

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 23, Number 9

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing May, 1999

...FROM THE EDITOR...

In these days of instant communication online or on CNN, we tend to forget that some written communication appears in public long after it was composed. The *Writing Lab Newsletter* has such a time warp because I have to finish preparing it a month in advance, to give to the printer and then to mail. Thus, this Editor's Note is being written early in April, and Eric Hobson's NWCA President's column on page 8 was composed a few days ago, on Easter Sunday. By the time you read this, events may have swirled forward and changed so rapidly that his column seems like history. But his comments and Anna Challenger's story remain valid, and we need to hear Anna Challenger's perspective on the disintegration of Yugoslavia and how it affected her, her family, and her chances of joining us at the NWCA conference.

Stories always have a force that abstractions don't, and so I suspect you'll also find Mark Fenlon's story about trying to write a personal statement, Tom Grau's story about his maiden tutoring voyage, and other stories in this issue as absorbing as the insights the authors abstract from them.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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What do they want? Personal statements, bourbon, and a whole lot of questions

Years ago, like many readers here, I wrote a personal statement when applying to graduate school. I remember the experience vividly but with no fondness. For those of you who do recall this experience fondly, please stop reading and offer yourself up to science for observation.

At the time I was a top English student in a department where that was not much of an accomplishment (fine faculty but mediocre students), the University of Lowell (now UMass, Lowell). I'm from Lowell (think Pittsburgh sans steel and Steelers) and have at my core a blue collar, lower middle class mentality. When one of my favorite English professors asked me my plans for the future, I thought he was going to hand me a civil service exam bulletin. Instead he suggested I think about graduate school at his alma mater, the University of Texas at Austin. I was about to expose my utter ignorance about graduate school when he proudly added he had "pull" in the American Civilization department.

Now I was really confused. What do you really do in graduate school? What is American Civilization? Do they study professional wrestling and the Dick Van Dyke Show? After getting some very limited answers to my questions, I realized this could be my ticket out of Lowell, and I began collecting recommendation letters and dreaming of Texas. Since 98% of my family lives and dies within 30 miles of Lowell, my decision was met with a mixture of shock, bemusement, and eventually support. All went well till I

tried writing my personal statement: “The Faculty Review committee considers evidence of creativity, initiative, motivation, and other characteristics indicative of the applicant’s potential as a scholar and contributor to society.” I imagined saying I wanted to move out of my parent’s home had limited persuasive value.

I spent five highly unsuccessful nights trying to sell myself to these strangers in a strange land (where a friend claimed beef was ten cents a pound). I felt like a ten-year-old Briggs and Stratton lawnmower trying to pass itself off as a Caddie. I eventually turned to a former English professor for help. My main problems were as follows: I didn’t know my audience, what they might want, or how important this 1000 or less words would be. I was extremely intimidated. Well, we sat in front of my friend’s out-dated-before-he-opened-the-box IBM PC Jr. and began. After several anemic efforts, we hit the bourbon at his suggestion. After several drinks, I blurted that I had a minor in Biology. Could we do anything with that? Two hours later I was “a blue-collar boy interested in the epistemology of science.” Surprisingly enough, I was admitted, and I’m actually writing a dissertation revolving around science and engineering. However, my point is the sorry, confused, and inebriated process. “Selling” myself was truly difficult without having any solid advice on what works. And while my approach worked this time, I’m not advocating writing center happy hours just yet.

Today, I teach Technical Communication and work as a writing consultant at the University of Texas Undergraduate Writing Center (UWC). I now consider myself an uncertified expert in personal statements, and over the past few years, I’ve worked with dozens of graduate, scholarship, and law school applicants. However, I was and am still essentially winging it, sans bourbon, Bill, and his IBM PC Jr. As I result, I wanted to know what faculty thought

about personal statements. What strategies generally work? What are they looking for rhetorically, personally, and academically? Are there differences of opinion between those in the sciences and liberal arts? When the next student came into the UWC, I wanted answers more credible than my personal opinion.

My answer was to conduct a broad survey of University of Texas graduate faculty. I sent approximately 150 questionnaires to departments that had graduate programs. I received 32 replies from seven departments (English, American Civilization, Biology, Chemistry, Library Science, Business, and Pharmacy). While I will discuss departmental/disciplinary differences if they surface, I am more interested in the commonalities that will help writing centers help students with this often daunting rhetorical task. However, before I get to my findings, I’d like to briefly discuss some relevant research on how these types of documents influence and persuade readers.

John Hayes, et al. published the most relevant research in “Assessing the Message and the Messenger” (1992), published in *The Quarterly of the National Writing Project & The Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy*. In their article they examine how readers attribute personality traits to writers which influence the effectiveness of the text. In other words, readers form distinct impressions about the author’s personality when they read, and those impressions influence the effectiveness of the author’s text. John Hayes, et al. focused on twenty admission essays submitted by high school seniors to Carnegie Mellon University. Eight Carnegie Mellon admission counselors were then told to select only ten students out of the twenty (the counselors were told they all had similar academic credentials) and note the positive and negative traits shown in each essay. The results were as follows:

“Analyzing the traits one at a time, we found that being mature, likable,

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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).

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down-to-earth, and expressing a positive attitude correlated positively with admission votes. In contrast, being dull, narrow, naïve, and egocentric were correlated negatively with admission votes. We found it interesting that being judged “arrogant” had no effect on admission decisions.” (p. 16)

Hayes, et al. also found that social and cultural differences are part of what leads students to misread their audience and poorly gauge how the audience will respond to their texts.

Hayes, et al. offers this example:

There were systematic differences between freshmen and adults that appeared to reflect cultural differences between the two groups. For example, this is the first paragraph of an essay (student admission) entitled “Footprint in Time”: In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch says that to know a man, you have to walk around in his shoes. I agree with that philosophy, so I will ask you to step into my size seven sneakers and take a walk through the meadows of my mind.

Adult readers tended to respond to this text as “trite” or pretentious.” In contrast, students responded with comments such as “This person is definitely creative” or “Wow, cool.” (p. 16)

Therefore, it is crucial that writing consultants be able to help students understand their audience. For example, being active in a medieval role-playing society may be interesting to your friends and be an important personal interest, but it might confuse or negatively influence an engineering professor reading an admission essay. This actually happened during a consultation I had, and the student balked at my observation that this information was potentially risky and irrelevant to what chemical engineering asked for in their admission packet. As the student noted, my observation was only my opinion, and I had no solid evidence to

the contrary. Hopefully, the feedback the UT faculty provided will help us understand them as readers of personal statements. In turn, we can then help students craft more persuasive and audience savvy essays.

What now follows is a summary of the suggestions received from the University of Texas faculty. I organized the responses according to the five questions on the survey. I divided the respondents into two groups, liberal arts and science/engineering. My reasoning was that there might be some differences between the two groups. Please note there were several maverick or quite odd responses. I chose, however, to focus on what the majority of faculty noted.

1) What strategies do you find most successful in personal statements?

With regards to this, faculty in liberal arts and sciences were in general agreement. Eighty percent advocated specificity and the use of concrete examples as opposed to broad descriptive statements. Faculty (62%) also suggested students tie their motivation for applying to their program with their proposed course of study. Finally, many faculty (70%) urged that the essay be an example of their “best” writing. By “best” many faculty suggested well organized and error-free prose. It is interesting to note that all five engineering faculty stressed written and verbal communication skills were a substantial advantage to applicants. They did this despite later saying more objective measures (GRE scores) were much more important.

If a student does have clear motivation and a specific academic interest, make sure the department she is applying to has faculty in that area. As one graduate advisor told me, “If a student is dead set on writing about post-modern existential Balkan poetry, there had better be someone in the department who has expertise.” I often suggest students research the academic interests of a department and/or talk to the department’s graduate advisor.

2) Do any personal statements stand out in your memory as good or bad? Why?

Faculty responses generally focused on the negative. Many (85%) voiced some concern against clichés and “half-witted statements like, ‘Because of my desire for artistic expression, I’ve decided to teach English in middle school.’” Three-quarters noted a lack of focus and structure (rambling was also noted). Finally, just over half complained about typos, misspellings and grammatical errors. The liberal arts faculty (6 out of 12) expressed the desire for a clear narrative structure and advised against attempting humor and self-deprecation. Overall, faculty, regardless of department, saw similar drawbacks in ineffective personal statements.

3) Please explain the relative weight of personal statements in comparison to other application materials?

When answering this question, the sciences and liberal arts differed slightly. Almost the entire science and engineering faculty (90%) indicated the personal statement could swing the balance, but they clearly preferred more “objective measures” such as GPA and GRE scores. As one pharmacy professor noted, “a personal statement is worth 25% if bad and 5% if good.”

Liberal arts faculty were split into two fairly even camps. Roughly half regarded personal statements equally with the other application materials. Less than half (40%) indicated they used the personal statement to see if the student “fit” into the program. The other half felt, like the science and engineering faculty, that they swung the balance, but an ineffectively written one was disastrous and undermined the credibility of the other application materials.

4) Are there common problems that occur in personal statements?

All respondents indicated “vague-

ness” as the most common problem, such as using abstractions without supporting evidence to give their ideas meaning. Faculty (80%) also noted poor mechanics, organization, and syntax. Interestingly, four faculty from separate departments noted naiveté regarding their profession as a major drawback. Examples of naiveté varied:

- “The appearance of egotism. Emptiness (content). Naiveté (I was always different).” (English)
- “Naïve statements like ‘I want to solve the world’s problems through better pharmacy.’” (Pharmacy)
- “Bland; non-specific; naive about profession (‘enjoying the camaraderie and collaboration with faculty, badly written’).” (English)

The last statement is open to interpretation. I believe this faculty member was alluding to the often-solitary nature of liberal arts graduate work, especially when compared to the more collaborative sciences.

5) What advice would you give to students when dealing with issues such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and personal matters not directly related to your discipline such as death, personal problems . . . ?

I asked this question because of the Hopwood ruling in Texas and the recent setbacks for affirmative action programs. Regarding these tricky issues, the engineering and science camp unanimously advised avoiding these issues altogether or advised extreme caution. Many writing consultants may find this somewhat surprising since the “death in the family/ general adversity” approach is fairly common in these essays.

On the other hand, the liberal arts respondents were divided. About half advocated including only if it was relevant to your academic goals. For example, being of a certain ethnic or racial may have motivated a student to want to study their literature/culture.

However, faculty often suggested avoiding any hint of “self-pity.” They also mentioned the potential for these issues to backfire or be misread as asking for “special consideration.” The remaining faculty stressed that personal problems are rarely relevant but added that ethnicity may be a plus if added “but is not unduly intrusive.”

Students often find these issues crucial to their identity, but using race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and personal matters as personal statement fodder is tricky at best. I noticed that collectively faculty generally felt uncomfortable reading personal statements that deviated from professional goals. Here are a few such examples:

- “Race/ethnicity: don’t address. Socioeconomic status: discuss if relevant. Personal matters: Don’t discuss. Often can be taken the wrong way.” (English)
- “Personal factors should be addressed *only* if they caused a serious setback in their GPA or academic progress.” (Biology)
- “Do not include.” (Engineering)
- “Personal problems are rarely relevant and never if they affect negatively. Ethnicity is helpful to sneak in if it will benefit the candidate.” (American Civilization)

Below are some of my suggestions for personal statement consultations based on the faculty survey and my experience working with students on personal statements. Consultants might consider these suggestions:

- *Interview the student more than usual and draw them out.*

Students often ignore or undervalue relevant experience. For example, I had a Korean student applying for pharmacy graduate studies. He made very general (and occasionally inexplicable) statements like, “My family spends endless hours discussing medical issues.” I asked “why” since no reason was given.

After a few minutes, I discovered he has two pharmacists in the family, and his cousin owns a pharmaceutical company in South Korea. After we discussed how alumni donors work, he added that potentially eye-catching detail as part of his motivation.

- *Offer concrete suggestions; you can be more directive than in other consults.*

As the example above illustrates, we can help students gauge what is potentially persuasive. As consultants, we sometimes bring more life experience to the consulting table.

- *Emphasize that the student is arguing a case for her own admission.*

I use the lawyer analogy and suggest the “burden of proof” for their admission lies in the clear, well thought out evidence they supply.

- *Help students understand their faculty audience and how personal statements are used.*

Most faculty want specific examples that are tied into their career goals, and those career goals should dovetail with faculty interests and resources. Tactfully suggest that personal suffering narratives may alienate faculty unless students tie adversity clearly with their professional goals. Liberal arts faculty generally give personal statements more weight when compared to science and engineering faculty. Finally, explain to students that many departments use these essays to see how well a student academically “fits” a department.

- *Be candid.*

If a statement or evidence does not seem persuasive, consider sharing that information.

Overall, faculty across disciplines tend to value similar qualities in personal statements. They overwhelm-

ingly want concrete, specific examples from students and not broad descriptive statements. They also stress that students tie their motivation for pursuing a graduate degree and experience into their goals and interests as graduate students. In addition, those goals should mesh with the interests of faculty in the department. Finally, the personal statement should be an example of the student's best writing and be mechanically sound.

Liberal arts faculty tend to give more weight to the personal statement while faculty in pure and applied sciences value test scores and grades which they consider more objective. However, many faculty noted that a "bad" statement could discredit an otherwise good candidate. Perhaps the most valuable help we can offer students is helping them understand their audience and write in a vivid and persuasive fashion.

Mark Fenlon
University of Texas
Austin, TX

Work Cited

Hayes, John., et al. "Assessing the Message and the Messenger." *The Quarterly of the National Writing Project & The Center or the Study of Writing and Literacy* 14. 2 (Spring 1992): 15-17.

Writing Center Director Concordia University St. Paul; St. Paul, MN

Full-time, tenure-track position, upon final funding approval. The successful candidate will administer Concordia's Writing Center and teach sections of English for Speakers of Other Languages. The person in this position provides leadership and scholarship for at-risk students and writing assistance for the entire community by directing the Writing Center. This professor will hold an appointment in the English Dept. and will serve as part of Concordia's Academic Support Team.

Terminal degree in composition or rhetoric, demonstrated excellence in teaching, experience working in a university writing center, experience working with ESOL students, leadership ability, commitment to Concordia's mission

statement. Send application letter, curriculum vitae, graduate transcripts, and three letters of recommendation.

Deadline: applications will be accepted until position is filled.

Send application materials to:
Chair, Search Committee, c/o Millis Sjostrand
Concordia University St. Paul
275 N. Syndicate St.
St. Paul, MN 55401-5494

Direct questions to Susan Pratt, Chair, Department of English
(651) 641-8221 or pratt@luther.csp.edu

Writing Center and Writing Program Director Clark University; Worcester, Massachusetts

Clark University seeks applicants for the position of Director of the Writing Center and Writing Program. The Director's responsibilities include training and supervising the Center's graduate student tutors; overseeing the Expository Writing Program; supporting faculty who teach Writing Across the Curriculum courses; and teaching one course each semester. Working with the Center for the enhancement of Teaching and Learning, the Director offers workshops and individual consultations for faculty on ways to help their students improve their writing skills.

QUALIFICATIONS: Doctorate in a relevant area, e.g. English, Rhetoric, Education; several years of experience teaching writing at the college level; and knowledge of current ap-

proaches to writing pedagogy are essential. Administrative experience is highly desirable.

Send letter of application, curriculum vitae, writing sample, and three letters of recommendation to: Director of Human Resources, Clark University, 950 Main Street, Worcester, MA 01610 (Fax: 508-793-7500; e-mail: resumes@clarku.edu). Review of applications will begin on April 7.

Clark University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer. Women and minorities are especially encouraged to apply.

Silences in the writing center: Avoiding babble for ESL students

A problem frequently arises when the tutor uses too many words in an effort to explain a point to an ESL student. Because the student has difficulty with English, each phrase the tutor uses must be decoded slowly; therefore, long explanations pose a real challenge for the student. The student is often still trying to decode the first explanation even as the tutor (recognizing the confusion on the student's face) is offering a second explanation of the same point. An avalanche of words can overwhelm the ESL student who is unfamiliar with idioms, uncommon words, and complex syntax. The student may sit in silence with a blank expression.

The tutor sometimes resorts to using grammatical terms to explain the point because the tutor is familiar with such terms, the terms are handy ways to describe a problem, and they carry authority in the academic world. The tutor feels confident of expressing the point correctly when employing the grammatical terms. However, these terms might only confuse the student further. Knowing the labels that grammarians attach to various parts of language is largely irrelevant to the everyday activities of speaking and writing. For this reason, the terminology seems artificial, rather than practical. So, many students (native speakers and ESL students) do not retain the labels of grammar.

One solution is for the tutor to use fewer words. One simple statement is more likely to be understood than a long-winded explanation. In order to use fewer words without leaving out any important meaning, the tutor must put more thought into what is being said. This may seem paradoxical, but fewer words do require more thought

than many words require, if the fewer words are to convey the message completely. The payoff for making the extra effort is that the tutor only needs to give one explanation, instead of making two or three attempts to explain the same point of composition. The ESL student naturally finds one statement easier to decode than two or three statements.

The statement is also easier to decode when grammatical terms are omitted. Even though some ESL students are more familiar with terms like "predicate nominative" and "relative pronoun" than many American students are, most students will be put off by such terms. The jargon that writing tutors use can be replaced with other expressions. The "subject" of a clause can be identified as the person or thing that does the action. The "antecedent" is merely the person that the pronoun refers to. Discarding grammatical labels in favor of common expressions will unclutter the path of communication between tutor and student.

A second solution is to use gestures and facial expressions, which are truly the universal language. Holding up one finger clearly means the number one (for a singular noun); whereas, holding up two fingers means two (for a plural noun). Plural versus singular frequently causes problems for ESL students, sometimes because of idiomatic expressions such as "if a person were to succeed." Yet, gesturing can offer an effective way to solve this problem, and few words need be spoken.

The distinction between degrees of adjectives can be indicated by moving the hands farther apart for "bigger" and "biggest" or moving them closer together for "smaller" and "smallest."

The first person pronoun or the second person pronoun can be indicated by pointing a finger at the tutor ("me") or at the student ("you").

Even certain grammatical concepts can be conveyed by physical signs. Telling a writer that the sentence needs parallel structure can involve balancing a pencil on the finger to show that the verb phrase on one side of a conjunction ought to be balanced by a verb phrase on the other side. These gestures can be used silently by themselves or they can be used to reinforce spoken English.

Simple gestures like wiggling a pen above the paper for "write" or smiling for "pleased" or frowning for "sad" should come automatically to the tutor. We all know these physical expressions, but some of us should use them more often. When the tutor uses the actor's tools of gestures and facial expressions, communication becomes more successful.

A third solution is to make use of complete silence: the student and the tutor read over the rough draft together as the tutor makes corrections—perhaps crossing out "the" in front of a noun that does not need an article or adding an -ly to the end of a modifier to turn it into an adverb. For corrections like these no explanation is needed because the student understands immediately what is going on as a correction is made. Putting articles in front of some nouns but not in front of other nouns is a constant challenge for an ESL student, thus the student anticipates that some corrections in this area will be needed. Likewise, the similarity between the adjective form of a word like "quick" and the adverb form of the word, "quickly," causes frequent con-

fusion. The student has experienced this problem many times in the past, hence, when the tutor adds an -ly to the end of a word that modifies a verb, the student knows why the change is needed. No explanation is required.

Without the babble of the tutor in his ear, the student can concentrate on what is being altered in the draft. Silence is the natural medium for thinking, and when the student is given time to reflect on the written sentence, a better understanding of English can occur. In this way, the student becomes more active: instead of being the re-

ceiver of spoken advice, the student becomes the performer of thought and discovery. As a correction is made, the student may nod in recognition of the correct form, remembering it upon seeing it again. In the best case scenario, the student and the tutor take turns making corrections as they read through the draft together line by line.

Much of this approach to assisting ESL students in the writing center flies in the face of what we as educators have been trained to do. We have been trained to be active, and keeping our mouths closed can be difficult. Yet, too

much explanation will sound like babble to a person who is not expert at understanding English. Grammatical jargon especially can sound like nonsense. We should speak less, using carefully chosen, simple words. We should definitely make frequent use of hand gestures, facial expressions, and props such as pencils in order to communicate. And there are times when we should be completely silent to allow the student to be the active one in the learning process.

David W. Berry
Widener University
Chester, PA

Director of the Writing Center/Assistant Professor Northeastern State University; Tahlequah, Oklahoma

Beginning Date: August 11, 1999

Qualifications: Ph.D. in English with emphasis in Composition/Rhetoric

Experience: experience developing, presenting and evaluating innovative writing support programs; knowledge of research and theoretical perspectives in writing; good organizational and problem solving skills; commitment to research in the field.

Responsibilities: develop and manage the operations of the NSU Writing Center; provide innovative programming that will enhance writing goals of the English Department and general education; teach composition and rhetoric courses

from the freshman to graduate levels; develop a student tutoring program; foster goals for writing across the curriculum; serve on appropriate departmental, college, and University committees.

Salary: Salary is commensurate with qualifications and experience.

Application deadline: May 1, 1999 (Applications may be considered after May 1.)

Submit resume, transcripts and letter of application to : Personnel Services, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah OK 74464-7098. Please include a list of five references and phone numbers.

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

October 14-16: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Sante Fe, NM

Contact: Jane Nelson, Director; University of Wyoming Writing Center; Coe Library; Laramie, WY 82072. E-mail: jnelson@uwyo.edu; fax: 307-766-4822

October 28-29: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Springfield, MO

Contact: Allison Witz, Hawley Academic Resource Center, Simpson College, 701 North C Street,

Indianola, IA 50125; phone: 515-961-1524; fax: 515-961-1363; e-mail: witz@storm.simpson.edu

November 5-6: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in San Bernardino, CA

Contact: Carol Peterson Haviland, English Dept., California State University, San Bernardino, 5500 Univ. Pkwy., San Bernardino, CA 92407; phone: 909-880-5833; fax: 909-880-7086; cph@csusb.edu

NWCA News from Eric Hobson, President

Sunday, 4 April 1999 (Easter Day)

The Prologue

Passover/Easter celebrates freedom from oppression and slavery, life over death. A strange introduction for an NWCA column (freedom and lives unmolested), it makes sense given the past week's events. Southeastern Europe faces a political and humanitarian crisis as the Kosovo province of Serbia devolves from a sporadic civil war into the site of systematic genocide. Up to one million displaced ethnic Albanians are in exodus into bordering countries to escape the terrors being wrought by Serb military and paramilitary forces. These events fill newspaper headlines across North America, are topics for political pundits on syndicated radio and television talk shows, and are CNN's hourly update fodder: we watch cruise missiles launch from warships in the Adriatic Sea and hundreds of thousands of refugees sit in rainsoaked forests and fields, exhausted, hungry, injured, dying, even being born.

These are global events. The National Writing Centers Association, like the writing center community as a whole, has not directly concerned itself with these events. Our students, staffs, and centers are, after all, local concerns. And so, we occupy ourselves with our program's day-to-day operations, and, for the most part, cocoon ourselves as isolationists. Our discourse is decidedly self-centered and self-serving, even as good intentions fuel our actions—we do want to benefit our clients and institutions. Yet we differentiate writing centers from composition classrooms, tutors/consultants from teachers, advice from directives, etc., all to ensure that when the credits roll, writing center staff ride into the sunset wearing white hats. This tendency is pervasive—one only has to look as far as my doctoral dissertation

for an example. It is also naive and highlights the extent to which we all insulate and isolate ourselves from distressing late twentieth-century realities. We focus intense energy on discussing and defending practices and adopting stances that are relatively unimportant; like many academicians, we make mountains of molehills.

The Context

Last Fall NWCA expanded its affiliate network to include writing centers located across Europe. Anna Challengler, at the American College of Thessaloniki, Greece, led the process of organizing interested teachers there and since she and her colleagues joined NWCA as the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA), Anna has served as a member of the NWCA Executive Board. We looked forward to meeting Anna face-to-face at the NWCA conference in Bloomington, Indiana.

Monday, however, that hope failed. Global events forced themselves onto the writing center community, shattering, for me at least, my naive belief in writing centers as above politics and other messy aspects of the nonacademic world. Anna sent the following message:

I just wanted to send a note to you telling you that, as things look now, I'm not sure whether I can make it to Indiana. We are in northern Greece, 70 miles from the Albanian/Yugoslavian borders. There are a number of makeshift camps, less than 60 miles from here, which have been set up along the Greek border to these areas for purposes of providing some minimal shelter/food/medical supplies to literally streams of immigrants making their way into Greece. 15% of our student population is from Albania/

Yugoslavia, and these students are in a state of terror. Anti-American sentiment is extremely strong here now. Turkish planes are invading Greek territory, which between these two countries is sufficient cause for war.

From this perspective, I feel that leaving behind my family here, even for 8 days or so, is . . . is what? I don't know what to say.

I haven't canceled my reservations yet; I'm holding off for one more day. I'll see how things look and how I feel within the next 24 hours. I just wanted to let you know what the perspective is like from this vantage point, so that, if I am unable to make it to the conference, you know that I very much wanted to be there and have appreciated your kindness.

Anna's message is one I will not forget. It yanked my chain, and I needed such a wake-up call. For my entire career I have done my job with clients as well as I can and then have gone home feeling smug. I've also read and written articles and given talks about writing center theory and practice that seem today more hollow and self-congratulatory than they did last week at the CCCC in Atlanta. With that context as background, speaking as an individual, and as NWCA's representative, I responded to Anna and tried to express both to her and myself my reaction to her situation.

Anna:

I know that you will receive any number of messages of support and understanding from the other members of the NWCA board, but I suppose that volume won't hurt. So, here I go

Your message was the first one on my screen this morning and it brought me up short. I have just returned from Atlanta for the CCCC conference, where I heard any number of writing center colleagues talk about the contested space of writing center tutorials (using vaguely combative metaphors) and I wasn't able to put my finger on just what it was about these presentations that bugged me. They seemed shallow, naive, even glib. Your message crystalized the feeling and helped me identify what it was about those sessions that bothered me: I was attending sessions in a safe city, in luxurious digs, surrounded by well fed and well housed colleagues who had the safety, comfort, and security to be able to sit around and, at times, talk cavalierly about "contested space."

Meanwhile space is being "contested" and people are dying. Kind of brings things into perspective.

I wish there were some sort of support that I could offer that would make a difference. It seems that at this point, all I can offer is words. . . . Please accept my words and my thoughts.

My hope is that you will be able to join us in Bloomington.

Sincerely yours,
Eric Hobson, NWCA President

Other Voices

Because Anna had posted her message to the NWCA Executive Board's bulletin board, other colleagues began to express their thoughts, too. Dennis Paoli's comments are worth sharing because his words capture much of what I feel and can't quite yet capture in print:

I was angry about difficulties I had making arrangements to get to Bloomington. Now I am ashamed. The safety of your family, your students, and yourself is every colleague's concern, and as Americans, it is our responsibility.

Writing Center workers are professional helpers, but at times like this, in the face of war, ancient enmities, and barbaric totalitarianism, we are helpless. A colleague in distress, students in "terror"—this is when you wish NWCA could mobilize a rescue and airlift administrators and tutors into the "contested space" to make it safe for collaboration, for education. A teacher here was bemoaning a recent talk-show dismissal of intellectuals and educators as "harmless," brandishing the old argument of wordsmiths as warriors. "Hell," I answered, "I aspire to be harmless." Like doctors, our first duty is to do no harm. This is how we do our work, and what is important about that work, and we should remember, in the midst of any peace we find, the travails of friends and colleagues in the midst of war.

Good luck, Anna. Please be safe.

The outpouring of concern—and of frustration at being able to offer Anna little tangible help—continued with many board members writing messages to Anna that capture sentiments similar to those articulated by Meg Carroll:

I just wanted to add my voice to the prayers and concerns of our colleagues. As so many have already expressed, I too feel that I'm in an incredibly privileged space—one in which trivial concerns too often are given disproportionate attention.

Then Muriel Harris wrote the following:

Anna, when your message came in, I had become immersed in the preparations and then celebration of the Passover holiday, and since the Seder meal and service retell the story of the Exodus, there were other Jews all over the world like those at our Seder table who had the horrors of Eastern Europe in our minds as we told the story of an oppressed people, the result of hatred and atrocities against humanity, the Inquisition, the Holocaust, and now another "ethnic cleansing" going on. It's a horror beyond comprehension for those of us far from the scene, but maybe the message of Passover and Easter . . . of hope, renewal, and human ability to survive beyond the hatred and oppression . . . will help those in need of something to hold on to in the midst of the present horrors.

Our thoughts and prayers are with you, your family, and all those who are suffering the consequences of power-hungry dictators and their followers who inflict misery and death upon others who want only to hold on to their religion, culture, land, and way of life.

Anna Responds

Good Friday found another message from Anna in my email account, from which the following is excerpted:

I so much appreciated your response to my note the other day. Things here certainly look more and more frightening and heart-wrenching by the day. I wanted so much to make the trip to Indiana. You and the others have been so generous in your support of my activities over here, and I wanted to share those with you first hand,

to meet all of you, to ask so many questions. But given the present situation in this area, it would have been extremely reckless of me to make such a trip. Even if I were to have no trouble getting there, coming back into Greece for an American citizen would certainly present major difficulties. Most likely I wouldn't have been able to get back in now. I feel very sorry about not being able to attend, but as you noted in your response, this whole affair puts other aspects of life into sharp perspective . . .

Two nights ago I attended a talk by a professor of International Relations from the Greek university who agreed to come to an American College to address an audience of Serbian, Albanian, Macedonian and Greek students. What a volatile situation—students crying and shouting at one another and others trying to make peace, but so many terrified because they had been unable to get in touch

with their families, who have evidently fled their homes and are who knows where? I had a student come up to the Writing Center last Friday afternoon. She was so timid and shy and cryingly asked me to read with her a poem she had written. She is from Belgrade and didn't know if she would ever see her mother again. The poem was addressed to her mother.

What Next?

I wait for a next message from Anna about her status. And several things have changed since she and I first started to write to one another. Eighteen months ago, I saw Anna as an NWCA/writing center recruiter in Europe. She could help internationalize NWCA. Tonight, she occupies my thoughts differently—as a parent who must think about her children, a teacher trying to help students in fear, and as a friend who is living so close to a reality that I can only comprehend in the most generic terms.

I rue the opportunity lost to meet Anna in Bloomington and to plan EWCA's inaugural meeting. That meeting will come eventually. Meanwhile, Anna's presence in the writing center community forces me to reflect upon my assumptions about what it is that I do as a teacher, the questions I address as a writing center scholar, and the initiatives I undertake as President of the NWCA. It is important to admit that many of the issues we clamor the loudest and longest about are trivial when measured using a global yardstick. I intend to go to work tomorrow more humble than I did last Monday. By thinking of colleagues like Anna Challenger who face situations more "contested" than any most of us see in our writing centers in North America, I also don't intend to take myself and my activities too seriously—even my duties as NWCA President.

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Suggestions for your bookshelves

Buranen, Lise, and Alice M. Roy, eds. *Perspectives on Plagiarism and Intellectual Property in a Post-modern World*. Albany, NY: SUNY UP, 1999. 306 pages, soft cover. ISBN: 0-7914-4080-X. \$23.95. (Order from: State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany, NY 12246)

"This book offers a wealth of thinking about the complex and often contradictory definitions surrounding the concepts of plagiarism and intellectual property. The authors show that plagiarism is not nearly as simple and clear-cut a phenomenon as we may think. Contributors offer many definitions and facets of plagiarism and intellectual property, demonstrating that if defining a supposedly 'simple' concept is difficult, then applying multiple definitions is even harder, creating practical problems in many realms." (Taken from the blurb on the book's back cover.) Chapters in the section on writing centers include the following: "Writing Centers and Plagiarism" by Irene Clark; "Writing Centers and Intellectual Property: Are Faculty Members and Students Differently Entitled?" by Carol Peterson Haviland and Joan Mullin; and "Plagiarism, Rhetorical Theory, and the Writing Center: New Approaches, New Locations" by Linda Shamoon and Deborah H. Burns.

Durst, Russel K. *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*. 189 pages, soft cover. ISBN: 0-8141-0742-7. \$22.95 (NCTE members' price: \$18.95). (Order from: NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096; 877-36906283; orders@ncte.org; Stock no. 07427-0015)

Russel Durst concludes from the ethnographic studies upon which the book is based that most students view writing as a tool that might help them be more successful in their chosen careers. They accept instruction, but want it to be pragmatic and directly related to those future careers. However, teachers and tutors of first-year writing would like to awaken in their students an awareness of social and political consciousness while providing assistance with writing skills. In this book, Durst looks at the negotiations between teacher and students that characterize the first-year writing course and offers a pedagogy of "reflective instrumentalism" as solution to the conflict, a pedagogy and approach that may be as useful to tutors as to classroom teachers.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Captain's log: Maiden voyage

Well into my second week as a peer tutor, I met the iceberg that sank my *Titanic*. Confidence ran high in my veins as I boarded ship in the writing center for my 11:00 to 12:00 shift. Pam, a fellow tutor, needed to leave for her class and asked if I would keep an eye on the ESL student she had been working with that morning. "All he needs is to focus his ideas. He has a great topic which I helped narrow down somewhat, and now he is starting to write his introduction," she said. "He'll ask if he needs anything," and off she went. Fatal last words.

Being the proud captain of my newly built ship, *Tutor-Ease*, I steered clear of him for about five minutes but kept a close eye on him just in case he needed my help. However, after the allotted time, I allowed my eagerness to get the best of me. "How's it going?" I asked, hoping to see an SOS signal shining from his eyes.

"Slow, but I am getting there," he nonchalantly responded. I should have tuned in and realized that he was coming along just fine at his own pace. But, instead, my confidence in my position as captain of the ship *Writing Center* overtook me, and I plopped down and introduced myself.

"Can I see what you have done so far?" I queried while reaching for his paper. I read the only three lines he had managed to sketch in the five minutes of silence I had allowed him. "Looks interesting," I said, and then added, "Can you tell me something about your topic?" As he drew a line on his paper and began to explain his ideas for the subject, I noticed his frosty attitude, an

attitude of having done this before and not wanting to do it again. Taking charge of the situation, as a good captain, I encouraged him to do some freewriting exercises. He began, but the frosty attitude turned into a downright icy one. I then had him read aloud what he had written. I found myself finishing his sentences, interjecting my own thoughts, and even changing the direction his paper was drifting. I was not even aware that his iceberg had emerged.

Finally, we collided. My ship *Confidence* began to take on water rapidly and sink. The once-focused student now faced a mess of information on his paper. He had a cluster, a short freewrite, two additional opening paragraphs, and two new thesis statements, neither of which satisfied the assignment. I felt myself going under by the weight of his icy confusion. Suddenly, a life boat in the form of Amy, another tutor in the center, intervened. "How's it going?" the tone of her voice indicated she had overheard our conversation and suspected I was drowning. "I'm his teacher for English 102," she informed me and turned to the student to remind him of his assignment.

Relieved, he crumpled up the writing I had him generate and returned to his original paragraph. Amy then guided my ship *Down and Out* to the harbor of chairs at the back of the writing center and described the student by saying, "He is a very good writer who has plenty of ideas. He could write and talk forever about them, but what he needs to do is focus on one idea and write it down. Now, calm down and refocus. We have a busy schedule this morning.

We need you." I then realized that if it weren't for her, the student would not have written a single useful word, and I would have been lost at sea without a rudder of inspiration to guide me to land.

After Amy left me in the back of the room, I recounted the many mistakes I had made in my encounter with his iceberg. I had forgotten Pam's instructions of leaving him alone unless he requested help. I interrupted the thought pattern he was pursuing and steered him toward things I was more comfortable with. I helped him generate ideas using my newly learned tutoring aides even though he did not need more ideas. Finally, I did not recognize his disgust over the suggestions I was making, suggestions I thought were helping him but, in reality, were not.

The thought of my leading a student so far astray in such a short period of time hit me hard. Soon, I realized if I had only listened to Pam, to the student, to my own sensibilities, I would not have made such a mess of things. Instead, I was so into being a "tutor," into captaining my ship *Newfound Knowledge* that it clouded my ability to help. Unfortunately, this incident had to occur to teach me the valuable lesson of listening, a skill I used more successfully throughout the semester with other clients as I attempted to sail the seas of peer tutoring.

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Lessons through letters: Using tutor-student correspondence to foster learning

Writing centers serve many purposes in any school. They're places where students come to receive extra help with reading and writing assignments, where they can simply "talk out" problems they're having with an essay, and where they learn more about the "culture of college" from a mentor—a tutor—who models behavior, strategies, and study habits leading to enhanced academic performance.

In many ways, then, a center is as effective as are the tutors it employs, and at Chabot, we feel our tutors are truly the heart of our program. Over the last few years, as our Center has grown and expanded its functions, we've also increased our services to move well beyond the traditional one-to-one, or even small group tutoring, sessions associated with writing centers to reach out to those who don't always come to us—or perhaps to those who remain primarily dependent on their instructors as the sole source of help.

In particular, we've targeted our ESL population as one group to work with more closely. Over the past four semesters, our Literary Pen Pal project—dubbed "Lit Pals"—has become an important vehicle—both for the tutors and for the ESL students involved—to learn more about literature, ways of reading, analysis, critical thinking—and about a person from another culture, whose values and perspectives often differ from ours and whose interpretations give new meaning to our own.

I'd like to describe our Literary Pen Pal program more fully to show how

and why it's become such a valuable adjunct to our Center. Let me also say at the outset that, while here at Chabot, we've concentrated on a correspondence between tutors and second-language learners, this kind of activity could easily be modified to a correspondence between writing center tutors and basic writing/developmental student groups. Also, while we target our highest-level ESL classes to include in this project—as they'll be mainstreamed soon and need to hone in on critical thinking type skills—some have suggested writing to the lowest-level ESL classes (although, at that level, problems with fluency might interfere with the communication). Moreover, while the program I'll be describing focuses on fiction—specifically, the novel—the same principles could easily apply to any text (or lesson) used in class.

So . . . what exactly is a Literary Pen Pal program?

It's a semester-long activity that matches each student in a target (ESL, in our case) class to a more proficient peer tutor whose English is native (or near-native) and who has completed at least freshman composition, with a grade of "B" or better. The ESL students, through in-class guidance from their instructor, correspond with their Lit Pal tutor about the novel they've been assigned to read in class. Obviously, the tutors also read the same novel. Then they are encouraged to share questions, opinions, predictions, or reflections about characters, plot, themes, ideas, and writing style in their letter exchange.

I understand that similar types of correspondence projects have been tried at the elementary and high school level—also with marked success—but this program was without precedent at Chabot when we piloted it during the Spring 1995 semester. Our findings—which I'll describe later—mirror that success and thus are very encouraging.

What exactly is the purpose of a Lit Pal program?

Reading logs or journals have been an integral part of many ESL reading and writing programs for some time now. Like diaries, letters can record thoughts, feelings, events, and growth as a reader and thinker. Moreover, as we know, the more students read, talk about what they read, and write about what they read, the more they improve their comprehension, retention, and fluency. Through extra tutor support, we also hope students will become more motivated and confident, and will appreciate reading and writing as useful as well as pleasurable skills. Finally, by regularly writing to a real person—the tutor Lit Pal—students get the opportunity to write purposefully and authentically and to gain feedback from a more proficient and sympathetic peer as they carry on a dialogue about books and related issues.

What do we cover?

To begin, keep in mind that any questions or topics for correspondence can be altered to suit whatever book or lesson is in focus. However, there are some general tips for being Lit Pals as well as the specific lessons we've been

using in our program. In addition to introducing themselves and perhaps explaining why they like to read—or the benefits they’ve derived from reading (as a student and as a more whole person)—tutors should keep in mind the following general guidelines . . . beginning with the point that exchanging pleasantries is fine but they should also try to steer letters away from only personal issues and stay focused on literature as much as possible. (Still, each letter should be personalized even a bit to avoid seeming rushed or robotic.)

Also:

1. **Respond to the content/ideas** of students’ letters, not the grammar or mechanics—although tutors are encouraged to answer any specific grammar-related questions that students might ask.
2. **Keep responses positive** and encouraging, avoiding, for example, chastising the student for not “getting something,” or saying “Don’t,” as in, “Don’t ask me about [whatever].”
3. **Share your own reading experiences** and offer tips for remembering what you’ve read—e.g., annotations, underlines, outlines, summaries.
4. **Try to compare situations, characters,** etc. from the novel to your own culture or family, and ask students to do the same. Also, ask questions focusing on cultural literacy, that is, knowledge of American culture.
5. **Discuss other genres of literature,** e.g., film: How would this be portrayed as a movie? In what ways might it be different on the screen? How would the internal narratives be conveyed? What might a particular character write in his/her diary?
6. **Be sure to answer any questions directly** that students have asked in their letters; otherwise, they feel

ignored or discounted. Also, *ask* questions of them to encourage their thinking about what they’ve read (or will read).

Because we focus on fiction—including basic aspects of analysis and other critical thinking skills—each of the six letters exchanged does have a specific focus. Tutors aren’t limited to these topics, but they should be incorporated in some way into the letters they exchange:

Letter 1 - Introduce yourself,

respond to some of the pointers above, ask students to predict what they think will happen to a character or as the plot unfolds—and WHY.

Letter 2 - Focus on language:

vocabulary, diction, dialect, dialogue, slang, sentence structure, writing style. Ask your Lit Pal to write down his/her favorite line or the most powerful passage in a chapter and to explain why it affected him/her that way. Find a quote or passage that illustrates a particular writing style and explain it. Ask if there are words, expressions, or phrases students don’t understand. (For example, when reading Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*, one ESL student asked about the word “fella.”)

Letter 3 - Focus on major

characters. Ask your Lit Pal to comment on the main character’s (protagonist’s) personality, attitudes, motives, values, and choices. What might the student do differently in the character’s place? Ask the student to describe (physically and emotionally) the main character, or to compare that character with people the student already knows.

Letter 4 - Focus on minor

characters. Ask what role the minor characters play, what their purpose or importance is, what

they contribute, how they’re used. Introduce and discuss the concept of stereotypes in characterization (and in your own culture).

Letter 5 - Focus on conflict.

Who or what is the *antagonist*? What is the major tension or problem that must be overcome? Where does the conflict get most intense? What complications in the plot add to the conflict? Which people or values conflict? What kinds of conflicting values, beliefs, and desires do the students have in their lives that might somehow relate to those in the book?

Letter 6 - Focus on point-of-view.

Ask how the story would be different if it had been told from someone else’s perspective? What specifically would change, and how? What would we not find out about? What would students like to have known that this “voice” didn’t convey?

Please note that even if these topics aren’t covered to the extent that you or I might like (or might well do ourselves), any and all discussion can only help. There are subtle benefits to the conversation going on in the correspondence, even if the focus strays or the explanations weaken.

How can a Literary Pen Pal program be set up?

Here are some tips, based on my own experiences:

1. Work ahead of time with the instructor of the target class. I can’t overstate the importance of planning to ensure the project runs smoothly. One suggestion is to work with a teacher you like, respect, are compatible and comfortable with. Another is to establish and agree upon specific due dates for letter exchange. Determining the logistics (where and when exchange takes place) is also critical to avoid confusion and

lengthy delays later on in the project. Additionally, be sure to get a class list from instructor as soon as possible and match all students with tutors, either in random or instructor-selected pairs. (I've done it both ways, by simply following the alphabetical order on the rosters or by trying to match tutors and students by sex, age, or, in so far as possible, cultural background.) Finally, be sure to determine whether the correspondence is to be done on-line (if computers are available to all students) or, as we do, in letter format.

2. It is just as important to work ahead of time with tutors. For example, in our tutor training class, I introduce the project to the tutors during the first week, explain how it will work, and identify the book to be read, noting that the correspondence will begin a few weeks into the semester. Then, before each letter is written, I brainstorm ideas with the tutors to include in that letter or present a mini-lesson or some review questions on the topic to be covered. Sometimes tutors themselves are unfamiliar with characterization or point-of-view, so the prewriting discussions help them prepare for their end of the correspondence. Finally, before each letter is sent, I review the guidelines, purpose, and focus of the whole Lit Pal program.
3. Our letters are exchanged every week over the twelve weeks in the middle of the term—in other words, the tutors write six letters (one every two weeks), and the ESL students write six letters (one every two weeks). I ask the tutors to save their and their lit pal's letters, which I collect and analyze at the end of the term. We use a "mailbox" in our Writing Center, and have a Thursday 12:00 deadline for both groups. Meeting

the deadline is important; I tell tutors that even if they're absent from the tutoring class the week that we're sending letters (written in class as often as possible), they're still responsible for "mailing" their letter by the deadline.

How do we know the Lit Pal project works?

Anecdotal evidence abounds—from the tutors, the ESL instructors, and the ESL students themselves—attesting to this program's success. The tutors claim:

- It sharpened their own skills of analysis by being responsible to a specific audience.
- By answering students' questions, it increased their own comprehension of the material.
- It increased their awareness of literary structure and terminology.
- Their skills at explanation improved, which of course has implications for other aspects of tutoring.
- Their appreciation for the efforts and struggles of students from other cultures grew, which also leads to better tutoring.

ESL instructors also cite benefits of the Lit Pal Program:

- It led to students' increased comprehension and retention of information.
- It increased their facility with basic critical thinking skills, including paraphrasing, citing specific evidence, and drawing inferences.
- It led to greater fluency and more substantive papers (not just summary/response).
- Students were more eager to contribute to and participate in class discussions.
- Students were more motivated and more involved in their work.
- Students became more independent learners, something we all want to foster.

The ESL students themselves say the participation in Lit Pals made them more comfortable with ideas in the book:

- It increased their willingness to raise hands in class, knowing they had something to contribute to the discussion.
- It gave them more ideas and information to include in papers they wrote.
- It led to a greater understanding of what they'd read.
- It gave them confidence to hear another's nonjudgmental response/comments.
- It was fun to "meet" a native-speaker through the correspondence—and then finally in person at the end-of-the-term potluck party !

Excerpts from three ESL students' anonymous program evaluations illustrate these benefits:

"I think writing to a pen pal is a good idea. Because it's exiting to write a letter to someone and describe in a letter what you are reading. You get serious about reading the book carefully and you want to be correct. On return the pen pal asks questions this make you to look more carefully when you are reading to find the answers. This program makes the student to get more interests in the book."

"I think the activity of writing to a pen pal was very usefull it help me with my writing, because it helped me practice my writing. I also enjoied it very much because my tutor was very nice person that encorrached me to write better."

"I think the pen pal project was very useful to figure out the main idea of the book. When penpal write a letter to me. She asked me very nice questions from the book which was very useful to think about it. I think that is very good way to understand the Navel. Last semester we had a Navel, but I did not

understand as well as in this semester.”

Problem Areas

Any program involving more than one group of students is bound to face problems. Some of the difficulties we've encountered are:

1. More students than tutors, or more tutors than students. In the first case, I ask for tutor volunteers to correspond with two students, reminding them to vary the phrasing of each letter to personalize them. In the second case, I can easily find an alternate project for tutors who don't have a lit pal.
2. ESL students drop out and I'm not notified, so the tutor keeps writing. It's important for the ESL instructor to notify the Lit Pal coordinator of class attrition. If tutors don't receive a response from their pen pal, I generally

advise them to write and inquire if there's been a problem.

3. Deadlines and logistics can also pose problems. If a tutor or student doesn't "mail" the letter on time, the cycle of writing and responding is broken, and with a relatively brief correspondence time it can be difficult to catch up with the schedule of topics to be covered.
4. Students (or tutors!) don't read the material on time. If the student admits to not having read the book, I usually suggest that the tutors encourage continued reading by posing questions to be answered for the next letter.
5. Sometimes we run out of time in the tutoring class to brainstorm ideas for the letters and to actually write them. What we don't accomplish in class must be completed at home, which creates an extra assignment for tutors.

6. Occasionally, the tutor and student lit pals become quite friendly through the correspondence and, as a result, they "chat" more about personal issues than about the novel. Some instructors don't find this a problem at all, in that most learning comes through the exchange of ideas rather than the specific lesson of the week.

We at Chabot have found the Literary Pen Pal Project to be a valuable addition to the services provided by our Writing Center tutors. In fact, we plan to expand the program to serve other groups, for example, our basic writing students. Whether the focus is on literature, nonfiction, or study skills, student-to-student correspondence complements classroom instruction, promotes collaboration, and fosters independence.

Julie Segedy
Chabot College
Haywood, CA

Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar

July 16-17, 1999
North Branch, New Jersey
"Welcoming Grammar Into the Classroom"

For information contact Brock Haussamen, Conference Chair, English Department, Raritan Valley Community College, P.O. Box 3300, Somerville, NJ 08876. Phone: 908-526-1200, ext. 8307; e-mail: bhaussam@rvcc.raritanval.edu

Call for Nominations for the National Writing Centers Association Board

We will need to elect four at-large board members and one secondary school representative. Each term is for two years. Please contact the people you nominate and be sure they are willing to run.

Please send nominations (including name, both institution and home addresses and phone numbers, and e-mail address) to Paula Gillespie, NWCA Secretary, 5918 N. Santa Monica Blvd, Whitefish Bay, WI 53217 or e-mail to paula.gillespie@marquette.edu by July 1, 1999.

Writing Center Coordinator North Harris College; Houston, TX

SALARY: Starting salary range \$25,515 to \$28,392 annually. This is a full-time, twelve-month position.

POSITION DESCRIPTION:

- Assist the Writing Center Director to work with faculty in the English department to develop instructional support linked to English, DS, and ESL programs.
- Assist the Writing Center Director to schedule, train, and mentor professional and peer tutors who work in the English Lab.
- Inventory and maintain all electronic and non-electronic instructional support materials to support faculty members and their current initiatives.
- Develop and maintain an index of instructional support for students and teachers.
- Maintain a working knowledge of instructional software used to support English department courses and assist students using the software.
- Maintain accurate and orderly records to track student contacts and help the Director to prepare semester and annual reports.
- Assist the Learning Center team to train student assistants to support instruction in the English lab.
- Assist with evening, weekend, and other job-related duties as needed.
- Maintain a safe, friendly, and efficient work environment for students, staff, and faculty.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Bachelor's degree in English or reading with knowledge of learning theory, writing theory, reading and/or study skills.

- Experience teaching and/or working in a library or a learning center.
- Word processing skills (opening documents, saving to disk, cut and paste).
- Internet skills (email, accessing information on World Wide Web).
- Ability to learn about the instructional software used in the English lab.
- Knowledge of HTML and web page design helpful, but not necessary.

All inquiries should be directed to:

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES: 281-260-3535

JOB LINE: 281-260-3534; FAX :281-260-3186

Review of material will begin 4/1/99 and remain open until filled. Submit a cover letter, resume, names, addresses, and telephone numbers of three job-related references. For consideration reference #10219 must be included. This posting is also available on the NHC website:

<http://www.nhmccd.cc.tx.us/DistrictOfficeHumanResources/jobs.HTM>

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