serviceable introduction.

To continue with the example begun above, the introduction might read as follows:

I have a negative view of lawyers. This opinion has been shaped by the way I see lawyers portrayed on television and in the movies, by my recent experience with my attorney during a D.U.I. conviction, and by two articles on lawyers that I just read in *Time* and *Newsweek*.

But the introduction, complete with analytical thesis, is not the only item the student has handy once she has finished her map. She also has her entire well-developed and logically structured essay sitting before her. All she has to do is transform the major map divisions into body paragraphs by adding connective material. (She will need the tutor's guidance here since a major map division may need to be broken down into two or more paragraphs. For example, the first and last divisions in the map described above call for at least two paragraphs each.) Even her topic sentences are virtually written. Like the analytical thesis, these come from the yellow areas of the map. To write topic sentences, the student need strive only for variety of expression and attach an appropriate transition. A possible topic sentence for the student's first body paragraph of her essay on lawyers is, "First, I do not admire lawyers because I often see them depicted as white-collar criminals by the entertainment media." As with the introduction, the key word here is *serviceable*. After students master the basics in the writing center, their classroom teachers can address matters of style.

Often when students grasp how relatively easy it is to construct a competent essay from a well-thought-out map, I have to deal with their unrestrained glee: in one memorable moment, a sinewy soccer player tried to hoist me onto his shoulders. They have not yet voiced a complaint that I thought I might hear: mapping is too much work because it is like writing the whole essay twice. Rather, they share the unhappy experi-

ence of having attempted to write papers from rough drafts, and they realize that any essay that goes through two versions *is* written twice; furthermore, they understand that if the writer has no method, neither version will amount to much. Mapping, on the other hand, insures that the first "draft," which is the map itself, will form a solid foundation for the actual paper—a fact that cheers my writing center students immensely. They also do not seem bothered that mapping could become somewhat formulaic or worry that it might stifle their creativity. On the contrary, students are grateful to be presented with an approach to composition that works every time. Indeed, many have landed in the writing center because twelve years of English have taught them no practicable expository method and because their problems are, therefore, not being effectively addressed in the regular composition classes.

A peculiar thing happens, though, once students master mapping. They become more creative; their examples and illustrations become more vivid and involved; their rhetorical strategies become more complex and varied. Furthermore, mapping facilitates their graduation from the tri-thesis, five-paragraph theme to more sophisticated essays. For instance, several quarters ago, an advanced mapmaker with whom I was working was struggling with a concept analysis on morality. As her statement of the central idea, she wrote, "Several characteristics are common to every moral person." Then, she wrote, "characteristics=as a child, a moral person *has observed moral behavior being modeled* and *has been required to behave morally*." Recognizing that she had generated two thesis ideas (as shown by single and double underlining in her paper and italics and underlined italics here), she treated each to independent development by citing several instances from her own experience.

She began her next topic area with "characteristics = moral people can distinguish between right and wrong," followed by, "distinguish between right and

wrong = make obvious choices." After isolating, "make obvious choices" and pondering the phrase for a few minutes, she recalled and located a *Newsweek* article profiling a young gang member who thought that a personal insult was reason enough to murder a rival gang member. According to the article, the killer genuinely believed that he had made the ethically correct decision. "So much for the clearly immoral person with a warped sense of values," I prompted. "But what about the finer distinctions that ordinary, law-abiding people have to make?" She responded by writing, "characteristics = the moral person can distinguish between good and better," followed by "distinguish between good and better = make difficult distinctions." Eventually, she decided to illustrate this idea by discussing an interview she had read in Bill Moyers' *A World of Ideas*. In this interview, ethicist Michael Josephson discusses the propriety and the necessity of choosing between the good and the better or the bad and the worse and of sometimes sacrificing one ethical principle for another (21).

By then, the student had enough material for a four-part thesis and five body paragraphs, but she chose to continue with, "characteristics = the moral person acts on his or her knowledge of right and wrong." First, she considered the behavior of Mr. Adams in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery." In speaking out against the ritual, Mr. Adams shows that he knows the difference between right and wrong; however, he is not a moral man because he is "in the front of the crowd of villagers" (219) when the stoning of Tessie Hutchinson begins. As a contrast to Mr. Adams, the student chose Harper Lee's Atticus Finch, who consistently elects to do the right thing. By the time the student had explored Finch's defense of Tom Robinson and his protection of Boo Radley, she had expanded her last topic area to three paragraphs. She was also able to work toward a powerful conclusion since Atticus must sacrifice a moral principle and tell a lie if he wishes to keep Boo out of the public eye. In other words, mapping had led the second

student to respond to her topic by crafting a multi-layered, informed definition based on material that went beyond personal experience, an approach she said would not have occurred to her if she had not been using the map tool. The resulting essay was anything but a formulaic, five-paragraph theme.

When I have asked for candid evaluations of mapping from writing center students like this one and from others just learning the technique, I get the same answer: mapping, they reply, encourages originality, first by freeing them from having to worry about essay form so they can concentrate on content, and second by stimulating them to come up with clever material to fill the blank sections of the map. The map, they further agree, challenges them to grapple with ideas on a higher intellectual level than they have ever thought before. With equal enthusiasm, students praise the system of color-coding and isolating ideas that need further elaboration because they claim that this system reminds them of the need to invent pertinent detail.

The improvement in the grades students receive on their papers most certainly explains their enthusiastic endorsements: the freshman I described in the example dealing with lawyers saw her grade jump from an *F* to a *C* after she learned mapping at mid-term; the veteran map-maker, who came for help after her first *D*, finished with an *A*. That this technique enables students to improve their class standing is hardly a surprise. We English teachers give the highest marks to papers that do the best job of marrying form and relevance to expressiveness and originality—the very skill that mapping cultivates.

Mapping, then, is the rhetorical method that has helped me effectively tutor the writing center student who has no essay sense. Mapping is simple to demonstrate; it lends itself nicely to a twenty-minute session; it need not tie a tutor down with a single student even during that twenty-minute time slot since

a crucial part of the process involves leaving the student alone to develop her own supportive material—an important advantage at periods of peak demand. Furthermore, mapping gives the student something to hold on to as she begins to deal independently with all types of writing assignments, from the backyard topics of state Regents' exams and some freshman composition classes to the literary topics of introductory analysis to the research assignments of advanced courses. I have even known a student who, unable to afford an attorney, used mapping to prepare his case in a child custody hearing, which he won in a state that traditionally awards legal guardianship of minor children to their mothers. Finally, mapping sends a student forth with the conviction that the writing center is a useful place, for there she has mastered a new skill. This conviction is guaranteed to endure until she returns with a sentence like the following and asks the tutor for help understanding the illogic of the thing: "People who do not go to bars and still have lifestyles generally have big appetites, critic capabilities, and lots of clothes," or "Hunting is a sport that takes all morning and afternoon to try and kill an animal, yet my son's favoritism is to the activity of downtown shopping because clothes are much cheaper than the malls." I don't know what the first sentence explains, but the second obviously accounts for why we see so few people wearing malls these days! I check my watch, note the line forming at the computer check-in, and sigh nostalgically for the leisurely afternoons in the writing centers of fifteen years ago. Depending on one's perspective, it's going to be either a very short or a very long twenty minutes.

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Address correction requested