

# THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 21, Number 4  
writing

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of  
December, 1996

## ...FROM THE EDITOR...

In October a friend who directs another writing lab sent me an e-mail message in which it was clear she was in a state of total frenzy familiar to us all. In my response, when I agreed that October is the month-from-hell and described to her that day's staff meeting—a meeting dominated by the group's discussion of how exhausted they were and how the demands of some teachers are beyond what we can achieve or even cope with, I realized how cathartic the meeting had been for us all (or maybe we were just on a sugar high from the refreshments). My friend responded astutely that we probably all ought to recognize that October meetings in writing centers should be dedicated to staff therapy.

So, if you've survived October intact, congratulations! Now, I strongly recommend that you consider the following instructions on how to read this issue: sit down, turn off phone, turn off computer, ignore anyone trying to get your attention, explain that a professional task needs your total concentration, put feet up, raise coffee cup to lips, read slowly (or close eyes and meditate with newsletter open as excuse), relax, enjoy. And as we prepare for well-earned holidays and relaxation, I wish us all peace, happiness, good health, and another year of bustling "hecticity" in our writing labs.

Muriel Harris, editor

## ...INSIDE...

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## Observation, inter-action, and reflection: The foundation for tutor training

A brief survey of the current literature on writing centers and a glance through the *National Directory of Writing Centers* reveal that universal standards for tutors include writing proficiency, enjoyment of writing, enthusiasm, and motivation. They also reveal that potential tutors are outstanding students who have superior grades and come highly recommended by composition directors, English department chairs, composition instructors, or writing center directors who base the final selection on the potential tutor's writing experience and writing sample. Subsequently, hoping that the English course work has given their trainees enough knowledge about writing (translated: grammar, mechanics, paragraph unity, organization, thesis sentence), and often limited by budget constraints and time, writing center directors must rely on *orientation-type* programs which emphasize interpersonal skills such as eye contact, body

language, and positive reinforcement while offering concentrated discussions of mechanics and grammar that tutors often already know. This approach, however, usually is inherently limiting.

For one, while interpersonal skills are important, they only address part of the complex situation we call tutoring. Even English majors have shortcomings. Often one-dimensional in their approaches, these students may have the background information, but may

lack teaching techniques. They may hold all the secrets for correctness, yet they may still not be able to negotiate the complex tasks we ask them to perform as tutors. And, while intuitively they may be good writers and have a good ear for words, they don't necessarily understand why or how they put their ideas together as they do.

Moreover, even at the most culturally diverse schools where writing centers must work with special needs students, these orientation programs, because of time constraints, exclude an entire untapped non-traditional population from which they can draw tutors (culturally diverse students, as well as those from other disciplines). Subsequently, primarily middle- to upper-class white students with little or no experience working with students from cultures other than their own often staff these programs, and although an orientation may offer them some exposure to cultural or gender issues and sensitivity training, the training often is too brief to expect the much-needed conversations and reflection to take place.

Thus, an orientation strategy not only may perpetuate the notion of a writing center, as Stephen North perceptively notes in "The Idea of a Writing Center," as what a "cross between Lourdes and a hospice would be to serious illness . . ." (435), but also may frequently contribute to two major problems facing writing centers: academic elitism and cultural egocentricity.

A tutor orientation program can provide the most fundamental and most quickly needed skills to enable tutors to work on student writing; orientation leaders can conduct motivated discussions, as well as supply grammar handbooks and a map pointing out the route to the handouts file cabinet. But an orientation program may not adequately train tutors to be holistic practitioners who can understand and assess other problems which may interfere with a

student's writing process and academic success. So in our minds, the tutors, not the tutees, need further instruction to ensure the well-being of the community they serve.

This instruction becomes even more imperative as culturally diverse populations in our universities and colleges continue to increase. Brief peer orientation methods may become less effective. While we recognize the *peer* label we affix to our tutors, we also must acknowledge that tutoring is a *paraprofessional* activity (Moore and Poppino), not an exercise where facts or sets of behaviors are memorized and regurgitated. Thus, as Irene Clark notes,

[L]earning to be a good tutor requires a self-examination and professional training beyond that which had been customarily provided. . . . Successful writing conferences do not simply "happen" . . . they occur because tutors have become experts in the field. . . . (vii)

As paraprofessionals, tutors warrant self-examination and training. While they may acquire some viable "quick-fix" skills in an orientation, in two days or less, they cannot develop the skills that would enable them to examine their linguistic and cultural biases; or think about tutoring and relationships; or contemplate the recursive nature of tutoring and learning processes; or investigate what it takes to move from outsider to insider status in the academic community. A program that relies on orientation sessions rather than lengthier tutor-training may be able to address these concerns in ongoing staff development. Regardless of how it is implemented, a well-grounded tutor training program, then, one that would allow tutors to explore the often asymmetrical tutor-tutee relationship, must include observation, interaction, and reflection.

Towards this end, we looked at Benjamin S. Bloom's taxonomy of the

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**Manuscripts:** Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. 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.

cognitive domain for California State University, Northridge's tutor training model because it fulfilled three basic program needs: it provided a "framework for viewing the educational process and analyzing its workings"; it allowed us "to specify objectives," as tutor trainers, "so that it [would] become easier to plan learning experiences and prepare evaluation devices," and, finally, it allowed us to develop course content which would elicit an "understanding of the educational process and provide insight into the means by which the learner changes in a specific direction" (Bloom 2-3).

tors often discover that "what appears to be writing problems may be much more" (Simpson 103).

### Observation

Indeed, tutors may encounter students with limited academic skills, reading problems, learning disabilities, poor language skills, second language interference, cultural differences, physical handicaps, or poor psychological health—all issues that could have an impact on the writing process. Knowledge and comprehension of the writing process alone, then, is not enough, nor is the quick briefing of

Observation is itself continuous and mirrors the peer collaboration techniques we stress. Tutor trainees at Northridge meet twice a week for a total of three hours. Once a month, the class is converted into a general meeting in which trainees and veteran tutors meet to discuss writing center experiences and issues and to engage in peripheral participation activities.

Initially, for the first two to three weeks after our writing center opens, tutor trainees practice a Chauncey Gardner-type "I like to watch" healthy voyeurism by pairing with veteran tutors in our writing center to observe tutoring nuances such as body language, active silences, and questioning techniques. During the course of this brief internship, the trainees and veterans meet to discuss the experience. At these meetings we not only see how quickly the tutor group has bonded, but also we hear time and again how much less anxious new tutors are about working in the center. Moreover, in the course of the observations, new tutors often inadvertently end up critiquing the veterans, who often appreciate the feedback. Another minor benefit that results from this pairing is that the trainees see—rather than simply hear—how we handle our paperwork.

Bloom's Taxonomy	Tutor Training Activity
1. Knowledge (recall) 2. Comprehension (basic awareness)	OBSERVATION
3. Application (use abstractions) 4. Analysis (express relationships)	INTERACTION
5. Synthesis (put ideas together) 6. Evaluation (judge materials/methods)	REFLECTION

We considered the distinction between the six classes of Bloom's taxonomy and combined them into the three activities that form the foundation for our tutor training program. The chart included here indicates how these activities took their shape from Bloom's design:

Although the classification may appear to be rigidly hierarchical—moving from so-called simple behaviors to complex behaviors—it is not designed to be linearly discrete. According to Bloom, the six major classes are constructed to reveal "their essential properties as well as the interrelationships among them" (17). Bloom's behavioral philosophy is essential to the concept of our training, especially when tutors come into the program thinking they already know about writing. As they begin to work with students in the writing center, these "knowledgeable" tu-

lists of available school resources (e.g., counseling services, disabled student services) sometimes offered during orientation programs. While tutors do not have to, nor, realistically, may not be able to solve all problems, they do need to understand the underlying causes of multidimensional difficulties so that they can identify them and point students in the direction of the appropriate source who can help.

Drawing on the learning theory that "knowledge is . . . basic to all the other ends or purposes of education" (Bloom 33), and that comprehension depends on "requisite or relevant knowledge" (Bloom 91), our observing activities treat this lapse in our tutors' education; it not only allows them to identify and cope with underlying learning problems, but also gives them the ability to develop a continuous assessment strategy.

### Interaction

While observing allows for developing the awareness of knowledge of academic, social, psychological, and physical issues that may interfere with the writing process, activities focusing on interpersonal interaction allow tutors to do something with that awareness and knowledge. One such activity, role-playing, emphasizes remembering and applying the generalizations and principles developed during the time tutors spend observing. Because we believe, as does Bloom, that "the behavior in the recall situation is very similar to the behavior . . . during the original learning situation" (Bloom 62), we direct tutors to apply the collected information to various simulated situations in order to examine how per-

sonal biases and professional relationships interact with the writing process.

Why role-playing and not on-the-job training? Both are useful and we don't believe an either-or dilemma exists. Each becomes more effective because of the other. However, role-playing lets tutors experience the collaborative process and allows them to try out new techniques, lines of questioning, and approaches for handling troublesome clients in a non-threatening environment that allows for experimentation—with minimal risk—and immediate constructive feedback. The confidence trainees develop shows up in actual tutoring sessions; they can approach each encounter with the *deja vu* to which Bloom refers.

Since role-playing activities need to develop complexity as tutors develop their skills, exercises should not simply start and end with the traditional stragem of partnering up, assigning tutor or tutee roles and looking at a "typical" problem paper. As Lil Brannon tells us, "problems of students in the writing center are often not restricted to writing problems"; tutors must be able to "interact well with their peers" (105). Thus, the most effective role-play will result from a blend of knowledge and personal experiences. Consequently, role-playing activities at Northridge are constructed by drawing from Bloom's idea that students can restructure knowledge in a familiar context, even if discrete elements differ, and can "apply the appropriate abstraction without having to be prompted as to which abstraction is correct or without having to be shown how to use it in that situation" (Bloom 120). No matter what tutorial workshops we construct, we always have our students look back at how knowledge from the classroom affects personal involvement. Thus, after each role-playing activity, tutors write self-and/or group-analyses.

With careful planning and by applying the information acquired from ob-

serving tutoring interactions, then, role-playing activities can be developed to focus on skills such as:

- Using listening/questioning techniques
- Developing positive nonverbal cues
- Recognizing linguistic/cultural/gender biases
- Understanding learning processes
- Identifying study skills weaknesses
- Using support resources and referral methods

To help trainees become more aware of what they do and how they do it, tutors are asked to pay attention to their feelings during the process, both as tutors and tutees. Afterwards, each pair is asked to enumerate these feelings, and then in a group discussion, they are asked to compare notes and discuss similarities and differences in their experiences. As a result, tutors increase their ability to modify and change their tutoring stances. Through the role-playing experiences, they learn that they will not get far on memorized facts and grammar rules. Since a major tutoring goal is to transfer learning skills so that Northridge's writing center students can replicate these skills on their own, role-playing not only allows trainees to experience a myriad of behaviors and learning styles they might encounter, but also lets them see how the transfer process works. Moreover, they are given an opportunity to practice how they would interact with the center's most challenging—and often most rewarding—clients, those who are dependent, demanding, manipulative, nervous, timid, slow, embarrassed, silent, or angry.

### Reflection

While orientation programs may provide an opportunity for observation and interaction, a survey of Northridge tutors, both those who went through its orientation program before a tutor training seminar was developed and those who have taken the course, reveals that they need time to assimilate

and internalize what they have seen and practiced.

Reflection primarily takes place—although it doesn't have to—in Northridge's tutor training course. This course focuses on tutors' needs and eliminates shortcomings of orientations. By adding the element of reflection over time, it allows for synthesis and evaluation by holistically and organically combining and recombining knowledge, comprehension, application, and analysis. Unlike orientation programs that focus on the structure of the tutoring process by disseminating and looking at discrete elements, this course requires students to "draw upon the elements from many sources [e.g., observation and interaction] and put these together into a structure and pattern not clearly there before" (Bloom 162). At the same time, the reflecting occurring in the tutor training course gives the pedagogy that puts the elements in context and allows tutors to break down cultural and interactional barriers they might experience in tutoring.

Toward this end, tutors keep journals on their writing center experiences, both as observer and tutor. They also write annotated bibliographies on tutor pedagogy. At various times during the semester, as different issues arise, we discuss how—or if—one informs or contradicts the other, noting the attending variables. Subsequently, tutors cultivate competence and confidence in their judgments. "With a firm foundation in theory and methods," one tutor trainee notes, tutors "can be confident enough to admit they don't know everything. [This course] remedies ego problems." Moreover, as another tutor suggests, on-going reflection helps "develop good reasons for [an] intuitive sense of what is good."

The goal of reflection, then, is to strip away preconceived notions while building up a new authority. By reading the pedagogy, talking to veteran tu-

tors, working in the writing center, and evaluating all these experiences, tutors begin to think about tutoring and learning processes, rather than simply recognizing facts or sets of behaviors.

Most significant, active reflection nurtures while it allows for diversity. In a comfortable, non-threatening atmosphere, similar to the atmosphere the writing center creates for the students who use its services, tutors see why large order global concerns are more important than is grammar or mechanics, and they develop an acute understanding that students' difficulties may go beyond the writing task. Through continuous dialog and their classmates' support, they feel freer to develop and test basic instructional techniques and alternative strategies than they would if they had used their writing center clients as "sparring partners." And when tutors are finally sent off on their own, into the writing center and into the classroom to assist instructors, they are humble, yet confident about what they do. They are, above all, professionals.

Especially on campuses with rapidly growing diverse populations, we need knowledgeable, well-prepared tutors who will need more than a brief orientation and a handbook. A tutor training course offers an opportunity for observation, interaction, and reflection, and we like to think of that course as tutors' point of entry into the academic profession and its conversations.

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## Annotated Bibliography on Writing Center Scholarship Now Available

*Writing Centers: An Annotated Bibliography*. Compiled by Christina Murphy, Joe Law, and Steve Sherwood. Bibliographies and Indexes in Education, Number 17. Westport: Greenwood, 1996. 304 pages, \$69.50 (ISBN: 0-313-29831-9)

(Order from Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 88 Post Road West, P.O. Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881-5007; phone: 1-800-225-5800; fax: 203-222-1502)

With the publication of *Writing Centers: An Annotated Bibliography*, Christina Murphy, Joe Law, and Steve Sherwood have accomplished multiple tasks. For scholars and researchers, their index lists almost one hundred years of scholarship on topics such as writing center theory, process pedagogy, individualized instruction, and collaborative learning. For newcomers to the field in need of information in order to plunge in, their index guides the reader to anthologies, book chapters, and articles on necessary topics such as tutor training, ESL, instructional materials, budgets, and record keeping. For anyone who wishes to demonstrate that writing center theory and practice has an established body of scholarship, they need only rifle the pages of a bibliography with 1,447 annotated entries to emphasize the extent of that body of scholarship.

The book's organization shows the care and thought that went into this massive task. Listed first are twelve anthologies whose essays are entirely devoted to writing centers. Within each anthology listing are the entry numbers for each of the essays in the anthology that will lead readers to an annotation for that essay. The rest of the bibliographic entries are catalogued under the categories of history, program descriptions, professional concerns, writing center theory, administration, writ-

ing across the curriculum, educational technology, tutoring theory, tutor training, tutoring, ethics, and research. At the back of the book are two indexes, one by author and one by subject. But, since the authors note in the Preface that one rationale for the book is that copies of the *Writing Center Journal* and the *Writing Lab Newsletter* "are not common in many libraries or archives" (vi), the authors might have also helped readers seeking these publications by providing addresses of editorial offices. Similarly, the inclusion of the new NWCA Press's address would have been helpful as it is not yet included in some lists of academic publishers.

While the vast majority of the entries are essays that appeared in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *Writing Center Journal*, the compilers have ranged widely among other sources as well, listing dissertations and essays in other journals. There are no doubt essays elsewhere that have escaped the huge net these compilers cast, but the results of their efforts leave us all in their debt—so much so that the appearance of this bibliography leaves a question hanging in the air. Writing center scholarship is flourishing, particularly with the advent of the NWCA Press, this annotated bibliography, and the yearly additions of articles from the *Writing Center Journal* and the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. With this volume we have an auspicious beginning. Can we look forward to future volumes beginning where this one leaves off?

# On evaluation

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Christy: Daddy, did you do good at the Writing Center this year?

Jim: Oh, yes. One out of every five students at the university came through our door.

C: Did you help them?

J: Not just me. I had all the tutors, too. They did most of the tutoring.

C: Did they help them?

J: I hope so.

C: You don't know?

J: Well, okay, I'm sure they did.

C: How do you know?

J: Look, darling, I've got a good job. I'm sitting pretty. You don't have to worry.

C: Isn't your boss, Mrs. Sigurdson, going to leave next year?

J: Not for sure. She could retire. I hope she doesn't. She's a great supporter of the Writing Center.

C: Will the new boss be as good?

J: Well, if you must know, the university probably won't replace her. They'll save money. My boss will probably be the new Associate Vice-president of Registrar/Student Services they are hiring.

C: Will he be a great supporter of the Writing Center?

J: He or she will probably be a registrar and won't know much about student services and even less about writing centers.

C: Is that really bad?

J: It's bad enough. The university is going to have a lot less money next year, and the year after that.

C: You'll have to tell your new boss what a good job you do.

J: I'm not sure it's that simple. He or she wouldn't believe me the way you do.

C: Why don't you do an evaluation like Mommy does at the hospital?

J: I don't know much about evaluation. I'm a writer and a teacher. I write stories and poems, and I teach other people to write.

C: Couldn't someone help you? Couldn't you read a book?

J: I could, but they're going to want me to do something with statistics and numbers. It's hard to explain, but I don't believe in that kind of research.

C: Is research the same as evaluation?

J: We talk about them as the same.

C: So they are?

J: Now that I think of it, not exactly. The purpose of research is usually to reach a conclusion. Maybe your particular study doesn't reach a firm conclusion, but when more people do more studies, there will probably be a conclusion. The purpose of evaluation is to make an informed decision.

C: Like your new boss would decide that you were doing a good job?

J: Exactly. And my reasons for doing research would be different. When I do research, I want to produce more knowledge. Sometimes it doesn't seem very practical. But if I did evaluation, I'd do it to solve a practical problem.

C: Do lots of other people like you have your problem?

J: I think so.

C: Can their evaluations help you?

J: Not too much. That's another difference between research and evaluation. A lot of research is generalizable. That means if it was true at one place it will probably be true at another. An evaluation is an accurate description of a local thing like my writing center. A good evaluation is accurate. Good research has external validity.

C: What's that, Daddy?

J: Sorry. It just means that you can generalize.

C: Oh. Is research better?

J: People seem to think it is. I do.

C: Why?

J: This might sound funny, but when I do research, I have freedom. I ask whatever question I want to ask, and then I try to answer it nearly any way I want to answer it.

C: That sounds like fun.

J: It is, but it's not quite that simple. You're not really free. You have to get money to do the research, and it's hard to get. Your question has to be sort of the same as the questions other people have asked. You also have to follow lots of rules that other researchers have made up.

C: Oh. Is evaluation even worse?

J: I think so. Someone usually asks you to do an evaluation. Or tells you to.

C: Is that like having to have your question follow from other people's?

J: Sort of, yes.

C: Nobody has asked you to do an evaluation?

J: Not directly. You just pick up the vibrations and realize it is needed.

C: Is that the hardest part of evaluation?

J: I'll bet it is. But once you start planning the evaluation, you have to think constantly of who will read the final report. What will they understand? What will be meaningful to them? How can I speak in their language?

C: In research you don't have to worry about all that?

J: Well, in a way, yes. But the people who read my research are people who are like me.

C: But you told Mommy they were stupid. They sent back your article.

J: That's some of them.

C: And they said bad things about your book.

J: They're supposed to, in a way. That's their job.

C: I don't understand.

J: Don't worry. The administrators who read my reports are worse. Sometimes I think they suspect me and everyone else of trying to pull the wool over their eyes. They want numbers; they want proof; they are always critical of what they read.

C: Is that their job?

J: In a sense it is. But what you have to realize is that before you were even born, I spent years going to school learning how to do research. A big part of that was deciding what kind of research is best. I had to think about things that you don't want to bother with right now: What is real? How do we know what we know? And I decided that textual research and qualitative research—don't ask me what those are—were best. That's what I believe produces the best knowledge. I just can't buy into proving things the way bean-counters want me to. I don't believe in that kind of research.

C: I don't quite understand. You are judging research and evaluation the same way. But you said research and evaluation were different. Why don't you judge evaluation some other way—like how useful it is?

J: Will it solve a practical problem? Will it help me teach students to write better? Will it help me convince the university to keep supporting the Writing Center?

C: Those sound important.

J: As important as research?

C: I don't know, Dad. I just like talking with you. You're so smart.

J: Is that a formal evaluation?

James H. Bell  
University of Northern British  
Columbia  
Prince George, BC

## Job Opening

The English Department at the University of Southern Mississippi is seeking to hire an "Assistant Professor in Composition/Rhetoric to serve as Director of Writing Center" (tenure-track position).

The University of Southern Mississippi is located in Hattiesburg, MS, a thriving, pleasant city of about 60,000 with a mild climate, low cost of living, and lots of azalea bushes and pine trees. We are approximately 65 miles from the Gulf Coast and 100 miles from New Orleans. The University, which has an enrollment of about 14,000, is one of three major universities in the state. The English Department, which includes thirty-five fac-

ulty members and an equal number of teaching assistants, is noted for its Center for Writers and its strong graduate program. We offer a concentration in composition and rhetoric at both the M.A. and Ph.D. levels.

We are hoping to hire someone with a doctorate in composition and rhetoric and with appropriate experience and publications. Duties will include teaching both graduate and undergraduate courses in composition and rhetoric as well as directing the Writing Center.

Deadline for applications: December 15. Please send letter of application, current C.V., and dossier (with at least three letters of recommendation) to Jeanette Harris, Box 5037, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS 39406.

## Job Opening

Cornell University  
John S. Knight Writing Program

Lecturer, full-time. The Writing Workshop and the Learning Skills Center have a lecturer position beginning Fall, 1997. This is a joint appointment whose responsibilities include teaching two freshman writing seminars per semester for the Writing Workshop and developing academic support projects in writing for the Learning Skills Center.

Qualifications: proven ability to teach writing and an advanced degree in Composition, Rhetoric, English or some other field relevant to composition instruction in an interdisciplinary program. We are looking for someone with considerable experience in teaching writing to underprepared students in multi-ethnic classes and with special competence in teaching college-level writing to second-language students.

The Writing Workshop is a small

staff of full-time lecturers who teach introductory writing classes and who support the wider goals of the Knight Writing Program. We coordinate WAC initiatives, direct a peer tutoring service, consult on ESL issues, teach upper-level expository writing courses, and support the TA training program. This lecturer will work with the Learning Skills Center, a university-wide academic support service that offers supplemental instruction and tutoring to help students develop learning strategies and skills.

Lecturers are appointed to three- or five-year contracts which are renewable. This position offers a competitive salary and benefits.

Applicants should send a letter, vita, the names of 3 references, and a brief statement about their teaching to Joseph Martin, Director, Writing Workshop by Dec. 2, 1996. We will interview at MLA. Cornell University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity employer and strongly encourages applications from minorities and women.

## Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers

### Call for Proposals

April 11, 1997  
Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania  
Keynote speaker: Pamela Childers

Proposals are invited from high school and college writing center staff and administrators; one-page proposals for individual presentation; two pages for roundtables and panels. Topics may include creating and maintaining high school

## CUNY Writing Centers Association

ment, reaching the student writer. Deadline: January 15, 1997. Proposals and English, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA 17815; 717-389-4736; or

Call for Proposals  
March 21, 1997  
Brooklyn, NY  
"Creating a Culture of Education"  
Keynote speaker: Jerome S. Bruner

The conference is known for its innovative, interactive presentations. Conference workshops, presentations, and discussions will be geared for participants from elementary and high schools, colleges and universities. Proposals are due by Dec. 16, 1996. Please include type of presentation and title; name(s) of presenter(s) and position(s); institution, address, telephone (home or office); three copies of the proposal (maximum 250 words); equipment needed; e-mail address; 2- or 3-line abstract to be used in the program. The Conference Committee will not consider proposals longer than 250 words or those not conforming to this format.

Send three copies, via mail or fax to Gretchen Haynes, Writing Center, Library 318, Queensborough Community College, Bayside, NY 11364-1497. Fax: 718-428-0802; phone: 718-281-5001. Kingsborough Community College/CUNY will host the conference and is near JFK Airport and is accessible by car, subway, or bus. Hotel information is

## Texas Association of Writing

Call for Proposals  
April 3-5, 1997

South Padre Island, TX

The Texas Association of Writing Centers will meet in conjunction with CCTE (Conference of College Teachers of English). Lady Falls Brown has been asked to chair the session since Christina Murphy has assumed her new position. Please send proposals to Lady Falls Brown, 213 Department of English, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091 (ykflb@ttacs.ttu.edu)

Please submit 3 copies of each paper and 3 copies of a 100-word abstract. Limit the papers to 10 double-spaced pages (20 minutes presentation time). Note the estimated reading time at the top of the first page of the manuscript (20 minutes maximum); put the author's name on the title page only; and submit only papers that have not been read or published

## Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association

September 17-20, 1997  
Park City, Utah

December 15, 1996.

Jane Nelson, the new president of the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, announces to RMWCA members that the regional will not hold conjoint sessions at the 1997 RMMLA because RMWCA is a co-sponsor for the next National Writing Centers Association conference. Therefore, for 1997 only, proposals for RMWCA will be considered for the National Writing Centers Association conference. Direct inquiries to Penny Bird, Brigham Young University, Box 26280, Provo, Utah 84602-6280.



# TUTORS' COLUMN

## Disproving "disclaimer" statements

Today while sitting in the University's Learning Assistance Center, to my left I heard an uncertain yet hardly unfamiliar voice, which quietly and reverently invaded a private moment of adulation over my most recent victory. I immediately sensed opportunity. "Hello, may I help you?" She seemed a bit disoriented and ostensibly nervous. With some reservation, she responded, "Is there someone who can help me with writing?" I answered, "Yes, I'm your man," and smiled in anticipation of another challenge.

As I followed her to a nearby table, I speculated about which excuse would I hear this time. Will she say "writing is not really my thing"? Or will she preemptively admit that she has never been a *good* writer? Will she say that she can't decide on a topic or that she hasn't had time to start her English paper which is due in 24-hours!

Perhaps I am being a bit too presumptuous . . . not!

Before my rear makes contact with the chair, she pulls out a rough draft and offers her disclaimer: "LET ME WARN YOU IN ADVANCE; my paper is nothing special, so please don't laugh."

What would your response be?

I have been a writing tutor for over two years, and I lament having to testify that such statements and attitudes are recurrent. Students who come into the Learning Assistance Center in search of a writing tutor, almost invariably engage in preliminary discussions and offer unnecessary apologies about their papers and their overall writing

potential. They generally assume an absence of, and quite naturally, reject the possibility of a peer relationship. As a tutor, I am first perceived and regarded as a *qualified* expert (*a bit of self-indulgence here*) rather than a co-learner. Arbitrary decisions are made about my degree of interest and sincerity in helping them. As a consequence, students arm themselves with what I call disclaimer statements, which they employ as a method of rhetorical sanitation. *If I take away the initial shock, maybe he won't think, and I won't look, as bad.*

At first glance, disclaimer statements may appear to be nothing more than inelaborate excuses offered as a token defense in anticipation of the undesirable. But if considered carefully, they provide intuitive insights about the anxieties that introspectively influence negative attitudes about one's self, and in particular, one's ability to *affectively* overcome these attitudes. Consequently, the nature and substance of any questions about disclaimer statements must be both introspective and exploratory.

To take the aforementioned example, my response focused on the information revealed, although inadvertently, within the disclaimer statement itself.

"Why do you feel it is necessary to warn me in advance about your paper?" "Because . . . you're a tutor, and therefore, you must write better than me."

I searched deeper. "Do you think that you are competing with me?" She seemed puzzled; "No, not really." I inquired, "If not me, then who?" She re-

sponded, "Me? Yah . . . I guess I'm competing against myself." There was a short, pregnant pause . . . and then she smiled.

Almost instantaneously, her disposition had changed. From that moment forward, she seemed less concerned with embarrassment and more interested in analyzing her own weaknesses with me (as a facilitator). Perhaps in recognizing the futility and/or ineffectiveness of her initial approach, she abandoned her disclaimer statement and replaced it with a genuine interest in not only improving her paper but also seemed resolute in improving her overall writing skills as well. Her smile was indicative of this shift in perspective. . . . Approvingly, I blinked and returned the smile, silently rejoicing in the intoxication of victory.

While discussing with my colleagues and reflecting on the appropriateness of this article for present and prospective writing tutors alike, I discovered that the propensity to offer disclaimer statements is not a proclivity peculiar only among undergraduates. In fact, I have talked to several graduate students who concede and indirectly suggest that this inclination is irrepressibly natural. One graduate student in particular, admitted to having employed disclaimer statements and attempted to characterize this behavior as a "form of self-preservation." According to her, she did not want to be rejected, and therefore, she offered disclaimer statements, and in some instances, even resisted the temptation to seek help altogether. When asked about consequences of not soliciting help, she responded that "[she] would rather a graduate professor grade and critique

[her] paper than risk the possibility of criticism from an *undergraduate* writing tutor.” Such criticism, I inferred, would be received as a confirmation for preexisting feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. She tacitly agreed.

When attempting to confront and disprove disclaimer statements, I believe that mutual self-disclosure is essential. Tutors should share their experiences in writing and allow students the opportunity of vicarious reinforcement. For example, in dealing with my writing difficulties, at times, I wanted desperately to observe: to see and hear success stories of how other people overcame writing deficiencies. Observation not only provided me with alternative strategies but also worked to reinforce my sense of struggle and commitment to become a better writer.

As a tutor, I have learned that in order to help students move beyond writing difficulties, they must first confront their uncertainties, and subsequently, evaluate the impact of these uncertainties on their overall writing experience. For me, this evaluation has in many cases functioned as a key to unlock the hidden potential within those students who question and in many cases doubt its existence.

My primary objective here is to communicate and stimulate a focused dialogue, within and among writing centers, about the real and unfortunate implications of disclaimer statements for all students at all levels. A secondary and less simple objective is to help cultivate an appropriate plan of action to confront these realities.

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## Diagrams: Left and right unite

Recently, a student wrinkled her forehead in consternation. I stared back at her, my face blank; I did not understand the relationship of the central players in her paper. I was processing complex material for the first time and was slow to compute. Suddenly she looked inspired, rather than frustrated, and penciled out a diagram of the seating arrangement during the meeting in question.

“Oh, I *see*,” I responded immediately. “All three were opposed but at that particular meeting, two were members of the audience and the remaining interviewee was a member of the council. Is that right?”

“Yes,” she smiled with a sigh of relief. “Yes.”

I’ve noticed that when some writers, myself included, are grasping new material they look confused, wear blank stares and have difficulty translating complex ideas into words. “I can’t think of the word,” they sometimes say. In cases where words don’t work, diagrams serve as a catalyst to comprehension.

Tutors use diagrams to help writers *see* relationships or connections. Diagrams help in explaining texts the writer may have read but does not fully understand. In addition, writers, as in the case mentioned above, have diagrammed for tutors who don’t grasp their ideas. But how do images relate to text?

Writers often encounter new material, concepts, or strategies during tutorials. Naturally, they have no history

for processing this new material. They need time to incorporate it into their routine way of approaching the writing process. In her book, *Writing the Natural Way*, Gabriele Lusser Rico discusses functions of the left and right hemispheres of the human brain. She asserts that “the right hemisphere, which responds to images—not grammar, is specialized for the initial orientation of a task for which no pre-existing routine exists” (69). Once a routine is set, however, “the left hemisphere, which has the power of syntax and grammar, carries out the routine” (71). Expanding on Rico’s assertion, I imagine the right side of the brain as a computer and the left as a printer.

The right side of the brain, or computer, takes in information via the writer’s keystrokes. The writer can read the screen but can not share the information with others until the printer spits it out. The left side of the brain, or printer, receives signals from the computer and converts them to formatted text. The computer and printer cooperate to produce an end product. If a tutor bypasses the computer, the printer can not deliver readable text. We, as tutors, can use the computer/printer image to our advantage.

For example, a writer came to me with an article that he could not decipher. Of course, he had a response paper due early the next day but had written nothing. He was panicking. I read the text: indeed difficult, academic, and complex. He lamented that he just didn’t understand it.

We waded through together, looking for key words, and discovered that the

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# No longer as stupid as my big toe

Sitting in a big soft chair around four tables arranged in a square to enhance discussion, feeling like a top executive in a respected law firm, I was startled by the intelligent women and their voices filling my first-year English class. I had expected the class to be similar to high school, which meant listening only to the teacher and completing the work to instantly receive an A. Unfortunately, sometimes things don't work out like they are planned. Dr. Christine Cozzens, my professor, was not as willing to give me the free A that I was accustomed to getting and expected. I was going to have to work my ass off. Before Dr. Cozzens and a special Writing Workshop tutor, Kelly, I'm not sure if anyone had ever cared enough to make me learn to write.

After graduating from high school, I planned to take the required English courses in college and then never think about writing again. First-year English began, and I attended class with my books, my notebook, and my "I hate English attitude." I showed up for every class but was never glad to be there. I avoided the first paper assignment because it might reveal how my writing lacked confidence and substance. I finally wrote the paper at a softball game the weekend before it was due. I would write sentences in between screaming, "all we need is a base hit" and "ruunn" and several trips to the concession stand for a coke and some Skittles. My paper was covered with more red dust than words. Still, I handed my paper in the next week expecting my standard A.

When Dr. Cozzens returned the paper, I took it to my room, isolated myself, and cried. I was reliving a fourth grade nightmare. Fifty small pounds sitting in a desk just my size on the

smart side of the room. One day, for no reason that I knew, my fourth grade teacher said, "Ginger, let's move your desk over to the other side of the room where you can learn better." Before I knew it, she tugged me out of my desk and shoved me to the stupid side of the room. I had loved reading and writing the year before when my third grade teacher told my mom, "Ginger has a real knack for writing." I could not wait until the fourth grade when I would become the next E.B. White or Madeline L'engle. But a year later, after the nauseating and embarrassing move across the room, I went home, isolated myself in my room, and cried.

At school my friends would ask, "Ginger, why did Miss Marman move you over there with the stupid kids?" I would lie to them and say, "She wants me to sit with them for a while so I can help them." I could not face the reality of my friends knowing that Miss Marman thought I was stupid too. During class, I would stare dazed at the smart side of the room while they did their important work and I did work I had already completed before being moved to the stupid side of the room. The smart group did not pay any attention to me because a helicopter had picked me up and lowered me in the middle of a desert. I could see no one for thousands of miles. The stupid students I was now sitting among didn't care who joined their side of the room because they were used to sitting on the stupid side. They did not know what the smart side of the room said about them. Now I knew that my friends would be putting my name in the stupid kids' rhyme. I could already hear them chanting:

Eny meeny miney moe,  
Ginger's as stupid as my big toe.

No one seemed to recognize the anguish, the anger, and the fear that stabbed me through the heart. I was distant and alone, separated by a row of desks from the group in which I ached to belong. Part of me wanted to never write another word again, but another part of me wanted to fight my way back to the top where I had been happy the year before. I was torn between the angel on one shoulder whispering, "You can do it. Show those teachers what writing is all about," and the devil on the other shoulder saying, "Don't give them the satisfaction. You gave your best and they didn't like it, so why waste your time."

These thoughts passed through my head once again as they had in the fourth grade. I had fought my way back to the smart side of the room then, could I do it now? Dr. Cozzens was willing to teach me, but was I ready to learn? Dr. Cozzens didn't just want her students in class, but she also wanted us in her office to discuss the next step in improving our papers and growing as writers. She would say, "I put the sign-up sheet outside my office. Go by and sign-up. There are plenty of times available." I began to visit Dr. Cozzens on a regular basis, but not because I loved discussing writing. I did it because she expected me to do it. She had also suggested that we go to the Writing Workshop for help with our papers. I went, but hated the world for it because I had told myself at the beginning of the year never to be caught dead in the Writing Workshop. I just kept reminding myself that I wanted to be on the smart side of the room—I wanted a grade I could be proud of.

My first experience in the Writing Workshop was unhelpful. The tutor

who discussed my paper with me did not seem interested in helping me improve. We sat at a table in the Writing Workshop, a cold distance from one another, and she read my paper while sighing frequently. Then, she told me my paper was fine except for a few grammatical errors. I tried to ask her questions, but she was too busy checking her watch to answer. I left even more disgruntled than I was going in. Could this tutor not understand that my paper was more important than “Days of Our Lives”? Once again, I felt the lack of concern for my learning, which I had first experienced in the fourth grade. Would anyone ever care about my writing?

I knew my paper needed improvement because Dr. Cozzens had made many suggestions when we discussed it. Flustered, I put my paper aside for a while and called a friend to vent some frustration. I told her about the unhelpful Writing Workshop tutor. Appalled, she told me she had had a good experience with a tutor, Kelly. So I made another appointment to visit the Writing Workshop.

Not expecting much help with my paper, I went to work with Kelly. We sat, a friendly distance that was close enough to look at my paper together, in the same chairs that were used during my last so-called tutor’s session. As I squirmed uncomfortably anticipating the worst, Kelly read my paper. After she finished reading, she said, with a respectful voice, “OK. If you had to explain the purpose of your paper in one sentence, what would you say?” I explained my purpose to her, and she jotted down what I said, which unveiled my thesis sentence. Next, she pointed to specific areas in my paper and said, “These are good and important points, but can you tell me why they are important?” Once again, I explained and she wrote. “You know all the answers to these questions, you just need to put what you are telling me in your paper. You also want to look for some specific places in the story to

back up the points in your paper.”

“I’ll do that. Thanks for your help,” I said to Kelly.

“You can call me over the weekend if you have any other questions before you turn your paper in on Monday.”

“That’s great. Thanks again.” Walking back to my dorm room, I thought, “I really appreciate Kelly’s help, but there will be no need for me to call her this weekend.”

Friday and Saturday I worked off and on on my paper from the notes Kelly jotted down during my tutoring session. For a few moments during that time, I was excited about writing. By Sunday, I wanted to make more changes. I called Kelly. Once again, my paper transformed from black and white to a rainbow of colors and words with meaning. Kelly got out her orange, green, and pink pens, and we covered those black and white pages with arrows to change the order of paragraphs, to make content suggestions, and to teach me grammar lessons. Kelly could tell I was pleased with the changes we were making, but she also knew I was nervous about turning my paper in. “You’ve improved a good deal already. Make the changes, but don’t be nervous about it,” Kelly told me. Inhaling deeply, I answered, “I’ll try my best to focus on the changes and my improvement, but I am nervous.” I knew Kelly and I were going to have a good writing relationship after this comment because she cared not only about my writing but also about my feelings.

I made the changes to my paper and tried to ease my anxiety by thinking how much I had improved. I knew it had improved because I had spent several hours of tutoring time with Kelly and I stayed up late on Sunday in the dark while my roommate slept. I had learned so much more than I realized, and when Dr. Cozzens returned my paper, it was proved to me. When I went back to my dorm, I didn’t cry. I did

cartwheels up and down the hall. The women who lived on my hall stood in their doorways, staring and snickering: “Ginger, why in the world are you doing cartwheels up and down the hall?”

“I have not been this excited about a paper and writing since third grade,” I answered and left them standing in the hall puzzled.

Now when I go to discuss a paper with Dr. Cozzens, I go because I’m excited about learning and improving my papers. She has made me grow as a writer. It was painless, and it happened without me knowing. Four Dr. Cozzens’ classes and many of Kelly’s tutoring sessions later, writing has once again become something I am excited about and want to do. Writing has become important. It’s the perfect way for me to express myself and know that whoever is reading it can relate an experience in their life to an experience in mine—I know I’m not the only person who makes mistakes. I’m free to be myself on paper. No restrictions apply. The words flow easily, and I know when they come out wrong the first time there are no ill effects—unlike talking. I can revise and rework until the words say exactly what I want them to say. Finding the perfect verb or the perfect description extends my mind into a whole new world of learning. Writing has become a part of me. When reading other works, I wonder how the author chose the words he or she used and how I, the writer that I am, could make it stronger. Writing is an ongoing process, and I will learn how to improve each day. I am still growing.

Now, my friends call me “an English person” because I took English classes that were not required to graduate. As a result of my extra courses, they come to me frequently and ask me to read and help them revise their papers and make small grammatical changes. I like helping them because I feel like I’m paying Kelly back for all the hours she spent helping me. The respect my

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# WRITING CENTER ETHICS

## Responsibility, context, and situational ethics

If writing center tutors accept the notion that it is their responsibility to act ethically in tutorial conferences, then they will have to decide, on a regular basis, what ethical conduct *is*. Though some ethical theories provide general principles and standards for determining ethical behavior (as I have attempted to show over the last several columns), in real life situations, those standards are often not so easily applied. One of the major problems inherent in ethical theories which depend upon an assessment of consequences, for example, is that consequences can never be predicted with complete certainty. As G.E. Moore wrote in his *Principia Ethica*:

In order to shew that any action is a duty, it is necessary to know both what are the other conditions, which will, conjointly with it, determine its effects; to know exactly what will be the effects of these conditions and to know all the events which will be in any way affected by our action throughout an infinite future. We must have all this causal knowledge, and further we must know accurately the degree of value of the action itself and of all these effects; and must be able to determine how, in conjunction with the other things in the Universe, they will affect its value as an organic whole. And not only this: we must also possess all this knowledge and with regard to the effects of every possible alternative; and must then be able to see by comparison that the total value due to the existence of the action in question will be greater than that which would be produced by any

of these alternatives. But it is obvious that our causal knowledge alone is far too incomplete for us ever to assure ourselves of this result. Accordingly it follows that we never have any reason to suppose that an action is our duty: we can never be sure that any action will produce the greatest value possible. (392-93)

Though Moore speaks disparagingly of consequence theories as ideal models for ethical behavior, he does not believe their epistemological limitations to be completely disabling, however:

Ethics, therefore, is quite unable to give us a list of duties: but there still remains a humbler task which may be possible for Practical Ethics. Although we cannot hope to discover which, in a given situation, is the best of all possible alternative actions, there may be some possibility of shewing which among the alternatives, likely to occur to any one, will produce the greatest sum of good. . . ." (393)

We can, in other words, make educated guesses about how best to proceed, even if those guesses might sometimes lead to unforeseen or undesirable consequences. By doing so, we will fulfill our duty—to the extent humanly possible—to behave in an ethical manner and this, he thinks, is probably the best that we can hope for. Still, even if we accept Moore's assessment at face value, writing centers are still left with the troubling questions of how to distinguish the features of the "given situation" he refers to and how to determine what might comprise the "greatest sum of good," especially

when that good must be negotiated among the multiple ethical frameworks which often intersect in writing center tutorials. The crux of the problem for writing centers, then, is the difficulty of predicting "right" actions in the face of often conflicting contexts and unpredictable consequences:

How far the standards of ethics can be used in ordinary practice to distinguish a right action from a wrong action will depend largely on the nature of these standards, but it has been a matter of common experience that there are cases where it is very difficult even for the man experienced in making moral judgments to tell which course of action is right. One of the most familiar examples is whether a doctor is right in answering a patient's question with a false answer, when he knows or thinks it extremely likely that a true answer will aggravate the patient's illness or even cause his death. (Lillie 11)

Writing center tutors face similar dilemmas (though not generally so dramatic or life-threatening) on a daily basis. What is the most urgent textual problem to address in a conference? What would be most useful for the student? What would be the most useful for the paper? What can be covered satisfactorily in the time available? How will the student react to the tutor's agenda for the conference, and how accommodating should the tutor be to the student's agenda—especially if the tutor believes the student's plan for the conference is unlikely to prove productive? How should tutors proceed if their perception of the "best"

plan for the conference violates general writing center or administrative guidelines? Is it even possible to talk about being “ethical” in a writing center conference when tutors are faced with so many competing “ethical” agendas?

According to John Dewey, in *The Question of Certainty*, it is indeed possible to be ethical in such circumstances, and, in fact, Dewey believes that ethical conflicts such as these are the norm rather than the exception:

Conduct as moral may be defined as activity called forth and directed by ideas of value or worth, *where the values concerned are so mutually incompatible as to require consideration and selection before an overt action is entered upon.* (400-1)

The science of applying ethical principles and theories to particular circumstances is called *casuistry*, and it is one of the central methodologies of situational ethics. C. Eugene Conover’s reflections on situational ethics in *Personal Ethics in an Impersonal World* define the philosophy’s basic principles quite nicely, and in doing so, Conover also describes, unintentionally yet quite poignantly, the real-life experience of tutoring in a writing center:

In situational ethics, the persons involved are expected to take a social point of view in the search for solutions to their problems. This interpretation of morality finds its focus in the give-and-take of human life. Our problems, our temptations, our opportunities to add to the good and evil that mark our common life arise in the changing situations within which we must choose and act. The morally ‘right’ act must be suitable to the situation, and the ‘good’ that we seek escapes us unless we find the ‘right’ means to the goal. . . .

[Situational ethics] places responsibility upon the individual. A customary morality which assumes

that the traditions and accepted practices of society provide sufficient guidance is held to be inadequate, because situations are unique and creative solutions are called for. . . . Human experience is ‘interactional’; the individual experiences the qualities of changing contexts of objects and events. Situations are of many kinds—threatening, embarrassing, joyful, satisfying. Reflection and decision are called for when the situation is ‘problematic,’ the outcome uncertain, and the solution not obvious. . . .

Situation ethics . . . emphasizes central factors in the moral life. Ethical problems arise in the changing contexts of persons and events within which we live. We make our choices and act—for better or worse—in situations. Unless we are sensitive to the special characteristics and requirements of each problematic situation, to the distinctive needs of the persons involved, and to the act that most fully meets our obligations and opportunities, we are unlikely to respond with the intelligence for which Dewey calls, or the awareness of human needs which [Joseph] Fletcher ascribes to love.” (48-9, 51-2)

Threatening, embarrassing, joyful and satisfying situations; the interactional experience of human life; solutions that are not often obvious; the special characteristics and distinctive needs of the students we see. . . . These are certainly features which are common to many kinds of teaching, but they seem especially evocative of the close, personal, dynamic, and collaborative teaching which takes place in writing centers. Writing conferences are deeply immersed in the full range of “changing contexts of persons and events” which can be brought to any teaching situation, and ethical responses to problematic situations in the writing center must demonstrate an

awareness of those contexts, events, and influences. Though different writing centers—by virtue of their distinctive institutional and demographic situations—may construct their ethics in different ways, it is important, at the very least, that they understand how and why they do so in relation to the many contexts that impact their operations.

And what, exactly, are those contexts? That will be the topic for next month’s column. \_\_\_\_\_

Michael A. Pemberton  
University of Illinois, Urbana-  
Champaign

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~~Not longer as stupid~~

Moore, George E. *Principia Ethica* (continued from page 12)  
Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1951.

tutees give my writing ability increases my confidence, especially when the tutee reaches an improved level of writing. Recently, I helped a friend revise an essay for a scholarship application. We discussed some changes she could make, and I offered to read it again after she made revisions. Several hours later, the paper returned much improved and we talked about some more specific changes to strengthen her paper. As she was leaving to work on another revision, she said, “These suggestions are good. Are you a tutor in the Writing Workshop?”

“No,” I said.

“Well, get your butt over there,” she said.

Now, I understand why Kelly sacrificed her time to help me. Helping someone improve her writing can boost self-esteem and help cultivate a permanent and deeper emotion for

## Job Opening

Director, William L. Adams Writing Center  
Texas Christian University

Applications are invited for the position of Director of the William L. Adams Writing Center at Texas Christian University. TCU is an independent institution with a balanced commitment to teaching and research. Approximately 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students are enrolled in six schools and colleges of the university.

Responsibilities: Primary responsibilities include directing and evaluating the activities and programs of the Center; supervising and evaluating 5 full-time and 2 part-time staff members; directing a computer lab; developing and managing the annual budget of the Center. The Director also works closely with the coordinator of the University writing program. Appointment: Full-time, twelve months in

the Center, beginning June 1, 1997.

Qualifications: A master's degree is required; a doctorate is preferred. Writing center administrative experience is strongly preferred, and professionally active leadership in writing center work is expected. Salary: Negotiable and commensurate with qualifications and experience.

Application: A letter expressing interest in the position and a curriculum vitae should be sent to:

Dr. Larry D. Adams  
Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs  
TCU Box 297024  
Fort Worth, TX 76129

Screening of applications by the search committee will begin December 1, 1996, and continue until the position is filled. TCU is an AA/EOE Employer.

## Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

Feb. 28: Northern California Writing Centers Association, in Hayward, CA  
Contact: Kimberly Pratt, Division of Language Arts, Chabot College, 25555 Hesperian Blvd., Hayward, CA 94545. Phone: 510-786-6950.

March 1: New England Writing Centers Association, in Providence, RI  
Contact: Meg Carroll, Writing Center, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI 02908. E-mail: mcarroll@grog.ric.edu

March 21: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in Brooklyn, NY  
Contact: Gretchen Haynes, Writing Center, Library 318, Queensborough Community College, Bayside, NY 11364-1497. Fax: 718-428-0802; phone: 718-281-5001.

April 3-5: Texas Association of Writing Centers, in South Padre, TX  
Contact: Lady Falls Brown, 213 Dept. of English, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091; e-mail: ykflb@ttacs.ttu.edu

April 11: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Bloomsburg, PA  
Contact: Terry Riley, Dept. of English, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA 17815. Phone: 717-389-4736; e-mail: triley@bloomu.edu

April 18-19: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Pittsburgh, PA  
Contact: Margaret Marshall, Dept. of English, Cathedral of Learning, U. of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Phone: 412-624-6555; e-mail: marshall+@pitt.edu

April 18-20: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Augusta, GA  
Contact: Karin Sisk, Augusta College, Writing Center, Dept. of Languages, Literature, and Communications, Augusta, Georgia 30904-2200. Fax: 706-737-1773; phone: 706-737-1402 or 737-1500; e-mail: ksisk@ac.edu

Sept. 17-20: National Writing Centers Association/Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Park City, UT  
Contact: Penny C. Bird, English Dept., Brigham Young U., Box 26280, Provo, UT 84602-6280. Fax: 801-378-4720; phone: 801-378-5471; e-mail: penny\_bird@byu.edu

## Diagrams

(continued from page 10)

author defined the U.S. Constitution not only as a guarantor of individual rights but as a buffer between conflicting cultures. In other words, all cultures receive equal rights in the Constitution that also acts as a filtration system between the individual cultures. Since legislation filters through the Constitution, cultures have decreased opportunities to limit the rights of others.

He stared, face blank; I talked and gestured. OOPS, I forgot, the printer does not receive direct messages. I constructed a diagram for his computer instead of sending organized words to his printer. I drew a circle to represent the Constitution. Then I placed two squares, representing conflicting cultures, on opposite sides of the circle and drew arrows to represent interaction between cultures.

His face registered enthusiasm. He grabbed the pencil from my hand, and made more squares positioned around the center. He labeled the squares as different cultures, then drew connecting arrows all passing through the central hub (Constitution) before reaching the square on the other side. As his pencil scratched out the shapes, he told me the meaning of the diagram and made sweeping motions to show movement. Soon he leaned back in his chair, relaxed a moment, then asked: "Now, how do I write this?"

"Just like your diagram shows it," was my response. Admittedly vague, but I hoped that once he comprehended the new idea, his own pre-existing routine for creating text, a left hemisphere function, would take over. In other words, the computer interprets infor-

mation and then sends signals to the printer. The printer communicates to outsiders with structure and text. His face relaxed further.

Unexpectedly, I have found that talking about concepts doesn't work for everyone. When I signed on as a new peer tutor, I expected to write and discuss text and structure with writers. Diagrams, however, may be a more natural way of processing new material. They effectively *show* relationships and structure serving as *visual* input for the right side of the brain.

I've made a pact to decrease frustration on both sides of tutorials. Now I never start a session until both the student and I each have a pencil in our hands and scrap paper in front of us.

Maria J. Dunbar  
Indiana University-Purdue University  
at Indianapolis  
Indianapolis, IN

THE WRITING LAB  
NEWSLETTER

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Forward & Address Correction

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