

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 29, Number 2

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

October, 2004

...FROM THE EDITOR...

Several articles in this issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* indicate the heightened interest in topics that have long been part of our professional discussion: working with ESL writers and writers who face competency tests. As the ESL population in institutions of higher education increases, writing centers naturally find the numbers of their ESL users increasing. Beatrice Mendez-Newman discusses the rationale for adding another ESL population that is overlooked—ESL faculty, and Sayanti Ganguly, a tutor, explores her experiences with tutoring ESL students. Another area of interest to writing centers, born of the increasing call for accountability, is tutoring students who are preparing for required competency tests, and Carol-Ann Farkas discusses the challenges of doing so. For those interested in more tutor training opportunities, Jessica Jansyn describes the three tutor training courses offered at her institution.

This month's issue also includes a number of announcements and calls for proposals for writing center and peer tutoring conferences and an announcement of the 2003 International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) Outstanding Scholarship Awards. Congratulations to the winners of these awards whose scholarship enlightens our field.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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When the ESL writer is a faculty member: Should we work with faculty clients?

Throughout the evolution of writing center theory and practice, English as Second Language writers have been recognized as a special-needs population. Numerous writing center researchers and practitioners have shown us how to adapt traditional tutorial practices to meet the writing needs of international or other ESL writers without compromising sound, accepted tutoring approaches and with sensitivity toward the writer's cultural predilections (Friedlander, Edlund, DiPardo, Newman). For the ESL client, the writing center functions as an institutional locale that offers a means for managing and perhaps solving language problems discreetly, perceptively, and competently. Nancy Grimm's statement that "in higher education, many of the unresolved anxieties about literacy come to rest in writing centers" (xiii) applies to student clients, but I would like to appropriate her statement as an introduction to discussion about a particular type of client with significant anxieties about language problems: faculty members whose native language is not English but who must

write professionally in English in order to meet their institution's service, research, and publication expectations. Granted, this is not a large population at most institutions, but I suspect most writing centers—particularly those at institutions that provide little or no fac-

ulty development support and no organized faculty mentoring program—have had encounters with faculty who need tutorial assistance. My assumption is that most writing centers would consider a faculty client outside the realm of the writing center mission. I would like to suggest that perhaps we should make a place for the faculty client in our writing center work.

Maintaining the integrity of the center

There is no dispute that writing centers first and foremost exist for our students. However, our collective beliefs about the writing center's place in the institutional environment permit exploration of possibilities for responding to faculty writers as well. "When there is a new clientele to serve, whether they be returning women, Asian immigrants, technical writers, or deaf students," writes Thom Hawkins, "writing centers not only face new instructional challenges, but also are in a superb position to make discoveries about language development and composition" (xiv). Joan Mullin, describing writing centers as "resources for resolving problems facing the discipline and the academy," (Mullin and Wallace, viii), echoes the notion that writing centers stand at the cutting edge of institutional response to composition problems and questions. Faculty members are not traditional students, but they are nonetheless learners: faculty members from foreign countries whose institutional experiences have been limited to completing graduate school in an American university and those who have degrees from foreign institutions are frequently unfamiliar with conventions of institutional discourse, academic documents, and professional writing, and they need guidance in learning how to write in an academic environment as professionals rather than as students. Institutions hire non-resident faculty but frequently fail to provide institutional support for helping them perform writing tasks effectively in the institutional environment. In some ways, they are an overlooked

institutional constituency with limited access to full membership in the institutional community because of linguistic and cultural factors. While it is not the responsibility of the writing center to mentor non-native faculty on their quest toward tenure, there is little to be lost and much to be gained by working with such faculty within carefully established boundaries.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), of the 1,027,830 faculty at all institutions of higher learning (public four-year through private two-year), 9,155 are classified as "non-resident alien" (U.S. Department of Education). Unfortunately, no statistics are available on the number of foreign faculty who need assistance in preparing institutional and professional documents in English. Anecdotal evidence, however, indicates that they do have language needs that can be addressed by writing center staffs without detracting from services and tutorial hours designated for students.

Writing center theory and the faculty client

While foreign faculty are on professional career tracks, they demonstrate many of the same characteristics that writing center workers recognize in special-needs populations of writing center clients and that writing center theorists and practitioners have helped us learn to serve effectively. Nancy Grimm, for example, has shown us how to recognize difference as an important aspect of the institutional environment. Grimm's student examples offer strategies for helping students from non-traditional backgrounds find a voice in the institution without compromising their individuality, blurring their diversity, or exposing their limited command of mainstream English (32). Anne DiPardo has shown us that working effectively with students from other cultures sometimes requires that we revise our established approaches to working with writing center clients. DiPardo's work with "Fanny" and my

The *Writing Lab Newsletter*, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by the Department of English, Purdue University, is a publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by Purdue University. Material will not be reproduced in any form without express written permission. However, up to 50 copies of an article may be reproduced under fair use policy for educational, non-commercial use in classes or course packets. As always, proper acknowledgment of title, author, and original publication date in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, Purdue University, should be included for each article.

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Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures. Yearly payments of \$15 (U.S. \$20 in Canada) are requested, and checks must be received four weeks prior to the month of expiration to ensure that subscribers do not miss an issue. Please make checks payable to Purdue University and send to the Managing Editor. Prepayment is requested for all subscriptions.

Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays. If possible, please send as attached files in an e-mail to wln@purdue.edu. Otherwise, send hard copy and a computer disk or CD-ROM, and please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for an October issue).

own work with Hispanic students suggest that non-directive tutoring may not be the best approach for tutoring students whose culturally-based behaviors pose barriers to non-directive tutoring, that sometimes the tutor must first be a listener in order to ultimately be a collaborator in literacy instruction (DiPardo, 364-365; Newman, 58-59). Relying on Stephen Krashen's language acquisition theory, John Edlund explains how ESL theory can inform our approach to non-native writers in the center (206-209), an expertise that even a professional editor is not likely to possess but which many writing center tutors recognize as vital in working with non-native English speakers. Muriel Harris has discussed how a tutor's individualized attention is vital in working with students "whose social and cultural values, predilections, and habits lead them to create discourse that does not look like accepted academic prose in American universities" (97). Thus, because we, as writing center workers, already embrace these insights about working effectively with special-needs clients, we are excellently positioned to work with another special-needs population: faculty members who recognize their lack of familiarity with conventions of written English and who need assistance in fulfilling the writing responsibilities of the academic community.

The process of going through the tenure-track cycle and finding a voice in the institution is traumatic even for native English speakers; if we superimpose the stress of completing the process in a language that is not our first language and in an institutional setting that requires behaviors that might be contradictory to our cultural norms, we might begin to understand the writing needs of the non-native faculty member. In addition, there is the stigma of asking a colleague for assistance in producing documents that academicians are supposed to know how to produce. Those of us familiar with academic culture and with the writing process know the importance of socializa-

tion and peer input in completing writing tasks; for us, asking a trusted colleague to provide input during the process of producing an important document is a necessary part of the writing process. Frequently, this is not the case for faculty members from foreign cultures. In asking for assistance, foreign faculty members risk being exposed as linguistically and academically incompetent. In the quest to secure footing in the precipitous academic landscape, the foreign faculty member must be "more perfect" than everyone else, and he/she sees every linguistic infelicity and every request for assistance as potential grounds for being kicked off the tenure track. Thus, the writing center—where no one criticizes the writer, where competent, confidential assistance is available, where all writing is equal, and where the writer is as important as the writing—seems the safest locale to seek assistance.

How the center can help

Based on my work with foreign faculty I categorize the types of assistance they need into three broad classes: (1) introduction to the conventions of standard documents, such as formal e-mail messages, memos, letters, and resumes; (2) assistance in producing required institutional documents, such as annual review and tenure/promotion dossiers, committee reports, internal forms, etc.; and (3) editorial assistance in completing professional documents, such as presentation proposals, abstracts, articles, research grant proposals, etc. Each of these categories requires specialized genre knowledge that is usually not included in tutor training, so whenever I worked with a faculty member, I invited a tutor to observe me. Eventually, I was able to designate several tutors who could work with faculty members when I was unavailable.

The first category—specialized documents—is the simplest; frequently, all that is needed is to show the faculty member templates such as

those available in Microsoft Word to ensure that the document is formatted appropriately. However, I also help the faculty member understand the communication conventions and audience expectations aligned with documents such as e-mail messages, memos, letters, and curriculum vitae. For example, I tell my faculty clients that memos must be concise, that chattiness, extended explanations, and detailed examples are not appropriate for the typical memo. E-mail, I point out, can be somewhat personal if the recipient is known to the sender, but like memos, e-mail messages should be to the point. I also explain that the writer of e-mail messages must be careful not to sound inadvertently terse or inappropriately humorous, both extremes in tone that can negatively impact the recipient's reaction to the message. I also remind them of the caveats most of us observe regarding e-mail: do not put anything in writing for which you do not want to be held accountable, and if the e-mail is in anyway confrontational, allow a cooling off period before sending the message. Curriculum vitae, I explain, should clearly and succinctly reflect the faculty member's education, teaching experience, professional accomplishments, and publications; I tell my faculty clients that specific dates, specific page numbers, and complete titles are vital to a well-written curriculum vitae. I also show them how to use typographical devices such as boldfacing, italics, underscoring, and even color to enhance a document's readability.

The next category—institutional documents—requires some specialized knowledge on the part of the writing center staff person, but with a bit of guidance, a student tutor can effectively help a faculty member who must produce, for example, a committee report. With committee reports, I start by asking for any guidelines that may have been established by the administrator who oversees the committee; in the absence of those, I tell the faculty member to be concise and to remember

that the report must clearly reflect the extent to which the committee has fulfilled the task it was assigned. I point out obvious things such as including dates when committee tasks were completed, noting the date of the report in a header or footer, attaching relevant documents as appendices, including a bibliography of materials consulted, if appropriate. With annual evaluation folders and tenure and promotion documents, I urge the faculty member to seek out a trusted colleague for help in formatting the document, but I also make my own annual evaluation and promotion documents available to them as examples. In writing centers where there is no direct connection between the center and an academic department (for example, if the director and other staff members are not affiliated with the English Department), it is probably best to restrict assistance on such documents to surface, linguistic elements. Still, we should remind the faculty member that self-effacement, a recognized virtue in many cultures, has no place in the production of evaluation or tenure documents. All accomplishments, I explain, must clearly reflect and explicitly explain the faculty member's contribution to the institution or to the discipline.

The last category—professional writing—is the trickiest. Under no circumstances would I suggest that we get into the business of editing potential faculty publications, but we can offer some general guidelines and assistance that can help the non-native faculty member gain confidence and competence in his/her writing efforts. Thus, I advise my faculty clients to seek out a professional editor, and I provide names and phone numbers of colleagues who do editing “on the side.” Sometimes, the assistance needed by foreign faculty members is so minimal that we can work with him/her without depriving our students of tutorial attention, but I insist on having the faculty member make an appointment with me

or one of our tutors to ensure we can devote a pre-established, designated period for working with the faculty member. I also remind the faculty member that we do not routinely work with faculty and that students are our priority. If the faculty member is preparing an article for submission to an academic journal, I always insist on seeing a copy of the journal to get an idea of the appropriate format, tone, length, etc. I also make sure the faculty member is using the style sheet required by the journal; if the journal does not list a specific style sheet, I advise the writer to take note of how references, stylistic matters, and presentation are handled in a published article and to use that article as an example. If the faculty member already knows the areas in which he/she has recurrent problems because of interference from the native language, I will usually go over one or two pages of the manuscript, explaining the reasoning behind the problematic English constructions and guiding the writer to correct the problems on his or her own in the rest of the manuscript.

Should we work with faculty clients?

I do have to admit that the first time a faculty client walked into our center, we were surprised; perhaps that's why no one said, “We don't work with faculty.” Instead, I took her in my office and said, “Let's see if I can help you; I may not be familiar enough with your discipline to really help you.” As it turned out, like the student writer who has one recurrent grammatical problem that he/she can't master, this faculty writer was already aware of her problems, but she needed some help in figuring out when certain constructions are appropriate in English and when they are not. She kept coming back for help with committee reports, with research proposals, with formal e-mail messages, and with various other academic documents not because she became dependent on us, but because we

explained the source of her problems and gave her strategies for managing the problems on her own. After working with her for several months, I told her that she had so adeptly dealt with her language interference problems that her writing no longer marked her as an ESL writer. She modestly beamed at the compliment.

In the end it comes down to a question: What responsibility do writing centers have to faculty clients, whether they be ESL writers or native users of English? The easy answer is none. Responding “no responsibility” should make us uncomfortable. Writing centers are the most visible places on our campuses for turning writing into an opportunity for self-growth, for increased understanding of academic discourse, for experiencing the confidence that comes with the knowledge that a writing task has been completed appropriately and effectively. The subject I am discussing here, as far as I know, has not been openly addressed in literature and discussions on writing center theory and practice. But, I find it hard to believe that my institution's writing center is the only one in the country that attracts faculty clients.

Should we work with faculty clients? I argue that the answer should be a qualified “yes.” No one is in a better position than well-trained writing center tutors to explain the nuances of English constructions, whether it be those pesky articles that plague so many non-native speakers of English, the way placement of an adverb changes meaning, or the misuse of a word that appears to be a cognate but is really quite different in meaning. Professional editors work with the writing itself and are generally indifferent to the client's understanding of the rationale behind the correct construction. Writing center tutors, on the other hand, work with the writer and guide him/her toward self-confidence and independence as a writer, and we foster these

attitudes while respecting the writer's need for confidentiality and recognizing the importance of the writing task. Writing centers can be an important milestone in helping the non-native faculty member assimilate into the American academic culture. My institution's writing center has welcomed faculty writers into our community of writers, but we do not know if this is an accepted or respected practice at other institutions. Perhaps it's time to open a conversation about the place of faculty clients in the writing center.

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2003 IWCA Outstanding Scholarship Awards

Congratulations to the winners of the 2003 International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) Outstanding Scholarship Awards: Michael Pemberton, Joyce Kinkead, and Neal Lerner. The following awards will be presented at the Watson Conference, October 7-9:

Best Book: Pemberton, Michael A., and Joyce Kinkead, eds. *The Center Will Hold*. Logan: Utah State UP, 2003.

Best Article: Lerner, Neal. "Writing Center Assessment: Searching for the 'Proof' of Our Effectiveness." *The Center Will Hold*. Ed. Michael A. Pemberton and Joyce Kinkead. Logan: Utah State UP, 2003. 58-73.

Many thanks to the Book Award Committee (Shevaun Watson, Chair; Penny Bird; Meg Carroll; and Craig Crist-Evans) and the Article Award Committee (Carol Haviland, Chair; Brad Hughes; Roberta Kjesrud; and Barbara Lutz).

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Writing back to the writing exam: Can writing centers teach and test without trauma?

I am an instructor in literature and writing at a college of pharmacy and health sciences—a school that includes liberal arts as a core part of the curriculum but which is overwhelmingly “professional” in nature. Since the 1970s, our student population has been increasingly diverse, including more and more first-generation college students, especially from recent immigrant groups. With this trend, there has been a matching change in faculty perception that communication skills, both oral and written, have been declining. As Neal Lerner has pointed out in his history of writing instruction in our college, this perception has actually existed for as long as the college has (“A History of WAC” 8); nevertheless, whether it is a new problem or not, we definitely have many students with communication skills that are weak—that is, not adequate for the kinds of communication tasks they need to perform in their professions.

To deal with this problem, our Arts and Sciences faculty initiated a Writing Proficiency Exam (WPE) in 1991. The stated goal of this exam is to identify those students, especially transfers who do not go through our course of freshman English, who need help with their writing. Two weeks before the exam date, students are given a packet of readings; they are instructed to identify the issue in the articles and to prepare to write a persuasive argument in response, which will employ the readings as sources. Students are allowed to take the test only once; if they fail, they have to take a one-semester, three-credit composition course. Students dread and resent this test, because they dread and resent the conse-

quences of failing. Those who fail argue injustice because they have either passed freshman composition at our institution here, or have credit for it at other institutions; they believe, with some justification, that their writing skills have already been assessed and approved. Students also complain, again with some justification, that they cannot afford the time out of their very densely packed curriculums to take three credits of writing.

Regardless of whether the test is fair or not, in the school’s culture it is unlikely the test will change any time soon. In the meantime, while the school has spent nearly the last century fretting over students’ writing skills, it was only in 1996, five years after the introduction of the WPE, that the school committed to creating a writing center to support writing instruction. At the time, the Center was envisioned as a place for “triage,” “assist[ing] composition faculty in diagnosis/ remediation of writing problems among ESL and native writers of English” (Lerner, “Confessions” 30)—this is where writing center types collectively sigh at those words: triage, remediation. Under the founding direction of Neal Lerner, the Center tried from its inception to be more than a place of remediation, advertising to faculty and students alike that it could provide writing support for all manner of projects. In Lerner’s day, and now that I’m coordinating the Center, the philosophy has always been rooted firmly in the writing center tradition: we follow Stephen North’s ideal, that we make better writers, not better writing (69).

So, in keeping with our goal to support students in their attempts to practice and improve their writing skills, we have indeed been helping the composition faculty. About 35-50% of our “business” in the last two years has come from students working on papers in freshman composition. We also do as much as we can to help non-native speakers/writers in their efforts to acquire fluency—on average, about 65% of the Center’s students identify themselves as having a first language other than English. In fact, one of our greatest public relations hurdles is convincing the campus community that we are not only a center for remediation, that we are not a place where only ESL students go (and that “ESL” does not equal “remedial”). This is the old writing center story.

And part of the old writing center story too is that, in order to justify our budget to the administration, we are constantly seeking ways to increase the number of students that we serve. So, right from the start of the Center in 1996, we have promoted a marketing tie-in to the WPE (I should mention too that the Writing Center and WPE are tasks that have, in the last few years, been given to one faculty member). When we advertise the exam, we also include, in the same ads, promotion of the Writing Center as a place where students can go for “help.” The Center also runs exam preparation workshops. As a marketing strategy, this tie-in has been natural, and effective—about 20-25% of our business is now related to the WPE over the course of a semester, but in the two weeks leading up to the exam, at least 50% of our 54 appointments per week are for the WPE.

This is where a marketing success becomes a marketing monster. As I noted, in the two weeks leading up to the exam, our business has become increasingly dedicated to the WPE, to the extent that other students, with equally pressing writing needs, cannot get writing appointments. We turned away at least 27 students in the last WPE period. Students are not getting the help they need, and—although one does not like to live and die by PR—it is really unhelpful to create the perception that “it’s hard to get in at the Writing Center,” or “I went there and they told me they couldn’t help me.” Another, more disturbing, problem of the last few years has been this: we have been giving students regular appointments for the WPE, and students have responded—understandably—by taking advantage of the full 50 minutes. They are preparing for an exam where they should be tested on their ability to plan and then write a well-developed argument, using their own abilities, in a time-limited situation—yet many students will try to write complete papers in advance, and get as much feedback on them as they would for regular, non-timed assignment.

What this means is that our consultants have been finding themselves giving more advice than students being tested should have—because it is hard not to treat a student writer as a writer, to treat her instead like an examinee. And students misinterpret the role of the consultant in this process; they seem to think that the consultants are agents of the exam, who can tell them if they are going to pass or fail. If they do fail, they hold the Center responsible: “I went to the Writing Center and they told me that if I made this change and that change I would be OK.” As consultant Katie McCormick notes—and students have said as much to me as well—students come to feel that they are owed a passing grade because they have gone to the Center, and if they fail, it was because the con-

sultants were hiding an exam solution. In fact, the consultants do *not* tell the students that they “will be OK,” and they try not to give any more than general advice; but it is hard for them to be completely non-committal, to give advice without in some way conveying encouragement or even approval—that, after all, is their job, in dealing with “normal” writing situations. The connection between this writing exam and the Writing Center seems, in theory, a natural one, but is, in fact, a problem.

Michael Pemberton has found that such conflict is widespread, and vexing, when a prescribed writing exam collides with writing center ideals. In his survey of writing centers supporting the Georgia State Regents’ Exam, Pemberton found that center staff who took a “current-traditional” approach, based on error identification and correction, found no contradiction between their mission and that of the exam: the work of both was to find weaknesses in student writing and get the students to fix them. However, other writing center staff, like the instructors at this institution, who identified their approach to tutoring as being more process- and writer-oriented, found that the focus on the exam as a formulaic product, and the tutoring process as trouble-shooting, forced them to “warp the kind of advice they gave to students.” Writing center staff provided exam support to the college’s students, but with a certain degree of cynicism; as one director put it, “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” (qtd. in Pemberton 8).

Pemberton’s findings parallel those at this institution. The consultants here, the writing instructors who are on the front lines, feel the test/tutorial conflict acutely. It seems to them that when it is exam time, the WPE more or less hi-

jacks the Center, and puts them in a very uneasy position. According to the consultants, the Center’s involvement with the exam tends to make them feel a sense of responsibility for, and investment in, student success when they work closely on a draft with students. Moreover, as consultant Pamela Siska has said, if the WPE is an instrument to assess writing ability, then giving students substantive input about ideas or very detailed suggestions about organization turns the revision process into a collaboration—exactly the kind of collaborative process that a writing center usually likes to foster. But when we are talking about a high stakes exam, this kind of help may mean the difference between passing or failing—and if the exam is a joint effort of student and tutor, then how does the exam accurately assess the student’s ability? In other words, by helping the student to become a better writer than she would be without our help, we may be undermining the exam.

At the same time, as consultants Francis Storrs and Katie McCormick point out, the exam is undermining the Center’s philosophy of teaching writing as a process that is both instructive and enjoyable. Many students do not seem to understand why they are being tested in the first place: some view the WPE as an inexplicable demand by an already demanding and labyrinthine bureaucracy. The rules of the Center and the fact that there are relatively few appointments make the Center seem like just another arm of this bureaucracy. Then because of the high stakes nature of the test, students come to equate writing with a system of competencies, and the writing exam as just another *thing* needed for graduation and professional accreditation—a hoop. Consultant Gerard Teichman adds that the high stakes nature of the exam diminishes the appeal of the Writing Center’s and the institution’s stated commitment to thoughtful analysis and discourse—the whole

school setting becomes a large machine that enforces standards and competencies without fostering a congenial culture of inquiry. The connection between this test and the Writing Center reinforces a problematic that inherently plagues centers—as Beth Boquet has noted, while our philosophy is to create a space where we put education and writing into the students’ hands, we may be perceived as—we may actually be—acting as agents of social indoctrination and punishment (44).

So, how do we talk back to this misidentification? How can our Center free itself from this problematic and invidious role, where we are being drawn further and further away from our philosophy?—especially when we have to be pragmatic and acknowledge that we need the business the WPE presents. We have been talking about this a lot lately in the Writing Center, and have started to come up with some solutions. What we would like is to see the WPE dismantled and replaced by a means of assessment that supports a student-centered, process-oriented approach to writing, like portfolios. Given that that is currently only a gleam in the coordinator’s eye, we are trying to find ways to distance ourselves from the perception of the Center as an enforcer of exam standards.

First of all, we have come up with the idea of an additional grade for the exam. Instead of consigning even the borderline students to an F, and hence to the much dreaded, punitive, writing course, we have worked with the faculty grading committee (of which I am the chair—I will not even get into the vexed nature of my role in all this) to create a grade of “W,” or “workshop.” Students whose exams are flawed but not disastrous, are assigned to a four-week workshop in the Center where they study their particular problem area—argumentation, organization, use of sources, mechanics—and revise their exam paper. Students who get a W see this as a gift compared to an F and are content to do the extra work—

and, whether they consciously realize it or not, we are able to teach them that writing is not a do or die situation, that it is indeed a process, a collaboration, an experience in thinking. I wish we could give many more of the failing students this option (although I have to point out that many of the students who fail really do need not just one more semester of writing instruction, but four or five).

Another change the consultants have proposed is to adopt a hands-off policy for helping students prepare for the exam. First of all, instead of claiming, with the exam advertisements, that the Writing Center will “help,” we will be more specific, informing students that the Center will provide assistance with understanding the exam as a procedure, without implying that we will “help” them pass. Then, we will stop giving full 50-minute appointments to students preparing for the exam. We will offer daily drop-in sessions where students can ask specific questions about the exam procedure and criteria; we will allow students to make shorter individual appointments where they can clarify their understanding of what the exam is asking them to do. This seems to be what many students need most anyway—there is a significant number of students who fail not because their skills are too weak, but because they do not understand the generic conventions of the exam. Finally, we will not help students write exam papers in advance of the test—it seems contrary to our philosophy to deny help to student writers who ask for it, but really, the exam itself is contrary to our philosophy, and we cannot preserve our identity, our integrity, if we become too hands-on in the exam preparation process.

I hope these measures will not cost us business; I hope that for all the students who get tough love in preparing for the WPE, we will free ourselves—literally and figuratively—to help more students with their writing process. Finally, I hope that by pursuing our ide-

als we will somehow pass that idealism about writing on to our students, to get them to come to the Center to learn, rather than to serve out some term of punishment.

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Boston, MA

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Project Excel Writing Center Director University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

CU-Colorado Springs announces an opening for the position of Director of the Writing Center. Masters required, Ph.D. strongly preferred, in Rhetoric and Composition, Writing Across the Curriculum, Writing Center Administration, or a related field. Duties include all aspects of Center administration and instruction of one course each semester in English or a related discipline. Experience in a college writing center, academic support center, or peer tutoring program and teaching at the college level is required. Salary is commensurate with experience and education. Send letter of

application, curriculum vitae, one-page statement of philosophy regarding writing center pedagogy, an academic transcript, and three letters of recommendation to: Barbara Gaddis, Search Committee Chair, CU-Colorado Springs, P.O. Box 7150, Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7150. The University of Colorado is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer and encourages a diversity of applicants. Receipt of materials will be acknowledged by letter. Review of applicants will begin in early November, 2004, and will continue until position is filled. For full job description and application requirements, visit our Web site at: <<http://web.uccs.edu/affirm/fac.html>>.

European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing

Call for Proposals
June 22-24, 2005
Athens, Greece
"Teaching Writing On-Line and Face to Face"

Full details and all update information on the conference are available on the website: <<http://eataw2005.hau.gr>>. For further details, contact George Exadaktylos, e-mail: gexadaktilos@hau.gr.

South Central Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
March 3-5, 2005
Baton Rouge, LA
"Writing Centers and Time"
Keynote speaker: Muriel Harris

If you believe in the Japanese proverb, "Time spent laughing is time spent with the gods," then join the South Central Writing Center Conference. You'll enjoy creative energy, laughter, and learning with writing center colleagues. We are particularly interested in your interpretations of the theme of time. Proposals should include a title, the names and contact information of all presenters and a description of the presentation (250 words for individuals; 500 words for panels, roundtables, and workshops) and a 50-word abstract. All presenters must be conference registrants. The International Writing Centers Association Web site: <<http://writingcenters.org>> has a link to the conference Web site, which includes suggestions for proposal topics.

Deadline for Proposals: All proposals must be emailed or postmarked by Dec. 15, 2004. Electronic submissions should be sent to jcaprio@lsu.edu. If you prefer to send your proposal by surface mail, send two copies to the LSU Writing Center, B-18 Coates Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803 ATTN: J. Caprio.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Learning through trial and error: Working with ESL students at the writing center

The number of English as Second Language (ESL) students is on the rise in American universities. Sometimes these students are fluent in English, but frequently they are not. For students who hesitate to write in English, a visit to the writing center is a weekly event. ESL students who return to the writing center repeatedly are proof of the fact that these visits are beneficial for them. Tutors find this encouraging because it means that they have been successful in helping ESL students to an extent that ensures that they come back for more help. Yet, appointments I have had with ESL students have made me wonder if I have been able to help them as much as I wanted to. Some methods I have found successful are offered here for other tutors to use with ESL students.

Scholars are quick to point out that there are numerous reasons that make working with ESL students different, and more difficult than working with Native English speakers (NES). But understanding these differences is the first step in enabling the tutor to help ESL students. Sandra Lee McKay points out one of the main difficulties when she says, “what students write is clearly influenced by their cultural, social, and educational experiences” (261). This is one of the main difficulties that ESL students face. Throughout their academic career in their home countries, they have been used to writing in a particular way that in all probability may have been very different from the conventions of American academic prose. But in American universities, they are suddenly expected to write like American students. This can be very difficult for ESL students be-

cause they are now expected to shift the way they write—a new way of writing that is completely alien to them. They now have to learn to write in a new manner while making an effort not to write as they have always written and were most comfortable with.

Tony Silva gives very succinct examples of the ways in which students from different cultures write. For example, he says, “Japanese-speaking subjects used more mixed arguments (arguing for both and against) and argument alterations (between arguing for and arguing against) and more often ended their arguments in directions that differed from the beginning positions” (212). This can be very difficult for students who are now required to analyze one side of an argument. Yet double-sided arguments are unacceptable in most cases since this prevents the students from making an argument and reaching a conclusion. Thus, they must be taught, through simple ways, how to choose one side of the argument and pursue it to the end.

Visual tools, I have found, work extremely well with ESL students. When their thoughts are down on paper, they are able to analyze them better. But their ideas cannot be randomly written on paper since that can confuse them. However, if their ideas are organized in a proper manner on the page in front of them, they are often able to think more clearly.

“Mind-mapping” is an exercise that works very well with ESL students because it helps them clarify their thoughts about their topics and their

positions in relation to the question. It also helps them put the topic/issue they are dealing with in perspective, so that they have a clear idea of what their own opinion is. This further helps them form their own argument and take a position. In mind-mapping students begin by writing the main idea of the issue in the middle of a sheet of paper. On one side of the paper, they then write down all the reasons that support the issue. The other side of the paper will have all the reasons that oppose it. In this manner, they have, on the page, the central topic flanked on either side by the arguments that they have been making for and against. The pattern they have created should give students an overview of both sides of the argument. This, I have noticed, is comparatively easy for them to do since they tend to make mixed arguments anyway. The final part of this exercise consists in deciding which of the two positions resemble their opinions most. When the student and the tutor discuss both sides of the issue, and the tutor asks the student insightful questions, it often helps the student pick a side.

Muriel Harris and Tony Silva write that “adult ESL writers plan less, write with more difficulty (primarily due to a lack of lexical resources), reread what they have written less, and exhibit less facility in revising by ear, that is, in an intuitive manner—on the basis of what “sounds” right, than their NES peers” (“Tutoring” 529). If mind-mapping is one of the ways to help the students plan more, then making them articulate their thoughts is another way of ensuring they reread what they have written. This entails making the students read what they have written again and again

until they are better able to see what the problem with their writing is. After they have read what they have written a couple of times, they usually have a clearer idea of what they are trying to say, even though it is not clear on paper. Then the tutor asks the student to expand the sentence and re-write it until the idea is clearer. It is to the tutor's advantage that ESL students are usually so motivated and committed to their learning that they will continue to struggle with individual sentences as long as it takes them to write clearer, more lucid sentences.

Another way of helping ESL students write clearer and more coherent sentences is by having them tell the tutor what they mean to convey. In talking of her class of ESL students, Kate Mangelsdorf says that the two ways of communicating, speaking and writing, could enrich each other (134). She elaborates, "In my class discussions, for instance, a student would begin a sentence, falter, begin again, be interrupted by a student with another idea, respond to that idea, try again to finish the original idea, be assisted by another student, and so on" (138). Within limits, tutors can take over the role of the other students who question and assist the original speaker.

During my appointments with ESL students, I have often tried to take on the role Mangelsdorf's other students play in her class. When I come across sentences and paragraphs that are unclear because of word choice, word order, or simply because they are too brief, I ask students to tell me what they mean. In explaining, the student usually talks about the idea he/she is trying to convey in much greater detail. They use three sentences to explain what they have said cryptically in one. Thus having the ESL students verbalize their thoughts before writing them is a good way of making their ideas clearer for the reader. It helps ESL students clear up ideas as they speak, and this then enables them to expand and elucidate their ideas in their writing.

Often the tutor has to re-consider his/her role when tutoring an ESL student because ESL students see tutors as writing professionals who will have a solution for all their problems. NES students, however, will view the tutor more as a collaborator. Judith K. Powers says, "the principle difference in the two conferencing situations appears to be the increased emphasis on our role as informant (rather than collaborator) in the second language conference" (101). But the role of the informant means the tutor has to be particularly careful that he/she does not end up doing most of the work for ESL students because they will not learn anything. While the ESL student may consider such a session successful because the paper has been improved upon, from the tutor's point of view such a session is a failure because the student has left the writing center with a better piece of writing, but not as a better writer.

It is not realistic to hope that one session will allow the tutor to address all the concerns a student has about his/her paper. And it is not necessary for the tutor to do so. Because the aim of a writing center is not to help students produce better pieces of writing but to produce better writers, it is much more important that the tutors address one or two specific issues during one tutorial session. During her interviews with ESL students, Muriel Harris noticed that ESL students view "the tutor as the appropriate person to bring their problems to and as the person who deals with specifics, that is, with individual examples of larger principles explained by the teacher" ("Cultural" 223). This view ESL students have with regard to the tutor ensures that they do not offer resistance if the tutor wants to focus on specifics in the paper rather than on all the errors.

Tutors may want to focus on global issues like organization or transitions during one session, and on local issues like comma splices and subject-verb agreement during another tutorial ses-

sion. If tutors were to deal with too many issues during one session, ESL students who are not comfortable with the language will be overwhelmed, and will not be able to learn anything at all. It will also discourage students because they will realize that they still have a long way to go before mastery over the language is achieved. But addressing one or two specific issues during a session also means that the ESL student should be encouraged to come to the writing center not only when a paper is due, but also when a paper is not due. They should be encouraged to come in with the same paper, or new papers, repeatedly so that the tutors can address different issues each time.

Handouts may not serve ESL students as much as they would serve NES writers. NES writers have a better knowledge of the language than ESL students do, and handouts require the user to have some basic idea of the language. Thus, for NES speakers who have had experience in writing, reading, and speaking English, the handouts are likely to be much more helpful. For the ESL student, one-to-one conferences will be much more beneficial. Not only can the tutor explain elements of writing in much greater detail, the student can also ask questions if he or she is confused.

The writing center, then, can cater to ESL students because this is the only place where they can get the special care and attention they need from a group of dedicated individuals who are committed to helping the ESL writer. My appointments with ESL students have enabled me to see that ESL students are motivated and are willing to work hard at their essays. They do present difficulties for the tutor, but these are difficulties that can be overcome by the joint efforts of the tutor and the student. When I first started working with ESL students, I was not very successful. But repeated appointments with them made me better at tutoring students whose native language is not English. The efforts that ESL

writers make have encouraged me to help them to the best of my ability. And I have been rewarded by the repeated appointments that some ESL students have made with me.

Sayanti Ganguly
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, OK

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

October 16, 2004: Michigan Writing Centers Association, in Lansing, MI

Contact: Jill Pennington, e-mail: penningj@lcc.edu, phone: 517-483-1298. Conference Web site: <miwritingcenters.org>.

November 4-6, 2004: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in St. Cloud, MN

Contact: Frankie Condon, Department of English, 720 Fourth Avenue South, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498. Web site: <<http://www.ku.edu/~mwca/>>.

February 10-12, 2005. Southeastern Writing Center Association Conference, in Charleston, SC

Contact: Trixie Smith, Middle Tennessee State University, Department of English, P.O. Box 70, Murfreesboro, TN 37132. E-mail: tgsmith@mtsu.edu; Web site: <www.swca.us>.

March 3-5, 2005: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Baton Rouge, LA

Contact: Judy Caprio, B-18 Coates Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA: 70803. Phone: 225-578-4438, e-mail: jcaprio@lsu.edu.

March 4-5, 2005: Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference, in Orem, UT

Contact: Lisa Eastmond Bell, Utah Valley State College, MC-176, 800 West University Parkway, Orem, UT 84058-5999. Phone: 801-863-8099; e-mail: lisa.bell@uvsc.edu.

April 1-2, 2005: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Adrian, MI

Contact: April Mason-Irean, Siena Heights University, 1247 East Siena Heights Drive, Adrian, Michigan 49221. Phone: 517-264-7638; e-mail: amason@sienahs.edu. Web site: <<http://www.sienahs.edu/~eng/ECWCA/ecwca.htm>>.

April 16-17, 2005: New England Writing Centers Association, in Brooklyn, NY

Contact: Patricia Stephens, English Department, Humanities Building, Fourth Floor, Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, One University Plaza, Brooklyn, NY 11201. Phone: 718-488-1096; e-mail: patricia.stephens@liu.edu.

October 19-23, 2005: International Writing Centers Association, in Minneapolis, MN.

Call for WAC Articles

The editorial board of *The WAC Journal* seeks WAC-related articles from across the country. Our national review board welcomes 5-15 page double-spaced manuscripts on all WAC-related topics, including WAC and writing centers. Send inquiries, proposals, or manuscripts anytime to the editor, Roy Andrews, via e-mail: roya@plymouth.edu..

Beyond training: The hands-on classes available for tutors at Centenary College

After only four complete semesters of tutoring at Centenary College, it is surprising how much I have seen the Writing Center grow. One aspect of this is the classes that are run through the Center. These are not classes for writing skills or composition; they are classes for tutors only. Centenary College's Writing Center is largely involved with the course selection at the college. Not one, but three courses are offered for credit for tutors. We have a training class, Writing Tutor Training, a second semester writing tutor course, Writing Tutor Practicum, and a leadership course called Leadership Seminar. These classes fit into the English major, core-required classes for all majors, or can be used as elective credit for the student writing tutors enrolled in them. Our Writing Tutor Training class is straightforward and mostly traditional. What is not traditional about it is the fact that we include mentors, who are experienced tutors, in the running of the class. These mentors are enrolled in the Leadership Seminar. Those two classes work closely together, while our third class works with the college community outside the Center. The Writing Tutor Practicum is a group of tutors called writing associates. These tutors work with a writing intensive class and a professor to improve the writing ability of the students in that class.

The Writing Tutor Training class is required of any Centenary student wishing to be a writing tutor. It is one semester long and is held both fall and spring semesters. The fifteen-week class includes readings, presentations, and discussions in class and online through our course manager system. Our Writing Center director teaches

the class with the help of experienced tutors, called mentors. New tutors are almost always nervous and worried about taking this class, and tutoring in general. This is only to be expected, and our training program is shaped around a significant amount of discussion to help ease the fears of new tutors. We have also found that the mentors help new tutors minimize fears, since they have a peer to work with and learn from.

These mentors are Centenary writing tutors who have at least one semester of tutoring under their belts and feel comfortable with tutoring. After getting permission, these tutors register for the Leadership Seminar. This class is one of Centenary's core required classes of all students. Over the years, several departments have created their own section of the class to direct students to discipline-specific aspects of leadership. Our director was able to define a section of the Leadership Seminar to be only open to writing tutors. Instead of reading about leadership and learning how to write a resume, the tutors practice their leadership skills hands-on, in the classroom with new tutors in our writing tutor training class. The mentors attend all the classes, and they are given a group of about five new tutors whom they monitor and support throughout the semester. The mentors help their group specifically, but they also work with all the students by running classes and helping the new tutors as they work in the Writing Center.

These mentors have become a great asset to our training program. They help new tutors get over tutoring fears by demonstrating that you can survive

Writing Tutor Training and that you can even learn to become comfortable tutoring. Although we have a supportive Writing Center director, he *is* a professor. It is easier for the mentors to relate to the new tutors as peers than it is for our director to relate to the fears and concerns of new tutors. This combination of new tutors and experienced tutors in one classroom helps the training become more personalized, since the mentors pay close attention to their own group of new tutors and can give personal help when needed as well as adding a personal touch to the readings with their own Writing Center experiences. These mentors become the link between classroom theory and Writing Center practice as well as the link from new tutor to experienced tutor.

Some comments from our new tutors who have had mentors in their training class include:

"I am thankful for having a mentor who was more than just a mentor and fellow tutor, but also a friend of mine."

"I felt more comfortable bringing up issues with the mentors because I felt they could relate better to me than the professor."

"I hope that some time in the future I can become a mentor to a new tutor, giving them the same help, guidance, and reassurance that I received from my mentors."

Our first group of mentors also had comments about being in the classroom with the new tutors. These tutors did not have mentors in their training class, since they were among the first

group of students at Centenary to staff a Writing Center. Here is what they had to say about being mentors:

“I wanted to take the Leadership Seminar because I wanted to help out other future tutors who are faced with the same issues and difficulties as I was last semester.”

“It helped me to brush up on my own tutoring skills, and it reinforced what I had learned in my training class . . . reminded me of the do’s and don’t’s in a tutoring session.”

“It created a great way for experienced tutors and new tutors to generate a Writing Center bond, which might not have been as strong if we only meet in the Writing Center, and I was pleasantly surprised that the camaraderie built up and spread so quickly. It helps when you are working in the Center because a team of writing tutors is much better than a group of them.”

These quotes are short examples of our own experience in the Center. Our mentors have helped with the comfort level, camaraderie, and proficiency in the Center.

The third class that has been created around the Writing Center is Writing Tutor Practicum. This class was created as a continuation of study for writing tutors. It is convenient for writing tutors who are English majors, since it fits into the English major degree program. It also can be used as a liberal arts elective for tutors of any major. To be enrolled in the class, tutors must have taken Writing Tutor Training. The class does not meet, and instead, tutors work with a professor teaching a writing intensive class. This may include Composition and Literature I and II or even classes like Introduction to Psychology, Sociology, Business, or any class that includes writing several papers over the course of the semester. The tutors are called writing associates and act as writing tutors specializing in

the writing assignments of that class. Writing associates are expected to attend at least half the classes they are assigned to; usually tutors attend once a week. They may be asked to help in class, or even run class. They may hold writing workshops or group tutoring sessions for the students of their class. In addition, there are readings and online discussions for the writing associates, so they have a chance to expand their tutoring abilities and communicate with each other about fears or discoveries.

Writing associates not only encourage students to come to the Center, but they also engage the professors in the dynamics of the Writing Center, are more prepared for their student’s tutoring sessions in the Center since they are familiar with the assignments and course material, and can gain the trust of the students from the class.

Sometimes it can be awkward for writing associates to be in a classroom setting and still avoid the “professor” connotation since they may be teaching the students in some aspects, but for the most part, these writing associates are comfortable working with the class. Often the writing associates gain the most rewarding experience from working with the students and the professor.

Some remarks from Centenary writing associates include:

“I formed a strong bond with the professor I was working with, and I looked forward to pre-class coffee meetings with her. My relationship to the professor, combined with the class time, made me feel better prepared to tutor the students from the class.

“It was hard to handle switching between the role of student and the role of writing associate. Many students saw me as an authority figure, so it was more challenging to get the students to trust me as their peer.”

“I was able to see more of a progression with the students that I tutored because I saw them in class as well as seeing them one-on-one for tutoring.”

Our Writing Tutor Practicum class is spreading across the curriculum, and our professors feel that we are making an impact on the students in their classes. This program especially encourages students to see their tutor repeatedly so that dramatic improvement in writing proficiency can be seen by tutor and professor.

For being such a young Writing Center, we have grown both in our physical aspect of room size and number of tutors, and we have also grown in our reach to the campus. The writing associate program has made more professors feel like they are a part of our Center, and in turn, these professors encourage all their students to seek help with papers. While we are branching out, we are also growing more closely knit through our mentors in the tutor training classroom. The bonds and friendships exceed the Writing Center walls, and it shows in the way we work together in the Center. Although programs such as our writing tutor mentors and writing associates could have been implemented without designing the courses to go with them, it has been advantageous for our writing tutors to have these options open to them. Students are often limited on time in their schedules, and the way our courses fit into degree programs helps our writing tutors become more involved and also helps them complete their degree.

*Jessica Jansyn
Centenary College
Hackettstown, NJ*

Metro New York City area meeting

For all you directors, assistant directors, and interested grad students who live in the Metro NYC area, please join us for another friendly meet-and-eat session of our organization. This semester, we'll gather at New York University on Friday, October 22 from 2:00 to 4:30 in 803 Kimmel, the unmistakably new (and strange) building on the south side of Washington Square Park. If you've never attended one of our meetings, you should! We talk, exchange ideas, help solve problems, and get to know colleagues in an informal setting. The New England Writing Centers Association (NEWCA) is coming to NYC in the spring—and our own Harry Denny, NEWCA's president, will provide us with some advance information.

E-mail me if you'd like to come. It's NYC, so I have to supply a list to security. If you have any doubts, e-mail me anyway, and you'll be on the list.

Here's the link for directions to NYU and the park:
<<http://www.nyu.edu/travel.nyu>>.

Mary Wislocki
Director of the Writing Center
269 Mercer Street, Room 230
New York, NY
212-998-8863
mapedaan@worldnet.att.net

Northeast Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
April 16-17, 2005
Brooklyn, NY
*"Writing Centers at the Crossroads:
Envisioning Our Futures"*
Keynote speaker: Muriel Harris

Proposals for panel presentations, roundtable discussions, individual presentations or interactive workshops are encouraged. Papers will be limited to 20 minutes and panel presentations will be limited to 80 minutes (i.e., up to three 20-minute papers with 20 minutes for discussion). Individual papers that address comparable issues will be grouped as panels by the conference committee. E-mail proposals (or attach as a Word file) to Leslie Van Wagner by December 27, 2004. For further information, contact Leslie Van Wagner, Writing Center, Rivier College, 420 South Main Street, Nashua, NH 03060. Phone: 603-897-8580; e-mail: lvnwagner@rivier.edu.

Registration is limited to 175 participants and must be received by April 8, 2005. Registration is non-refundable. Lunch is guaranteed only for those who have pre-registered. Direct conference questions to Patricia Stephens; phone: 718-488-1096; e-mail: patricia.stephens@liu.edu. To register for the 2005 conference, complete the registration form and mail the form and a check payable to NEWCA (cash registrations cannot be accepted) to Patricia Stephens, English Department, Humanities Building, Fourth Floor, Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, One University Plaza, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

Rocky Mountain Peer Tutoring Conference

Call for Proposals
March 4-5, 2005
Orem, Utah
"Returning to Our Roots"

Individual or group presentations are invited for poster sessions or a 20-minute or 40-minute session. Proposals must be received by January 28, 2005. For information, check the Web site or contact Lisa Eastmond Bell, Utah Valley State College, MC-176, 800 West University Parkway, Orem, UT 84058-5999. Phone: 801- 863-8099; e-mail: lisa.bell@uvsc.edu. Conference Web site: <http://www.uvsc.edu/owl>.

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

October 29-31, 2005
Hackettstown, NJ
"Writing and Beyond"
Keynote speaker: Christina Murphy

The conference will be held at Centenary College, 400 Jefferson Street, Hackettstown, NJ 07840. Conference Manager is Kristel Picinic: picinick@centenarycollege.edu. For further information, see the conference Web site, which includes a list of the conference presentations, hotels, and directions to the conference site: <http://faculty.centenarycollege.edu/writing/conference2004.htm>.

THE WRITING LAB
N E W S L E T T E R

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