THE /W/RITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

...FROM THE EDITOR...

In the "time sure flies when you're having fun" category, I note that as we start Volume 24 of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, we're rapidly heading towards the fall of 2000 when the newsletter will be a quarter-century old. From a hand-typed Volume 1 that a department secretary helped me put together to this desktop-published version that I did on a computer, the newsletter has matured along with the writing center community. What should we do to celebrate next year's 25th anniversary? Suggestions? Perhaps articles with historical perspectives that you'd like to share? Stories from the past? I invite you to think about this and let me know. Or fire up your computer and begin writing.

This issue offers you Suzanne Diamond's reflections on our administrative designations (e.g, faculty, staff, administrator); a review of a book that helps writers working on personal statements; news of forthcoming conferences and NWCA activities, Felicity Hanson's examination of directive and non-directive tutoring, Kim Baker's discussion of the advantages of students reading their papers aloud, and Michael A. Pemberton's always-thoughtful ethics column. And also included are my best wishes for a successful new semester!

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

What's in a title? Reflections on a survey of writing center directors

The traditional reflection on nomenclature asks us: What's in a name? Those of us working in writing centers might adapt the question to explore more fully our own institutional situations. An idyllic theory of self-determination informs what we have come to call "the American Dream," and it informs, as well, aspects of contemporary culture ranging from the broadly visible discourses of self-help to the often hidden discourses of the writers we assist. It is a theory of endless opportunity. Who among us has not yet wrestled with a beginning writer's fragile fantasy that social struggle can be flushed back into yesteryear ("back when there was inequality") or that she, with the proper attitude, "can become anything she wishes to become"? All educational intentions aside, it is a heartless commentator who tramples such tender illusions recklessly, even if maturity demands their eventual scrutiny and abandonment.

The power of an existing hierarchy, however, to sustain its foundational inequities can overwhelm such fragile

dreams of easy ascendancy. This power is asserted through the privilege established actors have to name those not in power. When I suggest that this power is not only left unchallenged but also unwittingly reinforced by ideologies of autonomous self-determination, I might be guilty of co-opting a political commonplace for local purposes. A writer who is labeled "remedial," for instance, can struggle in print with his historical, familial, cultural, and economic predicaments in a manner very self-instructive and therefore, in a

strictly individual sense, very self-improving; if, however, an official of the educational or occupational establishment is vested with the power to brand as simply "non-Standard English" the written outcome of that struggle, this personal experience of self-enhancement can become, in social terms, a violent illusion. As Paulo Freire has taught us, a hostile naming authority can easily deny even the basic validity of a marginalized person's or group's ideas. The "intellectual activity of those without power," he insists, "is always characterized as non-intellectual" (27).

None of this is news, of course, to the writing center community. Apparently an altruistic set, we have spilled plenty of ink expressing, with intelligence and indignation, these circumstances as they are faced by many students we see on a daily basis. Unfortunately, we sometimes fail to apply this dark reality to our own predicaments in higher education. What is in a name, specifically in the name applied to our roles within the institutions we serve? What kinds of occupational functions are stipulated and frozen in place by our designations sometimes as faculty, sometimes as administrators, and sometimes as staff? Like our students, we cannot pipe-dream away the stubborn fact that very purposeful occupational distinctions are specified by such terms; colleges and their departments—even, if not especially, those whose members profess radically anti-hierarchical views on paper—have in place elaborate mechanisms, from color-coded parking decals to separate-but-equal mailroom arrangements, that convey, against all published eloquence to the contrary, that the social hierarchies within which we teach are a matter of articulate and ritualistic obsession in day-to-day actuality.

In the spring of 1999, and spurred by an institutional experience I shall recount, I conducted an on-line survey of writing center directors which, I initially had hoped, would reveal some

basic and standard patterns among writing center directors' titles, contractual identities, and senses of effectiveness in their institutions. I must confess at the outset, and in the second-language of ethnography, that I was "a participant observer," one who could not claim objectivity even if she believed in it, and one who sought the experiences of peers more for the healing powers of a support group than as supporting data for incontrovertible truths. The digression into my own experience becomes relevant at this point, after which I mean to resume my discussion of both the power of institutional naming and the ways in which a discourse of self-help is an inadequate, if well-intended, match for that power.

In the fall of 1998, I began my second—and present—full-time writing center director position. This position is at a liberal arts college of some 1,300 students in a quaint southeastern Ohio town several hours' distance, in any direction, from a major city. The contract I signed was not the ideal enticement for relocation, but I signed it with opened eyes; it was a renewable faculty contract through the English Department, one which the MLA job advertisement hinted could give way to a "possible tenure track" line. Because I saw great potential in the college itself, in my license to shape a program within it, and in the surrounding community, I accepted this position along with its invisible contingencies. In what seems now an astounding leap of faith—for no promises had been made and thus none could be broken—I began my job with that magnified and fragile faith in my own individual agency. I assumed that my collegial energy, writing center vision, and professional visibility would bring to the center, and thus to my position, the eventual enfranchisement implied by a tenure conversion. I did the things we all recognize as the basic steps involved in professionalizing a writing lab. I introduced a tutor training seminar and encouraged recursive, in addition to the traditional one-time drop-in,

student visits. I invited professors from across the curriculum to offer discipline-related talks to tutors about writing; I encouraged tutors to propose sessions at the National Peer Tutors' Conference, proposals which eventually got accepted; I coordinated with ESL instructors to offer tutoring sessions directly linked to their weekly classroom activities; I participated in a roundtable discussion on writing centers in liberal arts colleges at the CCCC in Atlanta. I could go on, but my audience can fill in the blanks. Such a professionally visible center, I reasoned, would warrant an institutionally embraced director.

At the beginning of the Spring semester, my department chair evaluated my work as "above average" in every academic category and "exemplary" in terms of college service; responding to a mid-year nudge from the college provost, I asked my department to deliberate about this tenure-line conversion, and, if they found they supported it, to request it in a memo to the administration. They did so, supporting me unanimously. In April of 1999, however, that brand of fate with which so many in higher education are becoming familiar dealt me a jarring dose of corporate reality. In that language that effaces individual agency, the responding memo insisted pithily that the writing center director could not become tenure-track because this was an administrative—and not a faculty—function. Now all is fair, perhaps, in love, war, and that "pocketful of mumbles such as promises"; this is no victim story. The opaqueness of that term, "administrative," was what compelled my attention. Marginalization, I observed, could be packaged and sold in a simple adjective, one that foreclosed upon the very "possibility" of a postponement or rethinking of this transition. Given no performative or fiscal cataclysm, I could renew my annual faculty contract six more times. Perhaps by way of consolation, I was offered the option of signing an administrative contract either immediately or

when I had exhausted the faculty contract's renewals. I could not decide whether this weird turn of events was simply sinister way of rescinding the "possibility" in the original advertisement or whether the alternative contract was an acknowledgment that my work was indeed valued, a personal dam against the impersonal tide of tight budgets. This is where things stand as I write this essay, and this was the confused and isolated impasse that prompted me to survey other writing center directors.

Like many academics, I am the perennial good student; an occupational setback feels like a bad report card, not only a vocational but also a personal judgment. The healing promise of community prompted me to surmount silent self-chastisement and reach out to other writing center directors with the questions I was now asking myself. Therefore, I posed the following questions to writing center directors subscribed to WCenter: What is your title? What type of contract do you hold? What is your educational background, degree, and field of concentration? How do you feel about your contractual definition? What relationship, if any, do you see between your contractual definition and your institutional effectiveness? In closing, I asked respondents to share with me any additional information they thought was relevant.

Before I reflect generally on the preliminary results of this survey, I wish to share my own responses to its questions. Like many professors who have gravitated to writing concentrations, I have a Ph.D. in English literature. I wrote my dissertation, a cultural study of heredity themes—what I deemed "textual eugenics"—in the fictional plots of Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence, at Rutgers University. But the great divide between literature and composition often complained about or insisted upon by various commentators has never been a part of my lived experience. How could these fields feel

separate when they have been so contiguous for so long in my actual practice? From my third year of study in the literature Ph.D. program, and straight through all phases of my dissertation process, I taught various courses in the Rutgers Writing Program. The first four years of this teaching were spent as a teaching assistant and full-time student; the following four were spent as a full-time instructor and writing program administrator as I wrote my dissertation during winter, spring, and summer recesses. I have had the good fortune to work both with "literature professors" who emphasized authors' revisionary processes and "composition professors" whose own published work epitomized the potential of the well-crafted text itself.

What I am saying, in short, is that the ideological distinction between literary faculty and writing administration has never been practically or philosophically real for me, except as a tool in the hands of those with power over me, a tool for the allocation of subtle privileges often only hinted at by differently colored parking decals or differently situated departmental mailboxes! Am I therefore arguing that nominal designations such as "writing" or "administration" lack the power to deprive me of my self-definition as a professional? Certainly not! As Freire has taught us: The intellectual activity of those without power can be characterized, in one pithy adjective, as non-intellectual.

So far, I have gotten sixty-six respondents to my survey. I recognize that this does not even approach a representative pool. I also acknowledge that, in combination with my acknowledged role as "participant observer" and as a function of the inevitable blindness built into the questions I have asked or failed to ask, the size of this pool limits its function as hard "data." More important than the survey as a mechanism, I have found, are the responses from the persons who

have been willing to converse with me about the confession I offered and questions I raised. I have found, in general, that the issue of how writing center directors are institutionalized in their local workplaces, and the question of how effective they felt in these settings was a charged arena for many respondents, one about which we should talk more.

Underscoring the insufficiency of this "data," I shall nevertheless review it generally before discussing some of the more qualitative ideas respondents expressed. Most preliminary respondents—for reasons that might prompt additional inquiry—were tenured or tenure-track faculty (39 out of 66); the next largest group held administrative contracts (14 of 66); a third group were on staff contracts (10 of 66); and a fourth group (3 of 66) were considered faculty, but at institutions that had no tenure system. Two respondents on administrative contracts up to this point, were to be redefined in tenure-line positions this fall, and one additional respondent previously on a staff contract, likewise, was about to begin a tenure-line position. In general, there was a high level of discussion about institutions that were either recon figuring or at least considering the reconfiguration of the writing center director position to create greater stability and perhaps to recruit more institution-dedicated candidates.

To review this feedback with educational degree in mind, 26 of the 39 tenure-line respondents reported having a Ph.D.; one had an Ed.D.; and nine did not disclose. Four of the directors on administrative contracts had a Ph.D; one had an Ed.D.; interesting to note is that these five respondents with doctoral degrees who were on non-tenure administrative lines were at research universities, and some of them reported feeling compensated, in some sense, by the regional and/or cultural access this location implied; nine addi-

tional administrators had M.A.s or M.F.A.s; ten directors on staff contracts had M.A.s or M.F.A.s, and this last group included one director who ran the center on an adjunct/part-time basis. Three respondents with Ph.D.s were faculty at institutions where there was no tenure system, and they reported feeling contractually on par with other faculty there.

For the most part, the emotional tenor of the responses I received was sympathetic and/or furtively confidential. One director now on a tenured contract asked me to telephone, and when I did, this person imparted to me that after many years and long hours unofficially running the writing center, tenure was finally secured in a judicial settlement. Some tenure-line directors expressed that while they were happy with their contracts, they sometimes needed to delegate much of the center's day-to-day function in order to attend to more "professional" matters such as publishing and presenting their research, and thus they sometimes felt detached from the teaching that actually happened in centers they directed. Most on tenure lines, however, underscored that their identity as bona fide faculty members contributed to their effectiveness in working with other faculty on their campuses.

Among some members on administrative and staff contracts, there were some parallel and some altogether different anxieties. Some spoke of feeling "ambivalent" about the tenure question, worrying that the pressure to perform "professionally," through traditional scholarly publication and the like, placed additional pressures on a workload that already seemed quite hefty. On the other hand, some chafed over their interactions with some faculty, recounting weird glances they received when they attended faculty meetings, or atmospheres of disdain for writing in general, often observed in their departmental politics. One re-

spondent confessed wryly that he could never envision his particular English Department making a tenure-line position available to a writing specialist.

A backdrop for so many of these sympathetic exchanges I had was the insecure—even though central—position of writing as well as writing centers in many institutions. Many described duties pieced together from a portion of this department's teaching load and a segment of that operating budget, hybrid positions whose complicated financial derivations and reporting structures must feel at times like fiscal forms of homelessness. One administratively defined respondent confessed that, back when she had been a part-timer in the writing center and a director position became available, she had been counseled by well-meaning full-time colleagues not to expect an interview. The institution, she was informed, sought a Ph.D. and particularly wanted to recruit someone from outside the institution. Promotion from within, she understood, would be a last resort. This institution advertised in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* for a Ph.D. and offered a renewable contract, but their pool of applicants for the position as it was contractually defined was smaller than anticipated. Not surprisingly, within this scant and variously qualified applicant pool the respondent's M.A. and part-time/insider insider became less of an obstacle. She was offered the position and accepted it gratefully. I sensed that many of the respondents with whom I communicated had made similar kinds of good-natured peace with their sometime status as distant if not poor cousins to English, or Communications, Student Life Divisions, or even established writing programs in their institutions.

With one of my respondents, the emotional charge occasioned by the questions I was asking was downright palpable. This respondent, who was

on a staff contract, argued convincingly that many non-tenure track directors were out there, but they would be reluctant to participate in such a survey. This sounded intuitively accurate, but the reasons for that reluctance, I thought, invited nothing so much as further inquiry. This respondent claimed to know why other writing center directors classified as non-tenure-track or non-faculty failed to respond; the problem, she posited—in a tone that seemed angry though it might not have been—was that the survey itself was biased in favor of tenure. Results would be skewed, this director predicted, because the survey implied that tenure-track was better than non-tenure track. (This is a "bias" I must own, but I attribute it to humble concerns such as job security and academic freedom rather than just the kind of occupational hierarchy I have deplored earlier.) Illogically, by my lights, but a with a clear conviction I needed to trust, this director rationalized that not having a tenure-track position kept a wider range of future options—particularly options outside the academy—opened to a writing center director. (In this regard, this respondent's posture mirrored several other administrative or staff directors who felt "relieved" from the professional obligations, such as publishing, that tenure-track definitions could impose. What one might view as occupational marginalization, I speculated, another—for reasons that require further probing—might view as occupational "relief," a widening, rather than a constriction, of career options.) I attempted to understand more fully this respondent's reasoning, and asked how having tenure foreclosed upon non-academic options, and additionally whether it was writing center directors' tenure in specific or the concept of tenure in general that she found problematic. Before she stopped responding to my questions entirely, she replied that she had reservations about tenure in general.

My interactions with this particular respondent troubled me more than other exchanges with colleagues on staff or administrative contracts, because it caused me to reflect on the instability of what had seemed defining features of academic marginalization: the license to detach from wider professional venues; the implicit definition as policy implementers rather than as traditional educators; the absence of job security. I worried about the potentially isolating consequences of our separation from field-specific public discourse, and about our shortage of shared standards against which to measure the costs and benefits of occupational bargains we presently strike on a highly individualistic basis. The respondent who observed my own "bias" seemed an ally, at least in potential, for

against these shortsighted communities themselves. One needs only to glance across the headlines of any publication directed at college and university workers. Shrinking resources are shrinking the reserves of collegiality in higher education. I am not given to rash apocalypse, but it requires no expertise in composition to see this kind of writing on the wall; our failures, as writing center theorists and as compositionists, to collaborate—not only about the plights of the students we serve but also about our own local modes of contractual naming and institutional affiliation—will result in an ultimate and abject form of manageability. In turn, and perhaps with the darkest form of poetic justice, managed compositionists will exert an inevitable fallout against a professorate

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What kinds of occupational functions are stipulated and frozen in place by our designations sometimes as faculty, sometimes as administrators, and sometimes as staff?

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familiar social commentators who turn a cold, corporate eye on higher education, who rationalize the impulse to abolish the tenure system in its totality by recourse to generalizations about individual abuses they can rarely document, who curiously never pursue the more focused reforms that might prevent individual abuses and yet retain some vestige of academic security and freedom as we know it. Characterizing this candid respondent's reaction simply as "sour grapes" is tempting but finally facile and destructive; any failure to promote the kind of dialogue she and I had begun, in fact, continues our isolation, hence exacerbates our vulnerability.

I offer the somber generalization that the isolated individuals whom relevant communities fail to embrace sometimes take deadly aim, not against the institutions that profit most directly from their own isolation, but instead

class that had elected to draw in its skirts and harden its hierarchies instead of seeing professional salvation in a wider definition of literary community.

Nancy Grimm works admirably against these very trends in higher education that would harden class-boundaries between the professor and the manager, as she exhorts the writing center community to participate more actively in the increasing professionalization of composition studies. Bemoaning the paucity of writing center scholarship, even within the pages of venues such as the *CCC*, Grimm likens the role of the writing center to the psychic confines of pre-feminist housewives and mothers. Paradoxically at the very center of the academy, metaphorically figured as family, the writing center director, in Grimm's formulation, keeps an inexplicable silence about what she is positioned to know, about the father's and

children's pressures alike, as the metaphor might extend. Through the lens of this metaphor, then, the shortage of scholarly publication from writing center workers is analogous to the peace-keeping silence of the traditional wife. "By avoiding a clearer articulation of their own mission, particularly in regard to cultural differences manifested in literacies," Grimm claims, "writing centers protect both themselves and composition teachers from the anxiety of change" (532). Implicitly, for Grimm, this familial situation must come to an end for the sake of the children. These metaphorical children-as-students—no less than what "we" are able to "know" about them—suffer as a result of well-intended maternal tact. She observes that:

> Writing center positioning contributes to institutional *ignorance about the students' engagement— or lack of engagement*—with academic literacy. To move differently, however, creates anxiety because writing centers are supposed to suppress knowledge that challenges culturally accepted norms. They are supposed to make do with what they have, to keep the home tidy and put a perky ribbon in their hair when visitors come. (532, emphasis mine)

Trampling with admirable impunity over the boundaries between hallowed and marginalized social theories— from the Frankfurt School to the Self-Help School, as one must when extant explanatory language needs to be outgrown—Grimm assembles a diagnosis and treatment for the malady she sees. Writing centers, she argues, must shed their "sticky history" of remediation as others define it in order to begin a more authentic articulation of the literacy phenomena they are positioned to observe. As a family-systems theorist might advise that hypothetical woman who is sick and tired of donning perky hair ribbons, Grimm counsels writing center directors to take the following steps: 1) focus change on the self by defining individual priorities and beliefs; 2) share more by speaking

publicly about what writing center work positions us to speculate about. This is carefully considered and well-intended advice, and I find myself seeing new possibilities in Grimm's article each time I review it. But a skepticism prevails in my weary heart despite the disciplined efforts I have made and shall continue to make in response to Grimm's invitation. Is it possible that the material conditions that motivate and make possible continued scholarship and public speech might be eroded or erased altogether by contractual formulations of our work that "relieve" us of such "pressures"? Is it too dark to suppose that the family metaphor for higher education is dangerously benevolent? Grimm herself quotes Brian Street's observation:

> "[W]hen we participate in the language of an institution, we become positioned by that language[;] in that moment of assent, myriad relationships of power, authority, status are implied and reaffirmed" (526, Grimm).

Her purposes, inevitably, have permitted her to see only certain applications of that observation. For Grimm the central application of this formulation is that it points to our individual and collective failures to consult our own experiences with beginning writers, and to speak authentically about these experiences as an alternative to having our "missions" imposed by external, relatively uninformed forces within our institutional communities.

I would argue, however, that Street's formulation has at least one other application. The "language of an institution" inevitably includes its contractual language for defining us, our missions, and our terms of evaluation in our writing center work. When we fail to recognize this, we mirror the tragic if motivated posture of the hypothetical and so-called "remedial" student with whom my essay begins, the student who proclaims, against all evidence to the contrary, and in a language that can easily be deemed "non-Standard," that inequality was a problem only in the

past or that, with the proper attitude, we "can become anything we wish to become." One wishes to believe, and one is loath to impose cynicism upon hopeful creatures. But ripping the perky ribbons from our hair sometimes involves questioning well-intended motivational speeches if they pay short shrift to the shaping—if not crushing— force of social pressures. Considering the knowledge-making and professionalization of writing centers entails taking a closer look at how their work is named and delineated within local institutions. Admittedly, my preliminary study has only scratched the surface of the investigation that must ensue, and shame-shedding theoretically-informed personal narratives might be a better thing for us to look at than mechanistic surveys, though both have their utility.

This criticism on my part, in some sense, mirrors the classic misgiving voiced by materialist social theorists about individualistic agendas such as the family-systems discourse Grimm utilizes; when we focus exclusively upon how individuals within problematic family systems must change their own behavior (an insistence which is, itself, founded upon the tacit ideological belief that they always can do so) we may fail to acknowledge sufficiently the way certain "families" are socially, educationally, culturally and economically positioned to experience the "dysfunctions" from which they suffer.

To examine this another way, we might return to the silent mother in Grimm's familial formulation of higher education and adjust the metaphor. Though we have often heard horror stories to the contrary, the family with a reasonable amount of interpersonal elasticity might engender the presumable rebellion of a once-silent mother's foray into autonomous speech about what she is positioned to "know." As the adage holds, for better and for worse, "you can choose your friends, but not your family." The very same foray into self-knowing dis-

course by a hired person, however— this time the nanny, or the maid, or a cashier, or an administrator on a renewable contract, or an adjunct staff person, every one of these positioned to see the unacknowledged and say the unspoken—might impose a different ending on Grimm's story of ascendancy through discourse. The grim underside of the American Dream that "you can do anything you set your mind to" is that what cramped individuals need to do most is to get alone rather than get together; within this happy if questionable logic, Equality itself is real for those who can "make lemonade out of their lemons."

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South Central Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
March 24-25, 2000
Fort Worth, Texas.
"The Year 2000 Challenge: Learning from our Past, Planning for our Future"

Co-chairs are Jeanette Harris (Texas Christian University) and Lady Falls Brown (Texas Tech University). Please send one-page proposals for individual 20-minute individual presentations or 90-minute panel presentations to Lady Falls Brown, Director, University Writing Center, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409. Proposals must be received by November 1, 1999, to be considered. Questions about proposals may be addressed to L.Brown@ttacs.ttu.edu or J.Harris@tcu.edu.

Conference on the Teaching of Writing

October 22, 1999
Fall River, MA
"Writing on the Edge of the Millennium"
Keynote speaker: Ron Suskind

For conference information, contact Debra Deroian, Bristol Community College, 777 Elsbree Street, Fall River, MA 02720. Phone: 508-678-2811, ext. 2445; fax: 508- 675-2294; e-mail: dderoian@bristol.mass.edu

Learning Assistance Association of New England (LAANE)

October 29, 1999
Burlington, MA
"Education: Connecting to the Future"
keynote speaker: Martha Casazza

For further information, please contact Susan King, University of Southern Maine, P. O. Box 9300; Portland, ME 04104; phone: 207-780-4681; susank@usm.maine.edu

The Grad School Handbook: An Insider's Guide to Getting In and Succeeding, by Richard Jerrard and Margot Jerrard. New York: Perigee/Berkley Publishing Group, 1998. $14.00.

Reviewed by Carole S. Appel, University of New Hampshire (Durham, NH)

Always in my mind while helping any student revise a piece of work brought to the writing center is the physician's admonition: "First, do no harm." In no case is this precept more important to me than in counseling someone who is writing the personal essay for a graduate school application. Some things are routine: leading the student to locate her thesis, drawing her out about her strongest qualities when none seems evident in the draft before us, or teaching her how to proofread her own writing. But what do we do about an essay that is original but quirky, that amuses us but may lack the substance the graduate school faculty is seeking? How does a student who dropped out for a few years and resume school in his late twenties account for the gap in his academic chronology? What kind of mental checklist can we use in scanning a draft to see whether it includes the essential information the student should be providing? Where should we start with a student who has not begun to write yet?

Help in answering these questions is provided by the authors of *The Grad School Handbook,* Richard Jerrard, who until recently was graduate advisor in the mathematics department of the University of Illinois, and Margot Jerrard, who wrote and edited material for the university administration. In this useful reference book about the graduate school experience, the chapter on the personal essay supplies nine examples of "essays that work," as well as excellent advice to the applicant on writing the essay portion of the graduate school application. The chapter deals with how to explain the occasional poor semester or account for gaps, and it provides examples of both good and bad paragraphs from actual essays, including anonymous quotations from "two whose essays wrecked

their chances." It also gives strategies for writing the first draft and deciding what to adjust in subsequent ones. Essays include samples for programs in English, Slavic, urban planning, law, history, and psychology.

The book's advice on how to think about one's strengths and weaknesses in preparing to write the essay will be useful not only to students but also to consultants who want to add to their tutoring approaches. A chapter on why to go to graduate school in the first place will also help undergraduates decide what to include in the personal essay, while chapters on how to succeed once you are enrolled should be useful to students who are preparing for a new kind of academic experience and to current writing lab consultants in their own graduate lives.

In research for this handbook, Jerrard and Jerrard interviewed students from a wide range of disciplines and gathered a diverse selection of winning-essay samples. They write with wit and humor, and are often refreshingly blunt. Consider the story, in the chapter called "You Are In," about Edward, a graduate student with "fairly rigid ideas about how things should be done." The professor for whom Edward is a teaching assistant gives him a sheaf of papers and tells him that Friday's class will be canceled, since the professor will be out of town, and the papers are to be graded by Monday morning. Edward throws the papers down on the professor's desk and refuses to grade them, telling the department's associate head that it is immoral for a professor to skip a class and that he wants nothing to do with it. The Jerrards write: "The Associate Head told Edward that it was not his job to set moral standards for the profession; his job was to grade papers,

and if he refused, another student could be found to do the job. Edward graded the papers. The only thing he accomplished was to get himself known as something of a crackpot."

A realistic point of view makes the book appealing from the start, beginning with chapters that deal with getting information about graduate schools, decided where to apply, and paying for one's studies. The volume should be a good addition to any writing lab's reference shelf and can help us remain confidence that our advice to students is in line with what admissions committees look for in an applicant's personal essay.

Writing Center Ethics

comings of this practice may not be quite so severe as they might at first appear.

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NWCA News from Eric Hobson, President

The 1999-2000 academic year is beginning, and with it comes the many concomitant activities and commitments that are realities for writing center personnel working at all educational levels. There are staff to train, files to update, workshops to retool, courses to get up and running, and meetings to schedule and attend. All of these activities are among the many signals that we receive annually telling us that the green flag has fallen and this year's race has officially started.

September is also the time when the National Writing Centers Association (NWCA) steps back into a more public presence, making its activities known through such venues as this monthly column, upcoming conferences, and other information outlets. Since the last installment of this column, several developments have occurred within NWCA that deserve mention because they are activities that you should soon notice the results of.

At the NWCA Conference in Bloomington, the NWCA Board announced that to better meet the needs of the NWCA membership, it was establishing a new publication, the NWCA Newsletter. Kelly Lowe, of Mt. Union College, shouldered the challenge of editing this new information source and will mail the first issue to NWCA members in late August or early September (given the unanticipated hurdles that arise when getting a new publication edited, printed, and

mailed, we're leaving a bit of wiggle room on the mailing date). This newsletter will provide NWCA members timely news and information of interest about writing center issues in general and about NWCA specifically. Kelly intends for this inaugural volume's two issues (Sept 99 & Feb 00) to include feature articles about writing centers doing innovative (or, just interesting or unusual) projects, conference announcement and summaries, news and notes, funding source suggestions, among other topics. This newsletter provides the writing center community one more important resource (and, I encourage everyone to make sure that their NWCA membership is current in order to ensure that they receive the newsletter).

The NWCA Competitive Research Grant, announced last November, and for which NWCA was able to place a call for proposals to the community last March, has generated proposals for consideration by the Research Grant Committee. This group is working diligently to respond to each proposal in as short a time as possible and with the type of detailed response to make funding possible. This grant exists, in part, because of the generous support of Joan Mullin and Al DeCiccio, editors of *The Writing Center Journal* who pledged $1,000 in matching funds to establish the grant.

Plans for the 5th NWCA Conference are nearly complete and details will ap-

pear both here and in the NWCA Newsletter ASAP. This much is certain: the conference will be hosted in Baltimore, Maryland, in the Fall of 2000, by the Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association (MAWCA), and chaired by Terry Riley of Bloomsburg University with the able assistance of the MAWCA board. Conference details, including calls for proposals and other important information, will appear in all NCTE publications, as well as electronically on the NWCA website:

<http://departments.colgate.edu/diw/
NWCA.html>

Finally, the NWCA Board will meet during the NCTE Conference in Denver on Saturday, November 20 from 4:45-6:00 pm. This meeting is open to anyone interested and, given the time of day, will include refreshments. At this meeting, I look forward to welcoming new members of the NWCA Executive Board and handing over the NWCA President's gavel to Michael Pemberton who will begin the tradition of a two-year term of office.

May this academic year be another exciting and rewarding experience for us all as individuals and as a community. If there is anything that I can do to help you in your activities, please don't hesitate to contact me.

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Are you about to get lost?

We don't want to lose you, but we might have to if your subscription is about to expire. Please check the subscription expiration date listed above your name on your mailing label on page 16. If you have any questions about your subscription, please contact Mary Jo Turley, the newsletter's assistant editor, who handles all subscription matters. (She also really does

so almost faster than a speeding bullet and might even be able to leap tall buildings.) You can contact her as follows:

e-mail: mjturley@purdue.edu
phone: 765-494-7268
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TUTORS' COLUMN

The Socratic method, modeling, and collaboration: Theory and practice in the writing center

After working in writing centers where students walk in for brief, casual tutoring sessions, early this year I had the opportunity to work long-term with a student I shall call Phil. For me, the four months that Phil and I spent discussing writing brought into sharp focus the differences in tutoring methods. What I learned has enabled me to better articulate my tutoring philosophy, which centers around my belief that tutoring must be a collaborative, dialogic process, and that a writing assistant should understand the theories of the Socratic and modeling methods and also practice them. In this article, I define my understanding of the two theories and explain how working with Phil helped me see clearly the practical merits of each.

The two tutoring methods seem contradictory, one discouraging assistant input, the other encouraging it. The Socratic method is a minimalist approach that requires the writing assistant, through questioning, to help student writers express themselves and learn to correct their own mistakes. The assistant uses active listening techniques ("So in this paragraph you're saying. . . ." "Do you mean . . .?") to elicit answers from the writer. This is called a non-directive approach. In contrast, the modeling technique is considered by many to be too directive, and it can be if students are not expected to help themselves. Assistants may help students develop a thesis statement or topic sentences; they may question evidence or suggest a better word. Debate continues among writing assistants, center directors, and theorists about the ethical concerns of directive tutoring. "Perhaps our central ethical quandary involves how to limit the amount and kind of help we give students, which derives out of a larger question of whether knowledge resides in the individual mind or is socially constructed" (3) writes Steve Sherwood, coordinator of peer tutors for TCU's writing center. Socrates thought he knew the answer, but the question is still being asked. Since there is no consensus on the "right" way to tutor, writing assistants must decide for themselves what methods best fit the goal of helping students express themselves through writing.

From my own standpoint, the student's interests are best served when combinations of modeling and Socratic methods are used together. My own experience shows me that modeling gives students a clear picture of the sort of writing instructors expect, the sort of writing some students have never before been required to produce. Initially, they can use the models suggested, or parts of them, and start to form their own ideas more coherently. Sherwood writes that in one example, "Through what amounted to imitation, the writer assimilated portions of the tutor's writing style into his own. . . . The help the tutor gave . . . had a lasting, positive impact on the writer" (3). This might sound intrusive, but the fact is, we synthesize things we like and trust, then use them. And presumably a writer visits the writing center to discover how to communicate his or her ideas most efficiently and convincingly, and to the largest audience. Modeling offers tools, and questioning offers the opportunity to use them.

As a dedicated writing assistant, I see my work with student writers as a collaborative process, with give-and-take on both sides. The idea of being a "fix-it shop" is anathema for the simple reason that without hands-on experience, students will never learn how to correct their own mistakes, which means the center becomes a place with a revolving door. In addition, there are clearly ethical concerns about fixing a student's paper—who "owns" the paper, or whose ideas appear in it—but a serious writing assistant keeps this in mind. That's why the collaborative process—the assistant-student discussion of the how's and why's of writing—is crucial to students being able to improve their own work.

I find collaborative dialogue is often prompted by role modeling. Thus, instead of explaining writing how's and why's, which would seem to confirm the Socratic notion of innate knowledge at least in the tutor, assistants should demonstrate their own use of grammar manuals or other resources in the center. When I admit that I don't know all the answers, I hear a sigh of relief from the student. As a role model, I keep a handbook on the table and refer to it for anything I am not sure about, or I reach for whatever text provides answers. I also ask students to look up questions; then we discuss or apply our findings. I value the chance to model for students where and how to find information on our bookshelves, for not only do I increase my own knowledge, but students grow in confidence when they can get answers for themselves and feel less intimi-

dated by rows of resources. This is how I began my meetings with Phil, a writer who needed help.

I can best explain my support of balancing the modeling and Socratic methods by relating my experience with Phil. Phil is an older, minority student with a keen desire to learn. When Phil and I started working together, he wanted to improve his writing so that he would feel confident about the written portion of the LSAT. We agreed to meet twice a week. At first we went through some textbooks to review writing samples, brainstorming methods, building an argument, etc. When Phil brought in class writing assignments, we would discuss portions that had been done well and analyze what made them successful. Because we met over a period of months, we had the chance to work on a wide range of topics. At first, we went over higher order concerns such as forming an argument and where to find support for it, how to connect thesis and topic sentences, and organization. We also worked on practical elements—comma rules, subject-verb agreement, fragments and run-ons, transitions, etc. In place of an awkward construction, I would suggest types of sentences that would work better, and we continued to analyze why one sentence or word was better than another. Had I used the Socratic method early on, I would have been asking Phil to produce knowledge that was not then his, and we would have both become frustrated.

As Phil's knowledge and understanding of writing increased, I used the Socratic method more often. I was glad to move on to this way of tutoring because it required Phil to put theory into practice and so reinforce his new knowledge; it allowed him to form his own thesis statements, apply grammar rules, or use elements from past discussions to form something new. Most importantly, his attempts helped him to gain confidence as a writer. My questions could be more oblique: "What's happening in this section?" "Read this part again and see if you notice anything." It was exciting to observe the transition when Phil began self-correcting as he read aloud. "Hmm, wait," he would muse, "what am I trying to say?" or, "I need to be more specific here." One day he announced, "Wait 'til you see my transitions in this paper!" Phil did not pass the LSAT, but he felt he was successful on the written portion.

Phil and I continued to meet all semester. He worked hard. His use of formal language and his writing skills continually improved; they aren't perfect, but he is aware of his growing ability to express himself in writing. Our collaboration showed me that initial use of the modeling technique provided Phil with information he did not at first possess. Later, use of the Socratic method allowed Phil to practice his new knowledge and to hone his skills. Finally, when something was not quite right, he became able to recognize it and correct it himself. Subsequent discussion of an error enlarged his knowledge base and gave him more pieces to use the next time. Phil's efforts toward mastery were inspiring.

I do not usually work long-term with students, but even so, I take time to discuss writing how's and why's as we go, since logical reasons will tend to remain with them. To this end, I may model by drawing diagrams or using arithmetical analogies, for such concrete examples help abstract ideas gel, allowing student writers to better grasp what to work toward. Thus, throughout a session, I model, question, use active listening, just listen, and allow "wait" time where the seconds tick by and the student must break the silence by offering some sort of solution or other response. Collaboration and dialogue are vital to empowering student writers. At one end of the spectrum, marking up papers with corrections does not allow writers to take ownership of their work, to take responsibility for their learning, or to gain confidence in their own abilities. The burden falls upon the assistant to produce error-free papers—time after time. Yet at the other end of the spectrum, sticking too rigidly to the minimalist, Socratic method can produce frustration instead of growing confidence. Somewhere in the middle is where collaboration occurs; a judicious amount of modeling supplies student writers with necessary basic information, while Socratic questioning requires them to practice with it. Certainly in my experience, I have found that balancing these methods best serves the student, the mission of the writing center, and my commitment to help students grow.

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The reading aloud "aaahhhaaa": Helping students redirect their emotion and reclaim their writing

Lisa, huffing, puffing, and breathing fire, stormed in to see me as a faculty tutor in the Writing Center at the request of her developmental writing teacher. Her body language and sarcasm alerted me to an underlying problem. I responded like the veteran writing teacher that I am: What is your assignment? Where are you in the process? Specifically, what would you like me to address? Lisa sat as far away from me as possible, never made eye contact, and answered my last question with a sarcastic "Tell me what *his* comments mean so I can pass *this* paper."

In order to diffuse the anger, dilute the attitude, and (gulp) save Lisa from her bad writing and failing grades, I immediately (without a writing utensil in hand or within twenty miles) began to read the words. Secure in my approach, I was confident that the silence would diffuse some of Lisa's anger; however, the ire persisted in Lisa's body language: no eye contact and remote physical distance. Nevertheless, Lisa did write down ideas as I began to make comments. I celebrated her initiative in choosing to be "part of the process" as she wrote down my suggestions. In my zeal to secure her cooperation, I neglected her aloofness and apathy to the writing process; she was only going through the motions. I had accepted her physical and emotional distance because I was convinced that I was letting her be angry.

When Lisa returned a week later with the graded paper, angrier still because the tutoring did not help her pass the project, I felt guilty because I knew I had blundered. Oh, no, not because I accepted responsibility for her grade, but because I had been too busy, at my first meeting with Lisa, reading her paper. I neglected to address her anger/attitude and the ways they were inhibiting her in the revision process. What to do besides commiserate with Lisa, rationalize my writing process? Amy Blackman suggests: "Flexible thinking means always being attentive to whether your technique is effective; it means being unafraid to try other tactics until you find one that works" (9). The technique I chose to use with Lisa at our second meeting has influenced the way I tutor students in the Writing Center, as well as my own students.

At the second visit, I asked Lisa to read her paper aloud to me. This method had numerous advantages. First, having her read aloud afforded me the opportunity to watch and listen, to gather information about her: What is the student's physical demeanor, tone of voice, voice volume? These observations allowed me to engage the student in dialogue about her writing and the tutoring process, before the student had a chance to disengage, to expect me to "fix" her writing. I was enacting the "powerful component of the tutorial" that Muriel Harris contends has to do with "how tutors acquire needed information" (28). Although teachers acquire some of their knowledge about students in conferences and class discussion, most of what they learn about students' writing comes from reading the papers away from the student. We, as tutors, are in the enviable position of also being able to observe body language and tone of voice to unveil keys to student attitude and need. Harris contends that. . ."in the interaction between tutor and student, the tutor picks up clues from watching and listening to the student" (28).

In this second encounter, I was able to observe more than Lisa's frown: her lips were pursed and her head was shaking as she read in a low, emotionless voice. I deduced that Lisa was still angry about failing her paper. More importantly, I suspected that she had lost confidence in herself as a writer. After she finished reading, I mentioned my observations and asked her to talk about why she was angry. She said she was mad because she had failed despite having "done the right thing" by seeking help in tutoring. Furthermore, she was only here a second time because her teacher required her to continue in tutoring. This confession opened the way for me to acknowledge Lisa's feelings, but, more importantly, paved the way for a candid discussion about what tutoring is and isn't. In fact, Lisa likes to write and did not so much expect me to "fix" her paper, as to "decode his comments." Mostly, however, Lisa was hurt and disappointed in herself for not working harder initially. This frank discussion enabled us to establish what we both expected from future sessions that was reasonable and attainable. The clues I discovered in the second encounter, which led to candid discussion and goal setting, were not as apparent to me when I was focused on silently reading the student's paper.

The reading aloud strategy works particularly well with first time visitors to the Writing Center who have been required by their teachers to attend tutoring. Like Lisa, they often arrive angry, scared, and/or dejected. They wish only to sit passively by while the tutor reads the paper and struggles to make sense of the instructor's comments. In order to avoid a conflict with the already emotional student, the tutor at-

tempts to mind-read what the student wants to concentrate on, wasting precious limited time of the tutoring session. Having Lisa read to me enabled her to shift from emotion to reason as she concentrated on enunciation and making sense where often there was little: grammar errors, sentence fragments, and errors in logic became more apparent as she read aloud. Lisa was able to laugh at her self-acknowledged mistakes: "I didn't even notice that." As with Lisa, this revelation encourages the apathetic and/or angry student to take responsibility for his/her writing. Additionally, the temptation to "fix" and "edit" was eliminated because I was not holding the paper. This forced Lisa to make her own notes and/or changes as the discussion took place.

However, having a duplicate copy of the document is helpful. Sight reading as the tutee reads out loud may alert the tutor to other problems, such as proofreading. For instance, a student may read the words he/she hears in his/her head instead the actual words on the page. Consequently, "where" becomes "were." The tutor now has an opportunity to suggest some additional proofreading strategies, such as having someone read the words aloud to him/her. This works best if the reader is unfamiliar with the work, therefore, un-

likely to gloss over words which are spelled correctly but out of context.

Finally, having tutees read their own work out loud encourages student independence and what many writing instructors refer to as "owning your writing." Like Lisa, students begin to own their writing when they hold their own paper and read from it. Lisa now holds her paper firmly and gestures to it with her pen as she thinks and talks. Although many students speak very softly at first, they gain confidence and volume as they go. They "own" their writing the moment they catch a grammar error or stumble over an awkwardly written word, phrase, or sentence they didn't notice previously. They experience what writing consultant, Wilma Davidson, calls the "aha": that moment of understanding during which a light goes on. Often, students who find a grammar error while reading out loud, for instance, are more likely to avoid similar errors in the future. In fact, Muriel Harris suggests that students "prefer to do their own work, come to their own conclusions. . . ." (3 0), and her research concludes that "the more highly satisfactory tutorials were those in which the students were active participants in finding their own criteria and solutions" (3 1). Now, Lisa directs the tutorial as she comes in bouncing and full of questions to ask

me about the revisions she thinks will improve her paper.

Asking students to read their writing out loud has allowed me my own "aha's." I perceive the need for flexible thinking and being open to new tutoring strategies customized for each student's needs. As Amy Blackman suggests, I celebrate that "Tutors help students discover their own creative genius and then teach them to put that genius to work" (10), even if the genius is buried beneath anger at first. And, I get giddy because I still love someone to read to me, no matter what the content. Aaahhhaaa.

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WRITING CENTER ETHICS

The ethics of content: Negotiating religious arguments and papers in unfamiliar disciplines

Papers about religion

Many papers written for many academic courses contain religions themes. Literary exegesis often describes the religious imagery present in novels, short stories, or poems; history papers analyze the influence of religious forces on political movements; and papers about artistic works (paintings, music, architecture) many times consider the interplay of religious imagery and artistic expression. These papers generally treat religion as a piece of intellectual history, a context that can be superimposed over a wide array of disciplines and critical epistemologies. As such, they conform nicely to academic expectations for such subject matter, and they rarely present any significant problems for tutors in writing conferences.

But this rather detached, impersonal, and institutionally-endorsed perspective on religion is not the only one which appears in student papers. With some regularity—at least from the standpoint of tutors in the writing center—students will write about religion or draw upon religious teachings in ways that are not generally sanctioned by the academic community. They write about their conversion experiences, or they use the Bible as their primary source of evidence in an argumentative paper, or they adopt absolute, inflexible opinions about controversial subjects based on their religious teachings (Anderson). Tutors can have an extremely difficult time working with some of these students on their texts, because challenges to the substance or focus of the writing are sometimes interpreted as attacks on religious beliefs.

The conflict between opposing epistemologies is perhaps nowhere more striking or evident than in conferences on religious papers of these types. Academic discourse is largely grounded in classical precepts of argument and evidence: nearly all subjects are open to question and dispute, primary sources and textual evidence can be contested, and decisions about the "best" course of action can be determined through rational means — a careful examination of the evidence, the application of logical principles, and the thoughtful consensus of the majority. Religious discourse is grounded—at least in part—on principles that stand in clear opposition to academic discourse. Not all subjects are open to question; some are to be accepted as articles of faith. Primary sources and textual evidence cannot always be contested; God (however the divine being is construed), religious teachings, and the Bible (or other "divinely-inspired" religious texts) are touted as the "highest authorities" whose judgments and pronouncements are inviolate. And the "best" course of action is not always found through secular, rational means: sometimes the "best" actions are simply the ones that the religion teaches.

Sincere, good-hearted religious students—Christians, in particular—sometimes take it as their special duty to write papers that "witness" their faith and "spread the good word" as their religion directs. Some students may consider it a demonstration of their religious convictions to do so in a secular environment like the college or university they happen to be attending, and sometimes, in writing center conferences, they can be quite adamant about their "right" to express their faith and the "rightness" of their beliefs.

What should tutors do with papers—and students—like these? Do tutors have an ethical right to tell students that they cannot or should not write about their religion? What should tutors tell students about using the Bible as an authoritative source? How should tutors get students to think critically about some of the religion-based assertions they make in their papers (i.e., homosexuality is a sin, the only way to reach heaven is to accept Jesus as your personal savior, life begins at conception, etc.) without seeming to attack their religious principles?

As Chris Anderson points out, the issue may be even more complex than we might at first imagine because in arguing against the dogmatism of some forms of epideictic rhetoric, tutors may in turn be blind to their own dogmatism about the inherent values of academic discourse. If we truly believe in the principles of James Berlin's social epistemic rhetoric, that discourse is "the product of particular cultural and social influences, none of them sacrosanct" (12), then not only must we accept the fact that the language of the academy is laden with many tacit and generally unchallenged assumptions, but we must also be willing to reserve a special place for the rhetoric of religious declamation.

Several approaches are possible, I think, depending on the tutor, the paper, and the student. A number of the

tutors in my writing center, for example, are devout, practicing Christians, and they generally do an excellent job of talking about the different kinds of evidence that are appropriate for different audiences without seeming to threaten the students' belief systems. Other tutors may talk about the value that instructors place on comprehensive research and the use of sources that evaluate an issue from more than one perspective. Some of my tutors have even quoted Socrates' remark that "an unexamined life is not worth living." But all tutors need to take care in such instances to consider how directive they are being with their students and to what extent they are asking students to abandon writing that is meaningful and personal in order to conform to the often lifeless prose style that is typical for many academic student papers. Perhaps the most ethical pedagogy that tutors can adopt here is to present the student with a range of options and possible consequences. Characterize the expectations for academic writing in the context of the specific course and specific assignment, and discuss how well the student's thesis, evidence, and assumptions fit within that context. Rather than take on a proactive role as textual challenger, the tutor might be more productive adopting the role of passive questioner: "What do you think your instructor will think about this thesis? Do you consult the range of secondary sources the assignment asks for? What audience are you writing this for, and will they be likely to share your beliefs?" Anderson recommends giving students several possible models to choose from, encouraging them to think critically about their assumptions but finding audiences and modes of expression that will allow them to adapt their discourse to the appropriate context. Perhaps educating the student in this way will fulfill the tutor's obligation to address important rhetorical issues while still leaving the student in control of the final text.

Papers in Unfamiliar Disciplines

While religious papers may present problems for tutors because they resist some conventions of academic discourse, some other papers may present problems because they are fully immersed in such specialized conventions. In many writing centers, students are encouraged to bring in drafts of papers for any class they happen to be taking. History, mathematics, biology, anthropology, music, engineering — all are fair game for writing assignments of one sort or another, and chances are if writing assignments are required in a course, the students who have to write them will make their way into the writing center for assistance. Typically, these papers do not present any special problems for tutors. The paper assignments often ask students to complete relatively simple rhetorical tasks which draw on relatively common rhetorical modes for their fulfillment: description, narration, evaluation, comparison, contrast, and summary (Bridgeman and Carlson; Pemberton "Rethinking"). Tutors can then make use of *generic* tutorial strategies which are not, for the most part, tied to the conventions of a single discipline, and they can thereby provide useful writing advice without having to worry overmuch about complex issues of disciplinarity and the rhetorical demands of a specialized discourse.

But not all paper assignments can be handled quite so generically, and not all tutorial sessions can avoid confronting the expectations of specialized discourse communities. A number of WAC programs across the country are construed as WID, or Writing in the Disciplines. Writing assignments in these courses are geared to introduce students to the discourse and practice of the academic field they are studying; students not only need to learn the thinking practices and modes of inquiry central to a discipline, but they also need to express themselves as full participants in that discipline. That means mastering the vocabulary, the

discourse conventions, the tropes, and the rhetorical formats that are common to and valued by the discipline. And that also means the best writing assistance might be provided by tutors who are familiar with the requisite discourse conventions and who can comment on them knowledgeably. If that is so, and if we accept it as a given that writing tutors can never be expected to know all the discourse conventions of all the disciplines that students might write in, then on what basis can tutors claim to be providing useful help to students outside their own areas of expertise? Must tutors and students be selectively matched to ensure that they share a similar academic background and overlapping domain of content knowledge? Is it more ethical to schedule students in this manner and thereby guarantee — as much as such guarantees are possible — that the student will receive the highest quality help, or is it more ethical to schedule students randomly, believing that perfect matches of student/tutor knowledge domains are never possible and that one tutor's commentary and advice will be just as useful as that of any other?

There are no absolutely right answers to these questions, but I think it is worthwhile to note that a tutor will always be "ignorant" of the content or discourse conventions in a student paper to a greater or lesser degree, and this should not necessarily be seen as a significant drawback or ethical point of contention (Hubbuch "A Tutor" 29). The tutor's lack of knowledge can actually have some affective and cognitive benefits for the writing conference, providing the student with an important measure of rhetorical authority and giving the tutor the opportunity to provide students with a "fresh" perspective on the topic being discussed in the paper (Pemberton "Rethinking" 126). Allowing content-naive tutors to reflect upon the quality of writing in a field they know little about will always be ethically troublesome, but the short-

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

October 14-16: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Associa-
tion, 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

February 3-5: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in
Savannah, GA
Contact: Christina Van Dyke, Dept. of Languages,
Literature, and Philosophy, Armstrong Atlantic State
University, 11935 Abercorn St.,Savannah, GA
31419-1997; phone: 912-921-2330; fax: 912-927-
5399; vandykch@mail.armstrong.edu

March 24-25: South Central Writing Centers Association, in
Fort Worth, TX
Contact: Jeanette Harris (j.harris@tcu.edu), Texas
Christian University or Lady Falls Brown
(L.Brown@ttacs.ttu.edu) Texas Tech University.

March 30: East Central Writing Centers Association, in
Lansing, MI
Contact: J. Pennington. Conference website: http://
www.lansing.cc.mi.us/~penningj/ecwca2000.htm

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