

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 27, Number 3

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

November, 2002

...FROM THE EDITOR...

This month's newsletter challenges us to think about what constitutes writing center scholarship. Jane Cogie's essay—based on personal experience, her reflection on that experience, and insights from the literature of writing centers—offers us a valuable discussion of how to conduct writing center administration successfully. Michael Pemberton, working on a hypothesis about writing center attitudes towards assisting students with a mandated competency test, surveys his colleagues as a reality check. And from a different perspective, Lauren Fitzgerald, D'Ann George, and Janet Wright Starner review the new collection, *Writing Center Research*, often using those essays as starting points for their own self-reflection and for adapting results to their settings. Equally important, they raise questions about who should be the subjects of our research and what our obligations to those subjects are.

And for your tutors, Susanna Gibson offers her strategies for working on thesis statements. And for all of us wondering about our workloads, the job listings reflect a variety of expectations about what some administrators think a writing center administrator can handle.

Muriel Harris, editor

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The schooling of a writing center administrator: Lessons in the balancing act

"Directing a writing center is such an absorbing job that it is easy to keep a local focus—the writing center. . . . We tend to be committed to teaching writing, not to institutional politics" ("The Role" 107). With these statements, Jeanne Simpson identifies a key problem faced by writing center directors, the problem of influencing the institutional politics that shape centers. Indeed, her characterization of what it takes to move beyond the local suggests why directors may well be wary of such a move; they must become "doers and shakers" who "embrace change," fully aware of the risk, pain, and compromise likely to accompany any gain ("The Challenge" 2-3). Accomplishing such change, she emphasizes, entails schooling in the administrative structures of one's institution and more service time, time which may pay back little within a system where scholarship often dominates evaluation (3). Such a challenge can seem at once inspiring and daunting.

The value of administrative schooling became clear to me only gradually, over several years as I sought funding for a satellite writing center while attempting to become a viable candidate for tenure. Before I initiated the satellite proposal, the importance of administrative training was clouded not only by my local concerns with teaching writing but also by my one-way focus on educating others about writing center work and by my necessary preoccupation with producing research, the dominant area in tenure evaluation at my institution. Had I then

been asked, I would have spoken with conviction about the inseparability of writing center research, teaching, and administration. I realize now, however, that had I truly grasped that link, I would have been more prepared to seek to understand the work of other administrators and to address the diverse demands I faced. Most immediate at the time were student demands for expanded Writing Center services and the demands of seeking tenure as a writing center director.

In this article, I will share the lessons I learned as I moved—tentatively at first but finally successfully—toward increasing the Center’s services and gaining tenure. Certainly, tenure isn’t a universal issue for directors, nor is expansion of services. Absolutes, as Muriel Harris notes, apply no more to writing center administration than to tutoring sessions (“Solutions” 63-64). After sketching my situation, I will focus, then, not so much on my specific challenges as on the administrative process and the role administration finally plays in writing center teaching and research. I will emphasize in particular the unforeseen consequences, both negative and positive, that, however acute one’s foresight, remain part of any move beyond local concerns, beyond what Simpson refers to as “our comfort zone” (“The Challenge” 2).

When I was first appointed tenure-track director with 100% of my appointment in the Center and 25% release time for research, the need for change on the institutional level seemed remote. My immediate challenge was internal: developing policies, a mission statement, and tutor training for the English Department graduate assistants, and teaching seven or more undergraduate interns a semester. With the momentum of these changes, the English Department started assigning more graduate assistants to the Center, and the Linguistics Department soon began offering GAs as tutors. Within a year and a half, the staff had doubled as had the wait list of

students wanting regular weekly appointments, the only type of session available when I inherited the Center. In one of those trade-offs Harris notes are unavoidable in writing center administration (“Solutions” 66-67), we instituted one drop-in hour per tutor, easing the wait list but gradually increasing student demand for quick-fix tutoring. The sort of change that Simpson characterizes as at once inevitable and inevitably risky had begun (“The Challenge” 2). Although this increase in quick-fix demand was a serious problem, I decided that serving more students was worth this tradeoff, a tradeoff we would work to counter. I felt still within the comfort zone, that is, still reasonably in control of the Center’s destiny.

The pressure for higher profile change started with a challenge to the nature of my tenure-track appointment from the College of Liberal Arts (CoLA) dean. His position was that to earn tenure, I must teach one class a semester despite my considerable teaching as Writing Center director and despite his role in hiring me for my tenure-track Writing Center appointment. My teaching at that time included not only my day-to-day work with tutors and students but also the internship, entailing both classroom and writing center work yet not considered a real course because of its small enrollment.

For a good six months, I fought this push into the “regular classroom,” not to escape the classroom—indeed I met regularly with the interns as a class—but to resist the assessment of writing center teaching as mere service. In part, too, I was afraid that if I were to teach a “real” course, I might be forced to give up the internship or teach it as an overload. Certainly, there was the possibility of turning it into a regular course, yet my ability to draw enough qualified students to satisfy the dean’s requirements seemed less certain. After using a sizable portion of my summer research time sculpting memos on the

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Editor: Muriel Harris

Managing Editor: Mary Jo Turley
English Dept., Purdue University, 1356
Heavilon, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356
(765)494-7268.

e-mail: harrism@cc.purdue.edu

mjturley@purdue.edu

web site:<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/newsletter/index.html>

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validity of writing center directing as teaching, I began to realize the futility of this approach.

Not surprisingly, it was advice from individuals on WCenter that refocused my energy. When I asked for advice on winning recognition for writing center directing as teaching, I received numerous suggestions, such as the idea of creating an administrative-teaching-research portfolio (Harris, Nelson, Olson) or a departmental mentoring committee (Boquet). Along with these helpful ideas came crucial advice, emphasizing the time necessary to gain recognition: “I have said [that tutoring and training is teaching] so many times to so many people that they actually believe it now” (Mullin). Through this advice, I saw the need for a more patient, pragmatic approach to changing inaccurate views of the Center.

With this shift in perspective, I felt more able to attend to student demand for more Writing Center hours. I had deferred responding to this demand, fearful that a solution would entail more service, the least valued area for tenure evaluation. However, from my new perspective, I began to see how increased service might allow me to meet student need while reconfiguring the practicum to meet the dean’s own need to prove teacher productivity. My plan involved listing the internship as a regular course and obtaining funding to hire student work tutors from the ranks of this newly expanded course; this approach, I knew, had been used successfully at other centers. Combined with a proposal for a dorm satellite center, such a plan would help address student need and potentially contribute to the University’s retention initiative. Although listing the practicum as a classroom course wouldn’t counter views of writing center directing as mere service, it would help legitimate courses on writing center issues as integral to a tenure-track position.

How, though, should I move this plan forward? On the departmental

level, I easily gained approval for the internship as a regular course. On the University level, however, I was less certain how to proceed. The questions I faced were not ones I had prepared myself to answer. My only experience with University-wide proposals was my failed funding request for graduate assistant tutors from other CoLA departments. As to the possible repercussions of the current proposal, I had only the most general idea of what to expect. I never considered that the changes might have anything but negative effects on my scholarly productivity—or anything but positive effects on the Center’s main work, one-to-one teaching. In making these assumptions, I failed to see how intertwined writing center teaching, administration, and scholarship really are. Only in reflecting on my ultimately successful but largely intuitive progress toward initiating the satellite and earning tenure have I come to understand this cross-pollination and some basics of the administrative process.

In the remainder of this article, I’ll share points I learned at each stage of the process, from forwarding a proposal to implementing it and dealing with its at times unexpected consequences. To provide a context for this advice, I’ll refer to my own steps and missteps at each stage.

Forwarding institution-wide proposals:

1. Link proposals to current institutional initiatives, with evidence to support that link.

My earlier proposal for new graduate tutor lines, though clearly valuable to students, failed in part because I argued its benefits solely for writing across the curriculum, not then a viable University-level issue. My satellite proposal, on the other hand, succeeded in part because I connected it to the University’s high-profile retention initiative. To affirm the retention value of the proposed satellite, I submitted with the proposal the positive results of my study on the retention and graduation rates of Writing Center clients.

2. Collaborate with other departments with something to gain from and something to give the proposed initiative.

My earlier failed proposal sought to collaborate with departments without funding to contribute, leaving the entire cost to the dean. My satellite proposal, on the other hand, worked with funding-rich University Housing, whose administrators saw it as in their interest to donate equipment, PR, and space (a corner of a dorm computer lab) for the new center. Unschooled as I was, I realized the benefits of this cross-departmental cooperation only later when the provost noted its impact on the proposal’s approval.

3. Network with administrators who can support you.

Perhaps the most important reason for the success of my second proposal relates to the groundwork I laid with middle-level administrators. From my earlier failed proposal, I recognized that I needed help. I sought out two CoLA administrators, a retention coordinator and an associate dean, whose advice was invaluable, particularly on the configuration of my meeting with the dean. An unforeseen bonus of this association was the support both these individuals offered during my bid for tenure.

4. Include administrative allies in key meetings.

As Simpson notes, “It is easy for an administrator to say no to one person. It is less easy to say it to a council, duly elected and accustomed to careful deliberations” (3). I avoided a one-to-one meeting with the dean thanks to the two CoLA administrators’ suggestion that both of them and a second associate dean accompany me. Through the power of their positions and familiarity with the process, they considerably increased the status of my proposal.

5. For service-heavy proposals, request an administrative assistant or release from assigned duties.

When the Law School dean at the last minute funded a second, general use satellite to open in the Law School simultaneously with the first, I requested a full-time graduate assistant to work with me on administrative projects. It was one of the wisest moves I made, though at the time motivated more by fear than wisdom. It has made the workload more manageable, provided valuable training for the assistants involved, and added meaningfully to my Writing Center teaching.

6. Be aware that gifts can become liabilities.

The Law School dean's funding of a second satellite is a prime example of the dangers gifts can bring. While I found this new funding difficult to reject, I feared not only the added service it would impose but also the Law School location that seemed intimidating and out-of-the-way for a general use center. If it drew few students (a fear that indeed materialized), might not the Center lose credibility with administrators? While CoLA's dean did at one point blame this satellite's poor performance on the staff's failure "to vigorously sell it," the provost luckily agreed with me that the location was problematic and should be changed. Yet had the cast of characters differed, this gift could easily have damaged the Center and my record as its director. Though foreseeing such unexpected turns is impossible, it's important to realize that they can lurk within change.

Implementing change:

1. Build a network of support rather than depending on a single administrator.

Little did I know that within seven years as the Center's director I would work with four department chairs, three deans, four provosts, and four chancellors. One provost was fired but subsequently became chancellor, and the Law School dean requesting the second satellite went on to be acting provost when I was up for tenure. Most

pertinent to implementing my proposal was Housing's coordinator for the satellite; he soon left for an off-campus job and was not replaced for a full year. As a consequence, during the opening semesters of the satellite, its PR, physical set-up, and student use suffered. Fortunately, this dizzying turn-over in administrators was, to a large extent, off-set for me by the networking I engaged in across campus to promote the satellite project.

2. Recognize the effects of a center's configuration on the quality of tutoring.

In the main Writing Center, plants, posters, and well-placed bookcases was all that was needed to provide a welcoming atmosphere with a balance of public and private space. To define a comfortable, professional space in a cavernous computer lab was not as easy. Understanding interior design is just another matter in the "forbiddingly long list of matters" writing center directors must consider (Harris, "Presenting" 92). Before opening the computer lab satellite, I set up a table with computers and clip-on lamps by the room's only full-length window. Though not particularly satisfied, I lacked both the knowledge and the time to reconfigure this arrangement. By the satellite's second semester, however, cynicism against clients perceived to be out for quick fix assistance had developed in even the most enthusiastic tutors. Apparently, students were treating tutors as a sort of style-check extension of their computers, useful only if the effort required were minimal. The students' presumption seemed exacerbated by the ill-defined space; lacking recognizable institutional boundaries, this gathering of tables, chairs, and tutors seemed unlikely to have a mission worth respecting. This consequence concerned me far more than the potential repercussions of low student use at the Law School satellite since it disrupted the Center's mission of helping students become better writers.

3. Get to know the resources at your institution.

Before risking the satellite project, I knew little of the expertise within the University available for problem solving. Uncertain how to solve the satellite's layout problems, I followed the lead of a collaboration between a writing center director and an architect (Dickel and Parker) and sought advice from an Architectural Design professor at my institution, who helped me reconfigure this satellite into a more congenial tutoring site. On advice from this professor, I connected with a Graphics Design professor, who had his students create Writing Center logos.

The subtext of my story and the administrative lessons it spawned seems to me twofold. First, as Simpson suggests, the repercussions of moving beyond a local focus can never be fully predicted. Second, such risks, though necessarily resulting in tradeoffs, can allow the three aspects of writing center work—teaching, research, and administration—to further strengthen each other. To cite just one example, my selling of the satellite proposal led to, among other things, the Law School's unanticipated funding of a second satellite, which led to increased administrative work and accountability but also to funding for an administrative GA. Some of the GAs filling this position went on to attain writing center positions, while I gained the satisfaction of working with them and proof of another level of teaching inherent in writing center administration. There was a further surprise. While the increased administration decreased my research time, the teaching and administrative problems encountered increased the research issues I genuinely wanted to pursue and the first-hand knowledge I could bring to this pursuit. The trade-offs, though significant, seem worth the gains, both for the Center's students and for me in my push toward tenure. Not just for me but also for my evaluators, the benefits of

this project clarified the extent to which writing center teaching, administration, and research intersect.

Such unexpected and various repercussions of change may well be part of what Muriel Harris refers to when she says, "as one gets more experienced in writing centers, the complexities increase" ("Solutions" 64). Further confirming the increasing complexities, the satellite initiative has led full circle to yet another proposal, this time for a significantly larger main Writing Center aimed at providing additional services linked to an as yet only tentatively funded writing across the curriculum initiative. While many considerations have fed into this new proposal, not least among them is the recognition that the expanded administrative activities related to the three centers have begun to disrupt the student-centered atmosphere in the small main Center. The "hum" at this Center, to use Paula Guetschow's term for describing centers that carefully blend "order, chaos, and relaxed purposeful bustle" (2), at times now sounds more like a buzz.

With the new proposal, I am once again apprehensive about adding yet more layers of politics and administrative work to my position if the proposal is funded. As Simpson concedes, "there is only so much room for activity in a day" ("Challenge" 3). And the inevitable risks of an ever-greater university-wide commitment are very real. To sense just how real, one need only read the WCenter discussion "Quitting," exploring the toll escalating administrative demands can take on even the most committed writing center director. Yet it would be difficult to deny that political and administrative work is as central to writing centers as the more local, more congenial focus on teaching writing. Integral as all the strands of directing a writing center are to each other (see Harris' "Presenting Writing Center Scholarship"), it is essential for those of us who direct cen-

ters to educate ourselves and the future directors now in our centers about the workings of our institutions. Such knowledge certainly can't rid us of risk, but it should allow us to use the available resources more effectively as we move forward with the at times overwhelming and at times energizing balancing act involved in writing center directing.

Jane Cogie
Southern Illinois University at
Carbondale
Carbondale, IL

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Artful dodging? Coping with standardized literacy assessments in the writing center

Writing centers deal with all kinds of writing. They see lots of essays from first year writing courses on the evils of cigarette smoking, the merits of gun control, the tragedy of abortion. They work with students on economics papers, engineering papers, history papers, and nursing papers. Each of these papers, courses, and assignments has its own special problems and pedagogical inflections, but the conferences we hold with these students tend to be much alike. Without belaboring the obvious, I think we can say that typical writing center conferences always see texts as works in progress. Through the collaborative interaction of writer and interested tutor, students are made aware of audience and possibilities. They get new information, learn new strategies, discover new things about their texts, reconstitute their rhetorical goals, and leave their conferences with concrete goals for revision in mind.

When students come into the writing center to prepare for standardized essay tests, however, the goals for their conference are likely to be much different. Since these students will be working in a timed writing situation, and a short time at that, substantive revision will rarely be an option. These students need to learn how to write a “one-draft-wonder” that demonstrates their ability to produce a simple, thesis-supporting expository essay in sixty minutes. Because these students need only to show minimal competency, not excellence, they are often taught in their preparatory classes that a five-paragraph essay is sufficient to pass the exam, and they are advised to use that form. They are told to “play it safe,” not take risks, not to use sophisticated vocabulary or words they’re unsure how to spell, and not to use overly

complex sentences that might cause punctuation difficulties.

These students present special challenges for writing centers, not just because their stress levels are often much higher than those of other students, but because the very nature of the writing they are doing and the tasks they are being asked to perform seem, in important ways, antithetical to the very nature of writing center work and the pedagogical philosophies that underpin its operation. Students will have little opportunity to revise or brainstorm in a testing situation, and because scoring rubrics often highlight grammatical correctness, students will fret about sentence-level errors almost to the exclusion of everything else in a conference. This approach to writing can’t help but grate against the nerves of people who work in writing centers . . . or can it?

I would like to report some results from a survey I conducted in March 2002, which asked writing center and learning center directors in the State University System of Georgia how they resolved this apparent conflict in pedagogy—or if they even saw a conflict. Before I talk about the specifics of this survey, however, let me provide a brief description of the Georgia State Regents exam—a standardized literacy assessment that most postsecondary institutions in this state must administer to their students as a requirement for graduation.

The Georgia Regents exam

The Georgia State Regents exam is a two-part gateway exam (reading and writing), required of all students in the Georgia State University system. Systemwide, approximately 32,000

students take the Regents exam each year. The reading comprehension portion of the exam asks a series of content-based multiple choice questions about passages of expository prose. Approximately 80% of students who take the reading portion of the exam pass it the first time they take it.

Somewhat more challenging is the writing portion of the exam, though it asks for little more than the demonstration of basic organizational skills and the ability to write a relatively simple essay that is free of a “serious accumulation” of grammar and punctuation errors. As with the reading portion, approximately 80% of students systemwide pass with a score of 2 or better on a 4-point scale the first time they take the exam.

Most students have only an hour to take the exam. They may brainstorm and/or make an outline before they begin writing their essays, but they are only given a half page on the front of the booklet for such work, and the time they spend prewriting is counted as part of the sixty minutes total available to them.

There is no set limit on the number of times students can take the Regents exam, but students who fail the writing portion of the exam with a “1” will—at many institutions—be required to take a “Regents Preparation” course the following semester that will teach them tips, strategies, and techniques for taking a timed essay. At some institutions, students must take this course *every* time they fail the writing portion; at Georgia Southern, it is not uncommon for some students to take this course 3 or 4 times.

The Regents exam and the writing center

Regents Preparation classes are usually

scheduled to meet two days a week for two hours, and much of the in-class time is spent writing practice responses to sample Regents writing prompts. These essays are then scored by instructors and returned with a few generic suggestions for improvement, and then the whole class moves on to the next set of practice exams. Many students, however, want extra assistance and feedback on their practice essays, more than their instructors can give them given the sheer volume of papers they have to assign, read, and respond to in the intensive 8-week period of the course. Stress levels are high; this is, for many students, the last obstacle between them and a college degree. As a result, the writing center or learning center on campus becomes the place they go for additional help.

But how do writing centers—Georgia's in particular—deal with this demand? My survey aimed to answer this question. Of the 34 colleges and universities in the Georgia state university system, I was able to determine that 13 had either writing centers or learning assistance centers that offered peer tutoring in writing. For the purposes of this survey, I chose to focus my research on only those institutions whose writing centers were distinct entities on their respective campuses or which provided writing center services under the umbrella of a campus wide learning assistance center. I interviewed 11 of the directors at institutions that met these criteria, asking a range of questions related to tutor training, institutional mission, and the Regents exam, but in this article, I want to focus on the responses to two questions in particular:

- 1.) Are the tutoring sessions you hold with Regents students different in any way from those you normally hold? If so, can you characterize the difference?
- 2.) Do you feel that the goals of the Regents Exam are compatible with the goals of the writing center? How so or why not?

Though it's not possible to analyze

or even to describe the many and varied thoughtful responses of the directors I talked to, I would like to offer a brief overview of some of the many different approaches to Regents instruction enacted at writing centers across the state, representative, I think, of the unique institutional approaches that we are likely to find in writing centers across the country as they are forced to deal with standardized writing tests and the students who are required to take them. What emerges from this survey is a sense of the sometimes deeply complex and conflicted relationships that result when theory and pedagogy interact—sometimes in harmony, sometimes in discord—with the requirements of institutional and political mandates.

Conferencing differences

Every writing center director I surveyed said that they dealt with the Regents exam to a greater or lesser extent, but there was virtually no uniformity in their responses beyond that. In answer to the question about how they worked with Regents students, other than affirming that they sometimes met with those students in individual conferences, answers varied widely.

In some institutions, the writing center clearly has a remedial mission, and the Regents course for those who have failed the exam is taught in the center itself. At Gainesville College, for example, the remedial course is taught by the Writing Lab director; at the University of Georgia (UGA), interestingly enough, not only is the Regents course run through the writing center, but the center is also open *only* for students enrolled in the prep course for the first eight weeks of each semester. In contrast to these configurations, other institutions generally see Regents preparation only as part of their extended mission. At Augusta State, for example, the director visits first year orientation classes, gives presentations about preparing for timed essays, and encourages students to visit the writing

center to do practice writing. At Valdosta State and Middle Georgia College, the writing center offers Regents prep sessions each semester for interested students at all levels, not just those in the first year. At Georgia Southern University, students who have a diagnosed learning disability or who have failed the exam multiple times can be scheduled to work with tutors, but this is only a small part of the services the center provides.

Some directors believe that the tutoring sessions held with Regents students are not and *should* not be different from those held with other students on other types of assignments. The writing center director at Middle Georgia College does not see these two session types as different at all, though her description of a typical tutoring session suggests that the primary concern in their conference sessions is error identification and proofreading strategies. At UGA, the director believes that the better the Regents tutoring session is, the less it will be different from any other conference, but he also says that tutors tend to address matters of time management more often in Regents conferences. At Darton College, the director has a sense that the sessions are not significantly different, though she admits Regents students do have a higher level of anxiety.

Other directors observe significant differences between the two session types. Frank Sherwood at Gainesville College notes that conferences with Regents students are more focused on grammar and the specific test. The goals for Regents essays are well-established and concrete, he says, so tutorials tend to focus on the end product and tutors tend to be more directive than they would otherwise. Sonja Bagby at the State University of West Georgia echoes his sentiments and notes this behavior in her own center as well. The writing center directors at Augusta State and Valdosta State both find that conferences with Regents students are prone to be current-tradi-

tional in nature, centered on the identification and correction of error, and they are also more often geared to teach students a writing “formula” such as the safe five-paragraph essay. They both recognize that this is “not the best academic writing,” but as Augusta State’s director says, “it gives students a handle.”

Pedagogical conflicts

The final question I asked in my survey was the pivotal issue I wanted writing center directors to address—do they perceive a conflict in goals between what they understand about the writing process and conferencing strategies in the writing center and the assessment strategy employed by the Georgia Regents exam? If so, how do they resolve it? Once again, the results of the survey were mixed. Three of the directors believed that there were no conflicts—that the goals for writing and the basis of assessment in both were compatible; four felt that there was a pronounced conflict, and three expressed mixed feelings—that the goals were similar in some ways and different in others.

Directors who did not see a conflict between the exam and the center generally referred to their sense of shared purpose in upholding and maintaining standards. Here are a pair of illustrative quotes:

The mission of our learning center is to provide academic support including support to Regents students. The goal of the Regents exam is to test for appropriate levels of literacy in writing and reading. The learning center operates in support of and as a supplement to the instructors of the Regents course, and our work here is very much in line with devotion to the principle that our graduates should be literate.

The end result of the Regents exam is writing that intends to communicate. The Regents is a minimal test and students should be able to write at a level that displays minimal competency.

One thread that appears regularly in these responses is a conviction that the Regents exam asks for and expects very little in terms of written performance. The words “literacy” and “minimal competence” appear with some regularity, and the underlying context seems to be that if students cannot perform in even this minimal way on a test of basic academic writing skills, then they have no right to expect a college degree. In general, the directors who felt that the goals of the Regents exam were almost wholly compatible with those of the writing center described their centers as remedial in nature, saw relatively little difference in sessions with Regents and walk-in students, and characterized their conferences as a means to help students with errors.

Several other directors bristled strongly at the Regents exam and resented the ways it compelled them to change their writing conference styles and warp the kind of advice they gave to students in order to conform with the demands of the test. These directors, with only one exception, also felt their Regents conferences were significantly different from those they held with other students. The following are representative responses:

At no other time in any of our writing courses do we ask students to do timed writing. The sessions we have with students about Regents exams are controlled—they’re not real writing conferences. Improvement is not the goal. Getting a passing score is the goal. We work with Regents students as PR so students can see what the writing center is all about in other ways. It’s a necessary evil. Our hope is that we can snatch victory from the jaws of despair.

What is taught in composition and in the writing center is that writing should be natural and enjoyable. What I’m feeling from the Regents is static and formulaic, and it takes all the fun out of writing. Students are afraid of being too creative;

they’re concerned with how many sentences there should be and how many errors they make. That’s where the anxiety comes in. In English classes, they’re told to revise, but this principle is violated with Regents exams.

Clearly, the two positions expressed here are radically different, and they reveal, I think, a deeply divided set of perspectives about the purpose of writing assessment, the role of the writing center, and even what a college degree stands for. The complex nature of these conflicting points of view were especially strong in those directors who expressed what seemed to be mutually exclusive feelings in their responses, finding the goals of the writing center and the Regents exam convergent and divergent at the same time. As the writing center director at Valdosta State put it:

One goal of the writing center is to help people become better writers. The Regents claims to assess ability in ways that the writing center does not value—it’s a one-draft, crank it out format. There’s a lack of emphasis on process. On the other hand, I have to admit I’m shocked by the low ability of student writing; some sort of standard seems appropriate. I’d like to see changes in the Regents, something better, but I wouldn’t want to see it completely abolished.

Augusta State’s director concurs, saying,

The principle of the Regents exam goes against the grain of everything we’ve learned about how to teach writing over the last 20 years. . . . Still, I think that the test *is* appropriate in the sense that many of our students come to us underprepared. Whether they’re taking the Regents test or not, focusing on a structured essay can get students, particularly nontraditional students, started. The test itself is compatible with our institution.

When I began thinking about this study a year or so ago, I started out with the conviction that nearly all writing center directors would find the Regents exam an appalling artifact of antediluvian thinking about assessment. I suspected that tutors would perform a kind of pedagogical subversion, going through the motions of helping students to pass the exam, but doing so in the frame of a metanarrative that let students know that this wasn't what *real* writing was all about. I saw tutors as subversive agents of institutional change, questioning authority, challenging the status quo, even as they

worked surreptitiously within the system, ostensibly doing what was required of them.

This was, of course, a fantasy. The reality is that this is not a story of the good guys versus the bad guys, the Rebels versus the Evil Empire. It's a story about well-intentioned people on all sides caught in a web of complex social constructions, institutional configurations, educational theories, professional identities, and student needs. While directors may have some reservations about the value of the Regents test or the type of written literacy it

purportedly measures, they nonetheless feel it is their responsibility to do everything they can to help students pass it. While I suspect that many tutors and directors really do use some version of the metanarrative I described earlier, telling students that the Regents test is an artificial, unrealistic writing situation, (I know I certainly do), I suspect they are also forthright with students that be that as it may, it's a situation they're going to have to deal with—and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Michael A. Pemberton
Georgia Southern University
Statesboro, GA

Ben Rafoth Wins 2002 Maxwell Distinguished Leadership Award

Ben Rafoth, Professor of English and Director of the IUP Writing Center, has won the 2002 NCPTW Ron Maxwell Award for Distinguished Leadership in Promoting the Collaborative Learning Practices of Peer Tutors in Writing. The award recognizes dedication to and leadership in collaborative learning in writing centers, for aiding students in together taking on more responsibility for their learning, and, thus, for promoting the work of peer tutors. The award also denotes extraordinary service to the evolution of the conference organization. A plaque and cash prize, presented October 26, 2002, at the 19th Annual National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, were funded by an endowment from Ron and Mary Maxwell.

Rafoth hosted the NCPTW in 1992 at IUP, and he will chair the 2003 conference in Hershey, PA, in a joint meeting with the International Writing Centers Association. Rafoth is praised for keeping his writing center “on the cutting edge of developments in the field,” for managing a balanced program that is “professional and intellectual while being open and accessible to students,” and for involving peer tutors in every aspect of the operation. Moreover, his own publications—especially *A Tutor's Guide: Helping Writers One to One* (2000)—support the NCPTW goal of bridging the divide between writing center administrators and writing center tutors, between faculty and students.

As one nominator noted about Rafoth's participation in

the NCPTW, “he always has a van-load of well-prepared tutors ready to present at what is often their first professional conference. Behind the scenes, in the spirit of a writing center tutor himself, he has worked with his tutors at the point of their need, always willing to swing his chair around and listen to the latest draft.” Another nominator, who formerly worked as an IUP Writing Center tutor, noted that Rafoth “made it his job to be aware of my work, my goals, and my future interests.”

When Rafoth was asked what inspires him in his work, he responded, “I am reminded of the adage, ‘One student at a time.’ Like many people who work in writing centers, I tend to recognize more the individuality of each student who walks through the door than I tend to recognize any grand social, rhetorical or pedagogical theory that purports to explain our students, their writing, or my teaching. I have enjoyed tremendously my fifteen years in the Writing Center at IUP, and I owe it all to the many wonderful tutors, colleagues, and students I have had the pleasure to work with. I am honored to be a part of the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing and its long tradition of placing writing tutors at the forefront of our annual meetings. Each year at the end of the conference, I am aware that when we return to our campuses and writing centers, we all take with us a little bit of this national organization, so that we may stand with new energy before our students and tutors, one at a time, to help them along their way.”

Writing Center Director Colby College

Tenure-track asst. professor position, pending administrative approval, for a composition specialist with a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition or a terminal degree in another appropriate field with experience and scholarship in Rhetoric and Composition, beginning September 2003.

Responsibilities would include teaching writing courses, directing our Writers' Center, and taking a leadership role in the Writing Across the Curriculum program. Experience in composition for international students and/or Service-Learning helpful.

Ph.D. needs to be completed by September 2003. To apply, please send a cover letter that includes a brief discussion of your teaching and scholarship interests, curriculum vitae, and three letters of recommendation to Professor Peter Harris, Chair of the Rhetoric and Composition search; Colby College; 5260 Mayflower Hill; Waterville ME 04901.

Review of applications will begin on November 20 and will continue until the position is filled. Preliminary interviewing will take place at MLA in December. Colby is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action employer, committed to excellence through diversity, and strongly encourages applications and nominations of persons of color, women, and members of other under-represented groups. For more information about the college, please visit the Colby Web site: <www.colby.edu>.

Writing Center Director Jackson State University

Jackson State University seeks a Writing Center Director, for a twelve-month appointment starting January 2003. Position involves establishment of the writing center at Jackson State, overseeing student tutors in the writing center and coordinating graduate assistants for writing labs. May also include some teaching responsibilities in the English Department. At least a Master's Degree, with a focus in composition or literacy, is required.

Preferred candidates will have demonstrated coursework, experience or training in several of the following areas: teaching writing at the lower and upper division college level, teaching methods of writing, reading, composition, literature for the secondary level, supervision and training of writing center tutors, professional development or in-service workshops for faculty, writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines.

Salary competitive. Send letters of application, current vita, three current professional references and transcripts to Jackson State University Office of Human Resources, P.O. Box 17028, Jackson, MS 39217. Please include a SASE.

Initial deadline November 15, 2002; open until filled.

Director of the University Writing Center California State University, Los Angeles

Twelve-month academic appointment reporting to the Dean of Undergraduate Studies with retreat rights to an appropriate department. Starting Date: July 1, 2002. Minimum Qualifications: Ph.D. in Rhetoric/Composition, English or related field and experience in administering a writing center. Duties: Developing and implementing programs to enhance the writing skills of students throughout the University; recruiting, training, and supervising peer tutors; supervising the development of curriculum and instructional materials for tutorials, writing workshops and training sessions; providing consultation and workshops to faculty regarding writing across the curriculum; coordinating Writing Center activities with other student academic support services, the English composition program, and the CSU graduation writing assessment requirement; coordinating the course that serves as one means of meeting the graduation writing requirement. Salary: Commensurate with experience and qualifications.

Required Documentation: Employment contingent upon proof of eligibility to work in the United States. The position is open until filled; however, to ensure full consideration, apply by January 12, 2002. Submit a letter of application describing your qualifications and reason for interest in the position, curriculum vitae, and three letters of reference to: Dr. Alfredo Gonzalez, Dean, Undergraduate Studies, California State University, Los Angeles, 5151 State University Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90032-8254.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/TITLE IX EMPLOYER
<<http://www.calstatela.edu/academic/position/2002-writing-ctr-dir.htm>>

Writing Center Coordinator and Learning Center Coordinator Central Missouri State University

The Department of Academic Enrichment, announces the following two tenure-track positions available January 2003; start date negotiable:

Writing Center Coordinator (#51465) Responsibilities: coordinate all Writing Center activities and teaching. Required: (a) Master's degree (minimum) in English or related field; (b) college teaching experience. Desired: experience with writing center pedagogy and academic support services.

Learning Center Coordinator (#51459) Responsibilities: coordinate and supervise all Learning Center activities, faculty, and staff. Required: (a) Master's degree (minimum) in English, math, reading, or related field; (b) college teaching experience. Desired: experience with curriculum development and instructional technology.

Additional details at <www.cmsu.edu/ae>. Send vita, unofficial transcripts, and contact information for three references to: AE Search Committee, Humphreys 127, CMSU, Warrensburg, MO 64093. Phone 660-543-4061. Review begins November 1, 2002, and continues until filled. AA/EEO/ADA

Call for papers Special Topic Issue

Second Language Writers in the Writing Center

The *Journal of Second Language Writing* solicits submissions on the topic of tutoring second language writers, either in writing centers or in other settings. We seek reports of empirical studies of L2 writers and their tutors in these settings. We especially welcome research on writing in languages other than English. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Descriptions/analyses of interaction in tutoring sessions with L2 writers
- Comparisons between sessions with L1 writers and L2 writers, and between L2 immigrant and L2 international students
- Effectiveness of tutoring: How does it affect revision? How do these learners develop as writers as a result of tutoring sessions?
- Relationship between the classroom and writing centers
- Reconsidering writing center models and strategies to accommodate L2 writers
- Second language acquisition and its relation to learning to write in the writing center

Articles should be empirical studies that are 15-30 pages, double-spaced. For complete guidelines for manuscript preparation, please consult the *JSLW* website at <<http://www.jslw.org>>. Deadline for submission is June 30, 2003.

Special Issue Editors: Jessica Williams, University of Illinois at Chicago and Carol Severino, University of Iowa. Mss. should be sent to Jessica Williams, Dept. of English (162), 601 S. Morgan, University of Illinois, Chicago, IL 60607, jessicaw@uic.edu.

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

February 13-15, 2003: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Charlotte, NC
Contact: Deanna Rogers, Writing Resources Center, 220 Fretwell, 9201 University City Blvd., UNC Charlotte, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001. Phone: (704) 687-4226; fax: (704) 687 6988; e-mail: drogers@email.uncc.edu. Conference Web site: <www.uncc.edu/writing/wrcindex.html>.

February 20-22, 2003: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Fayetteville, AR
Contact: Carole Lane and Karen Clark (writcent@uark.edu), Quality Writing Center, University of Arkansas, Kimpel 315, Fayetteville, AR 72701. Conference Web site: <<http://www.uark.edu/campus-resources/qwrtcntr/scwca.htm>>.

March 27-29, 2003: East Central Writing Centers Association Marietta, OH
Contact: Tim Catalano (catalant@marietta.edu) Director of the Campus Writing Center, 215 Fifth Street, Marietta College, Marietta, OH 45750 <Catalant@marietta.edu>. Conference Web site: <<http://www.marietta.edu/~mcwrite/eastcentral.html>>.

October 23-25, 2003: International Writing Centers Conference and National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Hershey, PA
Contact: Ben Raftery, brafoth@iup.edu. Conference Web site: <www.wc.iup.edu/2003conference>.

TUTORS' COLUMN

On teaching the thesis

The standard definition of a thesis asserts that it should be “unifying, thought-provoking, and narrow enough to explore in-depth” (Capossela 31). This definition seems clear enough, there is nothing inherently confusing about it, and I, for one, have heard it repeated countless times. So why has it become a meaningless statement to me? Perhaps it has been so often repeated, that it has ceased to make an impression. For me, writing an effective thesis statement has always been an elusive concept. As a student, I have wrestled with the task, struggling to produce just the “right” thesis as though there was only one way to do it and also, allowing myself to become so intimidated by the idea that I have put entire papers on hold. I suspect that I am not alone in these feelings. So what can we, as tutors, do if our method of teaching a student about thesis statements is not effective? Because a single method will not work for all students, we must utilize multiple teaching strategies, such as questioning, the “Thesis Generator,” and the “Writing Wheel” (Rae).

As a tutor, it is problematic to assume that we can “fix” a student’s thesis because we cannot understand completely what they are trying to say. Instead, questioning methods have been used to help students discover what they are trying to say. Windy Noyes, a Writing Fellow from Brigham Young University, found it helpful to include a series of questions in her response letter and then discuss the questions in-depth during the conference. “What is the goal of your paper? Why would someone want to read this? What do you want to say to your reader?” (Noyes). Laura Ostler, an-

other experienced Fellow, also finds it important to ask a lot of questions. Because the Writing Fellows program works with students across several disciplines, Laura will only ask for a thesis directly if the student is familiar with the term. If the student might be confused by a question so phrased, she will simply ask them to state their “main idea” in a single sentence (Ostler). Then, while the students are verbalizing their ideas, both tutors take notes of key words and phrases. The students can then use these notes as they create a thesis that will work for their paper. Questioning students in this way allows students to clarify their argument and prevents them from becoming too dependent upon the tutor (Noyes, Ostler).

One of the problems among novice writers is that their thesis fails to relate to all aspects of their paper. Colleen Rae, a social studies teacher in a New Mexico Community College, has developed what she calls the “Writing Wheel” to help solve this problem. The Writing Wheel is a method of prewriting that keeps the thesis in a prominent position, forcing the student to consciously create evidence that will support the thesis. The Wheel is composed of an inner core, for a word or phrase that best represents the essence of what the writer is trying to say; spokes, for the evidence; and an outer rim, for the thesis statement, which encapsulates all of the inner evidence. This technique visually allows the student to see how the evidence relates to the thesis; they cannot use evidence that will not support this “outer rim.”

If a student is struggling to express ideas in a thesis-friendly form, the tu-

tor could suggest using the “Easy Thesis Generator,” a formulaic method of thesis writing. The “Thesis Generator” has four steps. First, have students state the topic. Then, ask them what their stand on the issue is, and then why they took this stand. Finally, have students qualify their stance by acknowledging the opposing argument. The resulting equation looks like this: Qualification + Stance + Rationale = Thesis. Though the student may not use this contrived thesis in the final draft, it will produce some ideas to begin working with.

Questioning, the “Thesis Generator,” and the “Writing Wheel” are just a few methods teachers have found effective. This list is certainly not all-inclusive, and these methods will not work for all students, but they do provide some new ideas for teaching students how to write an effective thesis statement. It is essential that as tutors we are always looking for new ways to present the information so that we can reach all of our students.

Susanna Gibson
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT

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- Capossela, Toni-Lee. “Finding a Focus.” *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring*. Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1998.
- Noyes, Windy. Personal interview. 18 Oct. 2000.
- Ostler, Laura. Personal interview. 18 Oct. 2000.
- Rae, Colleen. “Before the Outline—The Writing Wheel.” *Social Studies* 81.4 (1990): 178-180.
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Book Review

Gillespie, Paula, Alice Gillam, Lady Falls Brown, and Byron Stay, Eds. *Writing Center Research: Extending the Conversation*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002.

Reviewed by Lauren Fitzgerald (Yeshiva University, New York, NY), D'Ann George (Bridgewater State College, Bridgewater, MA), and Janet Wright Starner (Wilkes University, Wilkes-Barre, PA)

An overview of the collection and its audience

D'Ann: This book shows how work routinely conducted in, around, and through writing centers, by its administrators, tutoring staff, and clients, can be parlayed into research projects that benefit center staff, its clients, and/or the institution as a whole. The reader will find a rich collection of diverse projects and research methods, described by many familiar and some new voices in the field. The only tenet of "writing center research" that seems to emerge from most chapters is that it must be in some way self-reflexive, which is to say that as a scholarly community, we seek to cultivate, through the study of writers, a self-conscious awareness of our own practices and their contexts.

Lauren: The audience for these fourteen chapters is clearly writing center professionals—administrators and tutors in a position to engage in writing center research projects themselves. (However, students in graduate courses on writing centers or writing program administration or preparing to write dissertations on writing centers would find some of the chapters useful, as might students in intensive undergraduate tutor training courses.) Though some writing center folks might have a problem with the exclusivity of this audience—that it doesn't include the beginning undergraduate peer tutor, for example—I don't believe it weakens the project in the least; the specific concerns of writing center administrators are worth addressing.

How might this book prove useful?

Janet: The articles collected in this volume provide a long and wide view of writing center research, and many of them will be immediately useful to my work as a busy writing center director who wears many hats at a small liberal arts school. As a teacher/researcher I learned much, in a short space, about the outlines of the field. Like many of the book's contributors, my time to read-in-the-field is a precious commodity in short supply; this book offered a good way to catch-up.

But *Writing Center Research* provides much more than a survey of the literature. While many of the articles provided models that I could adopt in my own Center, laying out in clear terms how research—and everyday operations—is conducted, they also provoked new thinking and invited self-reflection. A good example is Jon Olson, Dawn J. Moyer, and Adelia Falda's essay, "Student-Centered Assessment Research in the Writing Center." When adapted to my own locale, I know the strategies outlined there will be quite useful. But the practice described was courageously framed by the narrative of institutional critique, and therefore—like so many of the essays in this collection—it made me re-think positions I had held and pushed me to reconsider issues I thought I had come to terms with.

Jean Marie Lutes' "Why Feminists Make Better Tutors: Gender and Disciplinary Expertise in a Curriculum-Based Tutoring Program" seemed similarly useful. The description of the curriculum-based tutoring program she developed provided resources I can use as I develop our own Writing Fellows program. The cooperative venture I

have envisioned will be staffed by writing consultants from various disciplines who will be paired with faculty who teach courses in their majors. Lutes' critical reflection caused me to pause in my headlong rush to get the system up and running. I had not considered some of the issues she raised, and I realize that I have wandered a bit naively into this imagined collaboration.

Lauren: What is most useful to me is how this collection broadened my notions of what constitutes writing center research—its objects of study, participants, the range of methodologies available, the knowledge produced. If I had to choose the one chapter most responsible for this shift, it would be "The Portfolio Project: Sharing Our Stories" by Sharon Thomas, Julie Bevins, and Mary Ann Crawford. Before reading this piece, I guess I'd thought of writing center research "spatially," in terms of what took place inside the center, with students or tutors, for instance; or just outside, in the center's relation to other areas of the institution (such as faculty perceptions); or somewhere "around" writing centers, in their histories and representation.

Thomas, Bevins, and Crawford's longitudinal study of student writers during their undergraduate years departs from this model. As they admit, and as I first thought as I started reading their chapter, some might consider their study not to be writing *center* research per se; after all, they studied students who might not have ever used the center. But as the authors persuasively claim, they benefited enormously from coming "to understand the culture of writing in our university from the perspective of those who live, study, and work in that cul-

ture—the students” (150), including increasing the center’s dialogue with faculty and altering tutor training methods (though they add that their research also brought with it more institutional demands). Another implication of their project, it seems to me, is that it requires thinking of centers not as cordoned off from the larger institution, but of a piece with it, which, despite repeated calls to see writing centers as sites of inquiry and subject to institutional contexts (such as Muriel Harris’s chapter in this volume), we tend not to enact perhaps as much as we should in our professional practices.

I also appreciated that several writers made clear the practical applications of their research. Peter Carino’s rhetorical analysis of writing center promotional materials, for instance, has given me food for thought about how I publicize the center I direct: Do my colleagues read my emphasis on the training tutors receive as my protesting too much? Maybe so.

D’Ann: I was happy to see a chunk of the book devoted to institutional research because writing center professionals are well positioned to do that sort of work. And for many of us (myself included), heavy workloads necessitate that research and administration overlap. I also found encouraging the many chapters demonstrating how directors can involve students—and even clients—in research projects. A successful researcher needs collaborators, and for most writing center professionals, tutors and tutees are the obvious choice.

Like Janet and Lauren, I too liked the practical applications of the book. In response to chapters by Welch and Rodby, I’ll be redesigning my tutor-training course to include more frequent and deeper analyses of what happens during actual tutorials. I realize now that our staff spends too much time reading professional articles and too little time theorizing about what we are experiencing on the job.

A few drawbacks

Janet: I confess it—I had no “problem” with this book; I can’t play the role of curmudgeonly reviewer. Yet at the same time, I am even more provoked that so much time still is spent apologizing for our work. If a reader had a dollar for every mention of Stephen North’s name, she could purchase several copies of the book for her colleagues, I suspect. Is there any other segment of academia that spends so much time whipping itself in response to one critical viewpoint?

Even the cover’s design seems to invite an additional body of potential readers—those in a position to approve the idea itself, that amorphous “they” whom North would have us defend ourselves to. The book’s title stands alone against a neutral-colored, shapeless background, but the word “RESEARCH,” in white type, stands out boldly against a dark blue field, making it the most striking image on the cover. One could carry this book around and almost no one would notice that the RESEARCH is located in a writing center. Seen from a distance, the eye goes straight to this focal point, then travels upward to WRITING CENTER, then follows down to the smaller italicized *Extending the Conversation*, as if to proclaim “this is real academic work, done in writing centers. Hey! not only have we had a conversation, but we are *Extending it*.” The narratives within the book indicate that I am not the only writing center professional who resonates knowingly to such defensive bravado.

D’Ann: My wish list for the next book on research through writing centers would be a greater exploration of research intended for institutional audiences other than writing centers themselves. So many researchers in this book tell stories that seem likely to be of interest to others—freshman writing programs, WAC programs, teachers of non-native speakers of English—yet only one chapter (“The Portfolio Project”) discussed research self con-

sciously targeted toward an audience outside of writing centers and their staff and clients. Even so, some of the methodologies and projects gave me ideas for research that could reach a broader audience both within and beyond my institution.

As someone undergoing self-training in qualitative research (when researchers directly observe people in a natural setting or situation, such as a writing center), I found the book inspiring and useful, but wished for more nitty-gritty on how projects are conceived, designed, refined, and most importantly, subjected to ongoing, reflexive criticism. To some extent, my own biases about the purpose of writing center research influenced my expectations for the book. I think we are first and foremost studying human beings, not texts, and that our research methods should therefore take special care to collaborate with the people whom we are studying and to treat them ethically. According to the introduction, the editors share my feelings, at least to the extent that research methods should be carefully critiqued. But I found few rigorous examinations of methods for studying people (Lerner and Neff were exceptions). Instead, I found fascinating textual analyses of tutorial transcripts and even WCenter listserv posts, often informed by literary theory. I also found useful examinations of administration-as-research, usually informed by lots of experience in the politics of applying for tenure. But issues of ethics in representation—how to choose research participants, how to gain consent for studying them and publishing the results, how to interview and otherwise involved them as research participants, etc.—were addressed less often.

Perhaps this lack of attention to ethics in research that undeniably involves human subjects points to the position of writing center research within the field of English Studies, which is still dominated by literary studies, a scholarly discipline that usually does not in-

volve the study of living people through interaction with them. Yet it may be that by foregrounding the issue of methods and the need to critique them, this book will start a small revolution. Judith Rodby, for example, concludes her fascinating critical reading of a tutorial transcript by wondering how her study might have been enhanced had she interviewed the student, the tutor, and the professor she wrote about and asked for their response to her conclusions.

Lauren: My own (limited) experience with qualitative research leads me to agree that it's crucial to involve subjects by asking for their responses to our conclusions about them. But it's just as crucial to consider how we portray our subjects. Oddly enough, it was while working on this review that I came to see why such consideration is important: One of my very first posts to WCenter is quoted in one of the chapters—as evidence of “the rough draft approach” often characteristic of the list discussion overall. Seeing my words, my name, and this conclusion on the printed page made me feel, well, *embarrassed*. Here I am, reviewing a book in which I'm cited as an example of incorrect summarizing! Of course, given the public nature of WCenter, the author had every right to use my email without contacting me first. However, it sure would have felt better to have been able to explain why I wrote what I did. The good news is that I now understand, more than I could have otherwise, what it feels like to be the research subject rather than the researcher. Perhaps all of us interested in qualitative research should undergo this kind of humbling experience.

Our favorite aspects

Lauren: I really like that many contributors demystified the research process further by addressing some of the difficulties involved with their projects. This is especially true of Elizabeth Boquet's and Neal Lerner's pieces, which describe some of the

struggles they had to work through to write dissertations on writing centers using qualitative methodologies, and in Boquet's case, to revise her dissertation into what would become her book, *Noise from the Writing Center*. But as Janet mentions above, Olson, Moyer and Falda aren't afraid of addressing challenges either, devoting a section of their chapter to the disadvantages of letting students research their center. And Joyce Magnotto Neff is just as frank about shortcomings of using grounded theory, pointing out its “lack of credibility in English departments” (144). As Boquet writes, “In general, academics don't do a very good job of talking about the process of publication in the same painstaking detail that we seem able to talk about the content of that publication” (30). This collection does a good job overall of countering this tendency.

D'Ann: Research happens when we begin to see criticism and conflict as calls to investigate rather than problems to smooth over, avoid, or gripe about, and I think that many authors show us this attitude in action. They did this by smartly following the lead of WPAs who have been arguing for years that many forms of writing program administration constitute a kind of research, particularly when some kind of change in thinking and/or in programming happens as a consequence of that research. Some authors, for example, developed a new justification or critique of an existing program, while others altered programs, created new ones, or worked to change individual teachers within a program. Objects of change included writing assignments, teaching/tutorial strategies, assessment tools, teaching/tutor training programs, writing center promotional materials, or even the attitudes of teachers/students/tutors about writers and their work.

Janet: Early in our discussion process for this review, Lauren said it seemed to her that this collection was “trying to move writing center scholar-

ship into another, more high-powered arena.” I felt the same way. So when I read Lutes' warning about creating “cross-disciplinary tourists” as the by-products of curriculum-based tutoring programs, I can't help but wonder about the appropriateness of the term to describe writing center research itself, as it is mapped out in this volume. Are we, as a field, in the same position in relation to academia? Rodby worries about subject positions in “The Subject is Literacy: General Education and the Dialectics of Power and Resistance in the Writing Center.” Are our researchers positioned something like the Mexican-American writer described in her essay? Neither the Mexican-American writer nor the tutor who bravely tried to assist him could imagine a way for him to move into the subject position required by his professor:

He comes from a farm worker culture in which “work” (picking and canning) is not remotely related to what one does in one's free time. The relations between work and leisure are ideological and seem to him obvious and natural. Yet the assignment appears to ask him to blur the boundaries, to turn free time into a commodity, into the confusion of means and ends typical of late 20th-century capitalism. No wonder he resists. (230)

Kathleen Yancey writes “All discourse calls its participants to be its subjects” (227). Yet I keep feeling within the volume's narratives a resistance to be placed by the academy—to be “interpellated” into its discourse in ways other than our own devising. Like the migrant worker's son in Rodby's study, perhaps our assumptive world—and our way of operating in it—is so different that there can be for us no comfortable entry into the subject position that the academy insists on for us. I see that now as our chief advantage rather than as handicap. Let us revel in our distinctiveness and plow the road for a new sort of “better research” that may well be seen by the future as “cutting edge.”

South Central Writing Centers Association

February 20-22, 2003
Fayetteville, AR

Contact: Carole Lane and Karen Clark (writcent@uark.edu), Quality Writing Center, University of Arkansas, Kimpel 315, Fayetteville, AR 72701. Conference Web site: <<http://www.uark.edu/campus-resources/qwrtcntr/scwca.htm>>.

For your tutoring tables

Ruszkiewicz, John, Janice R. Walker, and Michael A. Pemberton. *Bookmarks: A Guide to Research and Writing*, 2nd ed. NY: Longman, 2003.

For tutors working with students on research papers, every chapter of this text has a section entitled "Websites Worth Knowing." For projects other than traditional essays, the section on document design offers assistance with designing Web sites, technical reports, brochures, and flyers. In the section on drafting and revising, the "Focus on . . . Writing Centers" encourages students to take ad-

vantage of their writing center and seek tutorial feedback on their drafts. In addition to bibliographic information on MLA and APA , there is an extensive chapter on COS (Columbia Online Style), the documentation system created by one of the authors of this text, Janice Walker, to work with MLA and APA formats for citing electronic sources.

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Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
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