

# THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

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

December, 2004

## ...FROM THE EDITOR...

When this month's *Writing Lab Newsletter* arrives in your mailbox, you'll be winding down as the winter break approaches. But the calls for proposals for conferences and book chapters and the announcement of the International Writing Centers Association Summer Institute for 2005 all remind us that winter break is also a time to plan for professional development in the months to come, both for tutors and writing center administrators.

This month's issue begins with the journeys of two tutors, Earnest Cox and Sandee K. McGlaun, who went on to complete doctoral degrees and specialties in teaching composition. Each of them offers a compelling narrative of the influence their tutoring had on their career choices and on their understanding of how to teach writing. Joshua Hiller emphasizes the importance of understanding cultural differences when tutoring ESL students, and Anne Connor and Kyle Cushman describe an integrated center where they focus on combining assistance with reading, writing, and critical thinking.

As 2004 draws to a close, I wish us all very happy holidays, large amounts of quality R&R, and a year ahead of peace, joy, and an appreciation of the special rewards of writing center work.

• *Muriel Harris, editor*

## ...INSIDE...

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## Coming home: A writing center staffer's personal and professional journey

Almost six years ago, I began my current occupation as an assistant professor in the Rhetoric and Writing Department at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR). In many ways it was a homecoming for me: I was raised in Little Rock and had received a BA and an MA from the English and Writing programs at UALR. I then moved to Ft. Worth, Texas where I earned a doctorate from Texas Christian University. So with the PhD in hand I returned home. But it was not the home I remembered.

My first year experience was depressing, and many times I questioned my reasons for being at the university, for becoming a writing professor, for going to graduate school, and for ever wanting to be a writer at all. As I started the second year, I dreaded the idea of repeating the same experience. But something changed the summer before the second year. I got a new office—in the University Writing Center. With my office door open, I could casually observe writing center staffers and clients working each day on their

writing. Even though the physical location of the writing center had changed since I was an undergraduate and master's student, being so close to that action made me remember

- *I used to be writing center staffer,*

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**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](mailto: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).

- *I used to be a writing center graduate student,*
- *I started my professional career in the writing center.*
- *Now I was home.*

### Background and purpose

In the spring of 2002, two of my colleagues and I gave a presentation at the International Writing Centers Association Conference in Savannah. Our presentation, "Preparing Professionals: How the Writing Center Informs Staffer's Futures," dealt with our assessment of how working in the writing center had affected the professional careers of a group of former staffers of the University Writing Center. Our work was specifically influenced by Muriel Harris' article "'What Would You Like to Work on Today?' The Writing Center as a Site for Teacher Training," although we broadened our discussion to go beyond the effect on teaching. Harris states:

An examination of what is gained from tutor training and the accompanying experience . . . will help illustrate why writing centers can be a particularly effective—and unique—training ground for graduate teaching assistants, a place where they can learn approaches and insights that can be carried over into their own interactions with students. (194)

We definitely saw an influence of their writing center work on the professional development of many of our former staffers. This leads me to my purpose here: to show how much a writing center background can influence the professional development of an individual. I am living proof of this influence. What I hope my example does is to motivate a consideration by writing center administrators of the following concerns:

- how writing centers can give direction to staffers by helping them develop a professional identity
- how writing centers can provide a culture of support that helps retain and nourish potentially

talented students, including staffers

- how writing centers can sow a set of values and principles that are carried on by staffers who become writing teachers.

### Giving direction

I was never supposed to go to college. When I was growing up in a lower middle class, African-American neighborhood on the south side of Little Rock, college never entered my mind. I never knew anyone who had attended college; no one in my family, no friends or neighbors had gone. I was more than a little bit uncertain about my college and career path. One semester, I was taking a course in technical writing for fun. It happened to meet in the University Writing Center before hours. One day as the class was ending my professor approached me, introduced me to the Writing Center Director, and recommended me for a writing center internship.

I honestly wanted to say to both of them they had the wrong person. I was not a writer. I wasn't even an English major. I was someone who had no idea what he was doing at the university in the first place. I had always enjoyed writing but had never considered myself a writer. I did fine in writing classes in high school and even better in college, but I had to overcome a mental obstacle that writing was not a practical career option. Entering into the writing center was like stepping into a scary, unknown world, but the next semester I started in the University Writing Center as an intern.

I spent the better part of three years working in the writing center. I started first as an undergraduate staffer, then continued as a paid staff member, and finally became a graduate assistant. During this time, I also settled on a major—English—with a Professional Writing minor. The years in the writing center not only helped me with the development of my writing, they also gave me a direction. It's a direction

I'm still following to this day. In the writing center I believe I truly learned what it meant to be a writer. Even though I took a number of writing courses, my writing center work, more than anything else, helped me develop into a writer and ultimately into a writing teacher.

### Supporting a student culture

Once I became part of the writing center, I also became a part of a special culture. The writing center was a place where I felt comfortable; I spent most of my time there even when I was not working. It is important to remember that writing is a social activity in many ways, and being a staffer not only helped my writing abilities, it also helped me to develop socially, to be able to work with people in a productive way. As Kenneth Bruffee observes:

What students do when working collaboratively on their writing is not write or edit or, least of all, read proof. What they do is converse. . . . They converse about their own relationship and, in general, about relationships in an academic or intellectual context between students and teachers. Most of all they converse about and as a part of writing. (403)

Conversation is an important basis for building a strong community. The writing center staffers formed a community and many of my oldest, and most important, friendships were established during my time there.

During my years working in the writing center, I learned how to talk with other writers—both strong and weak in their abilities—about the many processes of writing. The other staffers came from diverse backgrounds and had various academic interests. We were not just English majors; we were also students of the sciences, business, pre-law, and other disciplines. By working in such a diverse atmosphere, a writing center staffer gains experiences and knowledge helpful in the

“real” world. I learned that effective communication was a key to success in many professions. I saw the importance of communication in the work of the many types of writers who came into the center. I also saw it in my own growing success as a writer and as a college student.

The writing center helps to retain students and can play an important role in student success at the university by giving them a “place to belong.” It typifies a setting for both academic and social integration into the university environment, and for many first-generation, at-risk students, like me, a writing center experience can help make the educational journey more successful and rewarding.

### Sowing values and principles in future teachers

It was the direction and the supportive learning culture of the writing center that were the catalysts for my transformation from an unfocused college student into a writing teacher. But the transition from staffer to teacher was not an easy one. As staffers we were taught to respond to student writing, and to respond to writers as peers. One policy, in particular, I remember from the University Writing Center: we were not to predict a student's grade or in any way question the grade an instructor had given to the student's work. This makes perfect sense, but later making the shift from peer responder to responder/evaluator was one of the most difficult I ever made. I was moving from student to teacher, from learner to “master,” and my writing center background had a great influence on how I successfully made that move. Even though I'm no longer physically teaching in the writing center, the experiences and the influence have stayed with me. I have taken the spirit of the writing center with me into the classroom.

Other elements of my writing center work have informed and affected the manner in which I teach in the tradi-

tional classroom. The first is the way I perceive the classroom environment. Because the Writing Center was, and is, a place of comfort and community, I have attempted to make my classroom as comfortable a place as possible. Many of the students I taught at UALR as a graduate student, at TCU as a doctoral student, and now again at UALR, have fears and apprehensions about their writing, and my job as their teacher is to reduce those fears by making the learning experience as effective and as painless as possible. That goal is a direct reflection of a background in the writing center.

My perception of the student-teacher relationship is also shaped by my writing center background. I try never to hold my knowledge over the heads of my students. As a staffer, I had the opportunity to work with older, non-traditional students, traditional-aged first-year writing students, retired professionals returning to school, and many others who all brought a great deal of knowledge and experience to our conversations about their writing. Often I learned more from those students than I taught them. My background as a peer tutor reminds me that we are all peers in one way or another. That equality should be respected in the classroom. Students will and can learn from me, and I will also learn from them. My writing center experiences showed me that teaching and learning are transactions or conversations, which must be open and respectful in order to be useful. This value I often see in the pedagogical choices I make as a writing teacher.

The values supported by the writing center experience—comfort, conversation, openness, and equality—contribute to an effective approach to teaching. Many of these values are so ingrained in my personality by now that it would be impossible for me to point to specific times and incidents in the writing center that led to their development. At the time, I was unaware of how the writing center was affecting

me, shaping me. Writing center administrators can and should be aware of how writing center experiences are influencing staffers, so that the experience of working in a writing center can be made even more rewarding for those students. Writing center administrators, as teachers of future teachers, might also remember Bruffee's comments:

Teachers are defined . . . as those members of a knowledge community who accept responsibility for inducting new members into the community. Without successful teachers the community will die when its current members die, and knowledge as assented to by that community will cease to exist. (409)

Writing center administrators are often sowing the seeds of future generations of writing teachers. I believe that opportunities and experiences available for writing center staffers may help to ensure that university writing instruction, in general, will continue to flourish in the future.

My story is hardly unique. There are others just like me who can trace their professional journeys and successes back to their time in writing centers. That perhaps seldom-considered fact suggests writing center administrators should be aware of how those students who work to help others might in the process also be helping themselves. Many of our former staffers attest to this:

- "I learned how to respect another's writings. . . I learned how to be tender with something someone has been asked to write. . . ."
- "I tried to get students to have a conversation about their writing. I learned that if you let someone talk long enough they eventually begin to answer some of their own questions."
- "The Writing Center helped me develop one-to-one conferencing skills. I found the students most

appreciated the focused individual feedback."

- "We didn't work with writing; we worked with writers."
- "I watched something happen in the writing center that I might not have been able to closely observe in the classroom. I watched as I began my training as a teacher."
- "Working with other students, one-on-one, taught me different ways to go about the writing process, edit my own writing, and gain confidence."
- "I will always be grateful to those directly involved with the writing center . . . for providing me with the opportunity to 'teach' as an intern."
- "I would not have become a teacher if I had not been part of the writing center. . . . I would not have gone into a classroom and found something I love to do."

That last statement also summarizes my ultimate feeling about working in a writing center. Now, every day as I walk through the Writing Center and observe current staffers as they work with clients, I feel it's a part of my job to keep my eyes open for the future. To keep a watchful eye on those students in the writing center, and also in my classes, who may be starting their own journeys and who might benefit from my guidance, my story, or a slight push out of their familiar worlds and expectations into a possible world of unexpected rewards and personal and professional adventure.

Every journey begins with a first step. Many successful journeys have begun with a first step onto that home ground called the writing center.

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## IWCA 2005 Summer Institute

You will find the list of the 2005 IWCA Summer Institute leaders on the Web site for the IWCA 2005 Summer Institute: <<http://www.writing.ku.edu/SI05/>>.

Registration went "live" online December 1, 2004. Please check the Web pages regularly for updates, additions and information about registration. We are excited to let you know that we will be offering 44 participant slots and two scholarships. This year's sponsors of the Summer Institute are: the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA), University of Kansas, and Clark University.

Please direct questions to either of the Co-Chairs: Michele Eodice and Anne Ellen Geller:

- Anne Ellen Geller, Clark University, [angeller@clarku.edu](mailto:angeller@clarku.edu), <[www.clarku.edu/writing](http://www.clarku.edu/writing)>;
- Michele Eodice, University of Kansas, [michele@ku.edu](mailto:michele@ku.edu), <[www.writing.ku.edu](http://www.writing.ku.edu)>.

# Reflections on teacher comments: Lessons from the tutorial

Once he grants students the intelligence and will they need to master what is taught, the teacher begins to look at his students' difficulties in a more fruitful way: he begins to search in what students write and say for clues to their reasoning and their purposes, and in what *he* does for gaps and misjudgments.

• Mina Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations*

## Scene One: The tutee

**1991.** As an undergraduate English major at a small women's college that has the reputation of being "the writing school," I write a lot of papers. I love my English classes and respect my professors, but the idea of visiting their offices to discuss my work in progress is intimidating. The accepted practice here is that professors only comment on papers after they are turned in. Still, when Dr. Ames surprises me by encouraging those of us enrolled in his Modern British Novel class to bring drafts of our final papers by his office, I take him up on his offer. As he reads over my draft—full of ellipses and parentheses marking places where I plan to further develop ideas or haven't yet found the right word—I am keenly aware of his raised eyebrows and concerned expression. I quickly explain that I like to get everything down first, skipping over sticky points and going back to them. But his brow remains furrowed. When I receive the final paper back, with an A and mostly positive comments, he notes that he was glad to see where I taken my ideas, because he was "a little worried" when he first examined my draft.

When I initially began to reflect upon my tutoring days as an undergraduate, the scene that came to mind

most readily was not one in which I was the tutor; it was not, really, a tutorial scene at all. Instead, I recalled this moment, sitting in my professor's office, and his confession, later, that he was distressed by the condition of my draft. Looking back, I find that conversation curious on several counts. Surely, as a writer himself, my professor knew that essays did not magically appear on the page in perfect form on the first try. Didn't he? Had he never seen a student's draft before, one that was truly drafty?

And yet I cannot recall a time during my undergraduate career when either I, or another student, went to the Writing Center to discuss a professor's comments on a piece of writing in progress. Perhaps my professors regularly encouraged students to stop by with their works in progress, and I simply didn't take them up on their offers. But I don't remember receiving any such invitations other than that of Dr. Ames', and that experience left me feeling less as if I had gained insight and more like my inadequacies had been laid bare for all to see.

So, instead, I turned to the Writing Center. On the top floor of Buttrick Hall, the cozy, sunny room was inviting, and there, the tutors gave me permission to understand, and participate in, writing as a process. They allowed me, even encouraged me to "write wrong," as Peter Elbow terms it. Perfection was neither expected nor desirable: in the Writing Center the assumption was that the essay, whatever form it was in, could always be improved. Professors could make pronouncements about my final products; tutorials gave me the space to negotiate the process—the messy, convoluted, and exhilarating process.

## Scene Two: The teacher

**1994.** It is my third quarter instructing first-year composition as a graduate teaching associate at a large midwestern university. I am reading my students' final essays, an assignment that asked them to reflect back on the quarter and their progress as writers. The essays are generally positive, the students increasingly self-reflective. I am almost ready to pat myself on the back when I read Martha's paper. It had taken her a while to warm up to making use of my written responses, she wrote, because she was used to reading teacher comments as negative criticism, unproductive pronouncements about her failings. She thought she had been proven right when she received a draft back from me in which it appeared that I was questioning the value of her relationship with her boyfriend. Following a sentence that read, "My boyfriend doesn't tell me what to do or say," I had written a "yet?" It wasn't until she angrily asked someone else to read the comment that she realized I was making a stylistic suggestion that she use "yet" to connect that sentence to the following one (which I had tried—and apparently failed—to indicate with arrows). It hadn't seemed like something I would do, she concluded, and she felt silly about having gotten so angry. Astounded, and feeling rather silly myself, I search through her portfolio to find the essay in question. I can see the source of her misreading, yet my arrows and marks are in many ways still perfectly clear to me.

Now, I am the writing teacher, and now, it seems, I am the one making pronouncements—even when I don't intend to. Having been powerfully influenced by my experiences as an un-

dergraduate writing tutor and tutee, I wholeheartedly embrace a process pedagogy as a graduate teaching associate. My students write two drafts of each essay before submitting a final copy; I review the first draft, their peers the second. I ask questions, make suggestions in the margins, hoping to stir their thinking but leave the decisions up to them. That was the idea, anyway.

But as Scene Two reveals, communicating my intentions to my students via comments was not so easy. My word was gospel: suggestions were read as commands. While some might revel in such power, I did not, because I saw how easily my comments could be misread. “Reading is not an innocent activity,” as Jonathon Culler reminds us (116). It was bad enough when a student unthinkingly adopted a revision I had actually suggested, solely because I “told her to”; but when a student misread my response and made a change without even understanding why I had written what I did—then I felt a terrible sense of responsibility for having misguided the writer.

How could I help students reform their ideas of what teacher comments were for? I tried taking a sample essay, printed onto overheads, into class, so they could witness my commenting process—for it was a process, of reading and thinking, re-reading and re-thinking. What did the writer mean here? What question can I ask that will encourage the writer to expand this idea further? In this way, I brought the tutorial into my classroom. If we could talk though *my* writing process together, if they could see my thinking as I commented, then maybe they could learn to read my comments as I read their drafts—as invitations, attempts to engage the reader—as part of a process, instead of as a final pronouncement.

### Scene Three: The student

1995. I am sitting at my kitchen table

across from my neighbor, friend, and graduate student colleague, Janet. We have just returned from a late afternoon Renaissance literature class in which our first writing assignment was returned to us: short exploratory papers, which were commented on but not graded. The two of us pore over the remarks written on our respective essays.

“‘This is a fine paper,’ he says—what do you think he means by ‘fine’?” I say to Janet. She wrinkles her nose. “Well, that comment sounds more positive than ‘All in all, a good intervention.’ What’s with the ‘all in all’? And why doesn’t he say anything about the writing itself?”

We continue in this vein for nearly an hour, lamenting our lack of context. “If we had ever seen his comments on anything else, we might be able to tell what he really meant. Does he ever use the word ‘excellent’?” We toy with the idea of approaching our professor in a conference, asking him to unpack what to us are coded phrases. We hypothesize about what he “really meant,” and, of course, about how what he had written would translate to a grade. Our readings of his comments are multiple and complex, even a little suspicious—and we refuse to be satisfied by the obvious.

In this scene I am a student again, puzzling over a professor’s comments on my written work. While one might imagine that having been a teacher myself for several quarters would have assuaged some of my anxieties, given me an insider track on how to interpret professor comments—no such luck. Feeling so at sea certainly shored up my empathy for my students, but interpreting the words scribbled in the margins was no easier than it had been five years ago. A little knowledge, in fact, is a dangerous thing, as they say, and some of my frustration was a result of new insight: I now understood that every professor’s comments were expres-

sions not only of their personalities but also their pedagogical preferences. As such, they were individual, idiosyncratic, and since these were the first comments my friend and I had ever received from this professor—and since the comments did not coalesce into a grade—we had very little interpretive apparatus to guide our reading.

What interests me in this story is the way in which we each instinctively turned to one of our peers for help. We created our own private tutorial space at my kitchen table, sharing a pot of tea as we shared our questions and anxieties. As I recall, we ultimately “sent” one another back to meet with the professor, in the time-honored fashion of tutors sending students back to the instructor when the tutor does not feel she has sufficient information to answer the writer’s questions. Professors send writers to us, we send writers to them, keeping the dialogue about writing going. Sustaining the conversation is the key.

### Scene Four: The tutor

1996. My second year of graduate school, I elect to work as a Writing Consultant in the University Writing Center. I tutor fifteen or so hours a week, and while I am thrilled with the return to the one-to-one teaching space of the tutorial, I sometimes feel overwhelmed. On this particular day a young woman, eighteen or nineteen, comes in to see me. She is enrolled in a first-year composition class taught by another TA, a fellow from Colorado who is a year behind me in the MA program. I have not had much contact with him beyond a conversation we had shared at the very beginning of the school year, when, sitting at a restaurant with a passel of other grad students during pre-quarter TA training, he had waxed eloquent about how deeply he loved literature and how much he was looking forward to studying it. Disappointed and a little jaded by a year of grappling with critical theory—not what I had expected to

study in my graduate literature courses—I felt a little sorry for him, but he seemed personable enough, if a bit naïve.

As my tutee and I sit down at a table, I read anger in her face. She is clutching a copy of an essay my colleague had returned to her, and within moments, she is in tears, telling me that he had made “mean” comments on her paper, and she couldn’t understand what he wanted, anyway. Dismayed, I read over the remarks inked in the margins. As a student myself, I could see how the student had read his questions about the clarity of her prose as “mean.” But, having instructed first-year composition, I could also read his scrawled questions through the lens of the teacher: one who wants to push the student writer to think harder, articulate ideas more fully. I take a deep breath, and begin the tutoring session.

The teary tutorial: who among us has not lived one of these? And yet, as many painful experiences are, this one was highly instructive. Though neither my first nor my last tutoring session in which I was charged with interpreting instructor comments, this tutorial was the one that clarified my understanding of the tutor as translator and mediator. The conversation felt a bit like walking a balance beam, carefully placing one foot in front of the next as I alternated between acknowledging the student’s reading of the comments and gently explaining what I thought her instructor had “really meant”; wobbling wildly when she gazed at me accusingly; regaining my poise and progress when she begrudgingly began answering my questions and making her own notes in the margins. The session, as I recall, was exhausting. We had not simply worked on her paper, her writing; we had worked on her student-teacher relationship, a relationship which by its very nature is “subtle, dynamic, and highly charged,” as Lad Tobin describes it (15).

Tobin notes that “any [classroom] relationship that fosters the writing and reading processes is productive; any that inhibits them is not” (16). Tutors, while not usually present in the classroom with the other actors, nevertheless play a pivotal role in shaping student-teacher interactions, and tutors’ responses to scenes like the one I described above may have profound effects. This is not news: many writing center manuals instruct their tutors never to editorialize on professors’ behaviors, assignments, or comments, since doing so is unprofessional and potentially damaging to the student-teacher relationship (not to mention the writing center-professor relationship!). And while this is good advice, it only tells tutors what *not* to do so as not to *inhibit* productivity. What we need to consider further is what tutors *can* do in order to *foster* productive relationships.

#### Scene Five: The director

2001. Fast-forward seven years. PhD in hand, I am now an Assistant Professor of English at a small state university whose student population hovers around 3,700. In my second year of employment, I am asked to take over direction of The Writing Center, which I agree to do gladly, if with some small trepidation. My tutors and I have weekly class meetings, and during these sessions we tell “tutoring tales,” stories of tutorials gone madly awry or astoundingly right. During one such storytelling session, one of the tutors recounts a tutorial in which she had asked the tutee to read aloud any of the professor’s comments written on the paper that the tutee didn’t understand. “I couldn’t believe it,” she says. “When he started reading the comments aloud, it was in this nasty, sarcastic voice.” Other tutors quickly chimed in; they had had similar experiences. “If that’s how they hear their professor’s comments in their heads, it’s no wonder they get defensive and don’t know what to do,” she continued. No wonder, indeed.

Every time I tell this final story, it disturbs me deeply. As I picture the student reading aloud, I flash back through the scenes described above, remembering my own struggles to interpret comments accurately, to write comments encouragingly. And I can hardly blame the student who hears harshness and sarcasm in his instructor’s written voice, if, as Lunsford and Connors tell us in their history of teachers’ comments, the “attitude [. . .] toward the job of the teacher was almost universally in support of critical/judgmental rather than editorial/interventionist relations with students” since as far back as the 1800s (446-47).

But a long history is no excuse for perpetuating the problem, or shrugging it away. So I do what I can. In my classes, I turn to tape-recording my comments in response to student papers. I can say more in the same amount of time it usually takes me to write comments, and I can control the tone. The students can hear the curiosity in my voice when I ask them to develop a point further. They can hear the excitement when I compliment a particularly well-turned phrase. And they can hear the genuine interest and puzzlement—not sarcasm or meanness—when I tell them I am confused, that I don’t understand what they are trying to say.

As writing center director, I hold a workshop for faculty where a panel of students talks about their responses to their teachers’ comments. On publicity posters, I bill this as a “straight from the horse’s mouth” enterprise. The students are wonderful: bright, engaged, full of insightful observations and suggestions. But only six faculty attend.

So I turn back to the tutorial once again. I encourage my tutors to intervene when a tutee assumes the voice of the villain when reading a professor’s comments aloud. I encourage them to walk the same balance beam I did, pro-

ceeding carefully, placing one foot in front of the next, one word after the other, until the voice of the professor is the voice of an ally, not an enemy. And so they learn, and I learn, and the writers who come to see us learn. And in the end, that is all any of us can ask of the others.

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## Southern California Writing Centers Association to meet

The Southern California Writing Centers Association, which is not yet an official entity but is an active group, will host a tutor conference February 26, 2005, at Glendale Community College. The day-long conference will again feature tutor facilitated-discussion tables and director-facilitated fine food. For more information, e-mail Carol Haviland (cph@csusb.edu).

Directors continue to meet every other month, rotating among campuses. New members may join the listserv by e-mailing Rob Rundquist (robert.rundquist@chaffey.edu).

## South Central Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals  
March 3-5, 2005  
Baton Rouge, LA  
"Writing Centers and Time"  
Keynote Speaker: Muriel Harris  
Featured Speakers: Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner

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.

Deadline for proposals: All proposals must be e-mailed or postmarked by Dec. 15, 2004. Electronic submissions should be sent to [jcaprio@lsu.edu](mailto: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. Conference Web site: <http://www.scwca.net/>.

## The Writing Center Journal

The *Writing Center Journal*, an official publication of the International Writing Centers Association, publishes articles, reviews, and announcements of interest to writing center personnel. We invite manuscripts that explore issues or theories related to writing center dynamics or administration. In addition to

administrators and practitioners from college and university writing centers, we encourage directors of high school and middle school writing centers to submit manuscripts. For specific information about submitting manuscripts or subscribing to the journal, please refer to our online site at [www.writing.ku.edu/wcj/](http://www.writing.ku.edu/wcj/).



# Call for Proposals

Marginal Words, Marginal Work? Tutoring the Academy in the Work of Writing Centers

Edited by William J. Macauley, Jr. & Nicholas Mauriello (To be published as part of the Hampton Press series on Composition and Literacy).

On your campus, who is really clear on what your writing center does? Outside of those who actually work there, who understands the scope of that work and its relationship to the academy? And, if others do understand writing center work, how did that knowledge come about? How did the writing center facilitate that learning? Even though writing centers have made it out of the dormitory basement at the far edge of campus, their work is not always clearly understood or sufficiently supported. How can we tutor our campus communities, administrators, faculty, and students toward the most effective use of writing center resources?

This collection investigates historical, practical, and theoretical issues relative to helping others understand writing center work. Based on the premise that writing centers already know how to guide learners toward more productive and successful work, this volume invites researchers and scholars to provide historical, theoretical, and practical support to those who have done this work, will do this work, and want to improve their practices in this work.

The collection will potentially include up to five sections among those listed below, each dedicated to both questions and solutions in that area:

- “Where I’m From”: Establishing historical credentials for writing centers
- “When Your Number’s Up”: Empirical arguments in support of writing center work and/or making the budgetary case
- “Composing Ourselves”: Using best theories & practices from composition to support writing center work
- “Over There, Over There”: Using models, arguments, & evidence from other fields to support writing centers
- “Have We Met?”: Relational knowing and building writing center support across the academy
- “We Have an Arrangement”: Locating/shaping writing centers (administratively, theoretically, technologically, and physically)
- “Stealth”: Quietly making your writing center indispensable

Included within these sections will be longer pieces exploring these issues and shorter pieces narrating local solutions to specific problems. An index of forms, documents, and texts used suc-

cessfully to increase and/or sustain institutional understanding of writing center work will also be included. The categories listed above are certainly not exhaustive; other topics are also welcomed.

Proposals and/or at least two other types of submissions are welcomed:

- 25-30 page chapters
- 5-7 page narratives of successful “tutoring” about writing center work
- 1-3 page documents used successfully to increase knowledge of writing center work
- Other forms will be considered.

Projected Timetable:

- 1/15/05: initial proposals and submissions due
- 6/15/05: full manuscripts due
- 8/15/05 final revisions due

Please send 500-word proposals, completed manuscripts, or selected documents (MS Word, PC compatible) in an e-mail message and attachment together by no later than January 15th, 2005 to Bill Macauley at macaulwj@ muc.edu and Nick Mauriello at nickm@iup.edu. Submission responses will be sent on or before 2/28/05.

## Congratulations and a name change

In our masthead on p. 2 you’ll notice that the name of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*’s Managing Editor, Shawna Burton, has changed to Shawna McCaw. Shawna showed awesome time-

management skills when she handled all her work in the Purdue Writing Lab and her *Writing Lab Newsletter* responsibilities as well as planning her wedding. Congratulations to Shawna and her husband.

# TUTORS' COLUMN

## Misinterpretation vs. misunderstanding: A look at ESL students.

An hour session with an ESL student can be daunting for even the most experienced of writing tutors. Many times this is attributed to the inability of the tutor to establish productive communication with the student. When considering why this happens, too often we simply dismiss this frustrating inability as “language difficulties,” not taking into account the very broad array of topics which differ with culture. Thus factors such as religion, political structure of the country of origin, gender roles, and even such superficialities as typical dress can lead to fundamental misunderstanding and not misinterpretation.

It is imperative that all tutors distinguish between these two terms, for in them lies an enormous difference. By misinterpretation, I am referring to the inability of two people to communicate due to linguistic barriers, and by misunderstanding, I am referring to the inability to establish productive communication due to differences in cultural interpretation of the same or similar objects, events or concepts. This difference became very clear to me in one of my sessions.

I recently coached a Japanese Buddhist. The assignment seemed easy enough: “Examine Shakespeare’s contrast between what is eternal and what is transitional in his sonnet: ‘Shall I Compare Thee to a Summers Day?’” But after forty minutes of explaining why the summer is not eternal, I realized that she did not understand the concept of death! At least, not in a Western sense. To her, death and birth are interchangeable, and thus, the “mortality” of summer is no different than the immortality bestowed upon the receptor of the poem. Folklore and

mythology also had a hand in our misinterpretation. In Japanese Buddhism (as I learned in that session), death is nothing more than an event, and so, allusions to Greek mythology passed totally unnoticed. Once I realized that the balm of the problem did not lie in linguistic differences but rather in cultural background, the session was more than just easy; it was fun. And most importantly, the student was able to complete her assignment and not feel, as so many other ESL students do, like an outsider.

As writing tutors, it is our job to find out when we are dealing with a misunderstanding and when we are faced with misinterpretation. There are several strategies that can be used to accomplish this. First of all, don’t ever underestimate the power of probing questions. Don’t just simply accept a “yes.” Force the student to participate. In many cultures, it is considered disrespectful to ask questions because it shows a lack of understanding, which in turn demonstrates a weakness in the instructor. If you do come across a “yes” type student, remember that the answer to “Do you understand?” is much shorter than “Explain what you understand to me.” This can be difficult to accomplish if the student is very new to the language or has a thick accent, but remember, if we can’t understand them, then they are probably having just as hard a time understanding us.

More important than how you ask, however, is what you ask. It is imperative that tutees understand concepts, and not just words. Ask them to explain an analogous situation in their culture or even better, ask them what they think about a given situation and

why. Do not try to alter their beliefs, but make sure they understand how the concept or situation is viewed in your culture, and when this is done, be sure to respect the tutee’s values. Try not to speak in a condescending manner. It is important to remember that your value system is just as foreign to ESL tutees as theirs is to you.

Have confidence in your tutoring abilities. With the occasional exception, we have gone through extensive training, enjoy and are good at what we do. If your problem is due to linguistic interpretation, then the tutee will probably understand an idea after you have explained it once or twice. However, if this is not the case, then perhaps the difficulty is deeper than just vocabulary. Do not assume that as a tutor you can automatically determine what the student’s problems are. Remember, grammar is generally considered secondary when other questions of understanding are present. Listen to what they tell you. And most importantly, be an active listener.

In the beginning of the session, ask about the student’s cultural background; find out if it differs greatly from your own. Keep this information in the back of your mind. It may provide numerous clues, not only as to what they don’t understand, but also how to explain it to them. Truly understanding a student can make all the difference in the world. Because we are tutors and guides in the learning process, it is fundamental that we teach not only words and grammar, format and citation, but also cultural concepts.

*Joshua Hiller  
Webster University  
St. Louis, MO*

## Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

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](mailto:tgsmith@mtsu.edu); Web site: [www.swca.us](http://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](mailto: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](mailto:lisa.bell@uvsc.edu).

April 1-2, 2005: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Adrian, MI  
**Contact:** April Mason-Irelan, Siena Heights University, 1247 East Siena Heights Drive, Adrian, Michigan 49221. Phone: 517-264-7638; e-mail: [amason@sienahts.edu](mailto:amason@sienahts.edu). Web site: <http://www.sienahts.edu/~eng/ECWCA/ecwca.htm>.

April 9, 2005: Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association, in Frederick, MD  
**Contact:** Felicia Monticelli, Frederick Community College, 7932 Opossumtown Pike, Frederick, MD 21702. Phone: 301-846-2619; e-mail: [FMonticelli@frederick.edu](mailto:FMonticelli@frederick.edu). Conference Web site: <http://www.english.udel.edu/wc/staff/mawca/index.html>.

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](mailto:patricia.stephens@liu.edu).

June 10-12, 2005: European Writing Centers Association, in Halkidiki, Greece  
**Contact:** Conference Web site: <http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/ewca2005/>.

October 19-23, 2005: International Writing Centers Association, in Minneapolis, MN  
**Contact:** Frankie Condon e-mail: [fvcondon@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:fvcondon@stcloudstate.edu). Conference Web site: <http://writingcenters.org/2005/index.html>.

## Writing Center Director University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK

The University of Oklahoma seeks to appoint a director for its Writing Center, to begin as soon as December 1 and no later than July 1, 2005. This position will be an administrative staff position with the possibility of an adjunct faculty appointment with the appropriate academic department.

The OU Writing Center is an autonomous unit reporting directly to the Senior Vice President & Provost; the Director collaborates closely with both the Director of the First Year Composition Program (administered within the English Department) and the Director of the new Expository Writing Program (Provost direct). The Director oversees the Center's daily operations; selects, trains, supervises, and evaluates a staff of writing consultants; develops materials and on-line programs; promotes and publicizes the Center's services; and works with OU faculty to enhance writing across the curriculum. The salary range is \$58,000-\$60,000.

Applicants must hold a Ph.D. in Composition and Rhetoric or a related field and must have some prior experience with a writing center and/or a program in writing-across-the-curriculum (WAC/WID). Additional preferred qualifications include administrative experience within writing centers, experience in administering WAC programs, prior college-level teaching experience, and a record of publication.

Applicants should direct a letter, a vita, a statement of philosophy regarding college-level writing instruction, and a list of references to: Dr. David Long, Director of Expository Writing; Chair, Search Committee, University of Oklahoma, 401 W. Brooks St., Bizzell Library Rm 4, Norman, OK 73019-6030, [dl@ou.edu](mailto:dl@ou.edu).

Initiated in January 2004, this search will remain open until the position is filled. *The University of Oklahoma is an Equal Opportunity, Affirmative Action employer.*

# An integrated model for academic support

When tutors work with students on their writing, it doesn't take long to recognize that the basic academic skills of reading, note taking, writing, critical thinking, and time management are interdependent. If a student's reading skills are weak, her writing and critical thinking skills may be affected. If a student is unable to manage his time, then reading, note taking and writing may suffer. If a student has trouble with critical thinking, she may not be an effective reader or writer as a result. Indeed, Tracy Baker acknowledges this in her article "Critical Thinking and the Writing Center: Possibilities" when she says, "Writing center tutors must obviously deal with students' lack of critical thinking skills, for they are the ones who attempt to help students compensate for their inabilities" (39). It also doesn't take long to realize that students are unique individuals with unique learning styles. Because academic skills are interdependent and because learning styles are diverse, we have developed an integrated approach for learning support at the Academic Support Network (ASN) at Vermont College of Union Institute & University (UI&U).

The Vermont College campus is located in Montpelier, Vermont; with other centers of UI&U located in Cincinnati, Sacramento, Los Angeles, and Miami. At present, the ASN staff provides tutoring services only to the undergraduate students in the Adult Degree Program (ADP) at Vermont College. However, we have plans to expand the program nationally so that we work with undergraduates at all UI&U centers, along with learners at both the Master's and Doctoral levels.

The Adult Degree Program is a low-residency program. Learners come to campus either one weekend a month

for the weekend option, or twice a year for the cycle option. The rest of the learning process takes place from home with students sending monthly packets to their advisors, either by mail or by using online technology. Because of this, we meet with students when they are here for residency and schedule phone appointments or work with students online when they are not. The ADP program attracts adult students who appreciate the student-centered learning they encounter here, as every degree program is carefully designed by both student and faculty to meet individual student interests and needs. The required writing is expected to integrate experiential knowledge, as well as analysis that reflects student reading and research.

## Working with skills in an integrated fashion

ASN staff members function as facilitators/coaches who, through open dialogue with students, help to pinpoint the academic skill area where students are getting "stuck" in the learning process. We then offer strategies to help students move forward in their skill development. For example, a student may come to us with a first draft that twists and turns and runs off in many directions and the student is frustrated because she cannot find a focus. However, after a conversation, student and "coach" discover that the student takes copious notes from the reading, pages and pages of notes, and the student then feels compelled to address everything from the notes in her writing. It takes so much time for the student to incorporate all of her notes that she claims there is little time for revising. A strategy that we might offer in this case would be for the student to define three to five questions or categories to take notes on while reading, helping to narrow her focus before the

writing process even begins. In this way, we help to simplify the writing process by addressing reading and note taking.

In another example, a student comes to us because he is not meeting his deadlines for writing assignments. Through conversation we discover that the student has issues with attention and gets easily distracted from his learning. The issue, then, has not so much to do with his writing skills, but more to do with attention, time management, and his study environment. We might suggest the strategies of breaking down larger tasks into smaller tasks, thereby allowing for shorter periods of study time, as well as creating a quiet learning place that has fewer distractions, and setting up clear boundaries with friends and family around study time.

In a third example, a student comes to us with a paper in which ideas are undeveloped in terms of critical thinking. Conversation with the student reveals that when she encounters material in her reading that contains completely new knowledge and offers terminology and concepts with which she is unfamiliar and are, as a result, confusing, she "shuts down" and no longer connects with the reading. Afterwards, despite taking notes, she doesn't really remember or understand what she's read. This might be a case where a student lacks the skills to think critically in order to incorporate new knowledge. She might benefit from practicing the reading strategy of consciously identifying one's prior knowledge and experiences on a topic (through brainstorming or freewriting) before reading. Then, while reading, she can create categories in her notebook for the unfamiliar concepts in the text that are beyond the scope of her

prior knowledge. This conscious acknowledgement of the intersection of prior knowledge with new knowledge then circumvents her tendency to shut down, helping her to retain the information from the reading more easily. The enhanced critical thinking and retention can help her to develop ideas more extensively in her writing, including writing about how these new connections formed for her as a result of her metacognitive approach.

### **Paying attention to learning style**

In addition to honoring the interdependence of academic skills at the ASN, we also pay close attention to the unique learning style of each student. Our concept of learning style is very broad and covers everything from whether a student conceptualizes a first draft by starting at the end, rather than at the beginning, to whether a student is routinely late or early for appointments. Learning style, from our perspective, addresses whether a student is a morning person or a late night person, reads slowly or quickly, can grasp large concepts but forgets the details, or remembers all of the details, but has trouble synthesizing them to grasp the big picture. We find that a student's learning style often has a profound impact on academic skill development. Coaching students to develop an awareness of their learning style, a metacognitive approach, can empower students to take control of their own learning, fostering academic growth previously thought impossible.

Mel Levine, in *A Mind at a Time*, supports the idea of honoring personal learning styles when he says:

Planet earth is inhabited by all kinds of people who have all kinds of minds. The brain of each human is unique. Some minds are wired to create symphonies and sonnets, while others are fitted out to build bridges, highways, and computers; design airplanes and road systems; drive trucks and taxicabs; or seek cures for breast cancer and hypertension. The growth of our society and the progress of the world are

dependent on our commitment to . . . the coexistence and mutual respect of these many different kinds of minds. (13)

Contrary to Levine's enlightened words, many students come to college with an assumption of how a "model student" is supposed to learn. Most likely this assumption was learned and relearned in traditional educational settings. Traditional educational systems value and teach to students who have linear learning styles and natural time management skills, students who are neat, orderly, quiet and bookish. Because most of us never fit this model, we developed shame around our learning style. We learned to identify ourselves with labels that either greatly restricted our developmental growth or shut us down altogether. The student who was active and could pay attention to many things at once was scolded for being noisy and disruptive. The student who got overwhelmed by the magnitude of a project was considered slow. The student who procrastinated was lazy.

Sadly, this sense of shame about learning style can freeze many college students. This shame shows up as missed deadlines for papers, undeveloped ideas, or papers with too many topics and poor organization. However, an integrated learning support model that recognizes individual learning styles can help students to turn this shame into honor and a sense of empowerment. At the ASN, we help students focus on accepting and working with their unique learning profiles rather than teaching strategies that expect students to conform to a style that is not intrinsic.

Organization and time management come to mind as an example for this point. Students who tend to be late with assignments have long carried the stigma of being a "procrastinator," and that label sits upon their neck and shoulders like a heavy yoke, self-fulfilling and oppressive, even as they

work up the courage to try one more time to beat it. In the past, they may have been taught how to set time goals in a linear fashion, or to write out daily, weekly, or monthly schedules, or to examine what inner turmoil might lead them to sabotage fulfilling their dreams. We teach them instead that this learning style of needing a longer processing time and needing creative pressure (i.e. working up against a deadline) is simply how some people learn and produce. This is not procrastination, as they've been told over and over, this is percolation! Percolation is the valuable step of allowing time for ideas to percolate in the brain until the brain is full and ready to bring ideas to fruition.

We invite these learners to stop fighting with the energy of procrastination and to rename it "percolation." We help them to see that prior to actually sitting down and writing the piece, which is often the locus of angst, there is a lot of processing "work" going on in the mind that is worthy of a sense of accomplishment. There are many smaller steps that go into percolation—reading, accommodating new information, jotting down notes and ideas, and talking to others about the new learning. When a student recognizes that there are many smaller cognitive tasks that go into the final product, he or she can more realistically manage the amounts of time needed for each of the tasks leading up to the whole project.

In another learning style example, a student explained to an ASN mentor that she was a "big picture" person. When she encounters facts and concepts, she makes logical leaps and connections which send her thinking into many directions simultaneously. While she recognized this ability to synthesize information as an asset, she found it a liability when it came to writing papers. She just couldn't wrangle all of her ideas down into a focused topic that flowed in a logical direction. The fact that she was able to clearly articulate this aspect of her learning style

was a valuable first step in developing strategies for dealing with her big picture tendencies. The mentor suggested that, rather than fight against her preference to produce a multiplicity of ideas, that the student honor this tendency and give it “airtime” in her writing process. Before writing her next paper, the student experimented with a pre-writing strategy that would do just that. She took a huge piece of poster paper and some colored markers and drew a mind map of all of her ideas for the essay. The tutor encouraged her to go wild. She did. The paper was covered. Next, the tutor encouraged the student to tame the ideas just a bit by reorganizing the mind map into more of a flow chart. This flow chart then led her to create a helpful outline for a focused essay.

### Employing the integrated model in the on-line environment

Because of the low-residency component of the programs at Vermont College, we do a large part of our tutoring/mentoring online. Tutoring in the online environment creates some interesting learning opportunities for both facilitator and learner. Many writing labs worry about the loss of important face-to-face communication in the online environment. Justin Jackson says in his article “Interfacing the Faceless: Maximizing the Advantages of Online Tutoring,” “The most frightening prospect of the online tutorial is that all one is left with is the writing and not the writer, the product and not the process” (par. 1). However, our experience in the online environment has shown that a rigorous conversation about learning can develop. When a student sends us a piece of writing, by using the track changes and comments functions of Microsoft Word, we can ask questions in the text and offer feedback, much in the same way we would in a face-to-face conversation, but with the advantage that a learner has the ability to ponder and digest the feedback, deciding how to respond to it without the pressure of someone sitting right there. In addition, we have also

seen the advantages that Jackson notes: For the writer, [the online environment] acts as a first stage of the self-reflection process (more importantly, this takes place through writing). Even more paradoxically, it seems to be the very absence of the tutor’s face, and the online ‘screen’ of anonymity for writers, that allows the cathartic ability to say whatever they wish—about writing in general or about themselves specifically as writers. (3)

This anonymity can actually work to the advantage of the learner/mentor relationship. The act of asking for help *in writing* immediately engages the learner in personal reflection (metacognition) about learning style and learning process. When the tutor responds with questions and observations or strategy suggestions in writing, the student can reflect on the issue being raised about his or her learning style or process from the comfort of “home,” which can help to circumvent feelings of shame. When the exchange is over, the student has a written dialogue to keep about his/her learning issues.

There is, however, some caution to be undertaken when responding in an online environment. There needs to be a strong awareness on the tutor’s part of *how* a student learns. What are the learning preferences of the student? For example, if a learner has difficulty concentrating on a lot of information at one time, the tutor has to be careful not to overload the student with too much information. The tutor must pare down the feedback to its most essential components, breaking it down into small, manageable bites. For instance, when such a student sends work to be reviewed, we might arrange ahead of time the specific skill on which we will focus, let’s say, paragraph organization only, leaving other issues for a later date. If a student has a lot of shame around his or her academic skill development, then feedback has to be given in a gentle fashion because comments

online go out to the “listener” without benefit of facial expression, tone or body language. Finally, students who are more confident can take stronger feedback and even a little humor.

We make it clear to students that we do not provide “editing” services. We believe that our editing of students’ work is a disservice to learners since the opportunity for their learning of editing skills is diminished if someone else “corrects” for them. Rather than editing, we offer students strategies so that they can learn to edit themselves. This is particularly important in the online environment, since it can be easier to lose the “dialogue” aspect that is integral to our work. It is easy for our responses to go out to students, to be seen as “corrections,” which the student then makes, and to be sent to the advisor without any sense on our part whether new skills learning or simple “correction” occurred.

Therefore, we’ve learned to state our comments so that they require a response, in which case we can observe the learning process that is happening and, at the same time, reinforce a metacognitive model that helps the student become aware of his or her learning. So, after modeling correct usage of a particular issue a few times, we might ask questions such as, “Can you see where you need to make a change in this sentence?” or “How can you apply the rules for comma usage in this paragraph?” or “Can you tell me in your own words your thinking process when you use a semi-colon?” In this way, we encourage students to be less dependent on someone outside themselves for “the right answer” and more self-reliant about learning to edit.

It has been our experience with the combination of in-person, phone, and online conversation that a healthy, friendly dialogue and relationship develops between ASN coach and learner. With our integrated academic skill approach, we have seen that students have positive breakthroughs in

their academic skills development. Students gain empowerment and courage as they see all aspects of their learning—reading, writing, and critical thinking, as well as revision and editing—improve as a result of addressing a block in one area. We also see that with the awareness of learning style comes the awareness of self at a new,

deeper level that can increase efficacy in many life areas.

*Anne Connor and Kyle Cushman  
Vermont College of Union Institute &  
University  
Montpelier, VT*

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lities." *Writing Center Journal* 8.2 (Spring/Summer, 1988).

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## Director of the Center for Academic Excellence Sante Fe Community College, Santa Fe, NM

**Posting no.** 04-115. **posting period:** 10/27/04 to 11/09/04 (or until filled). **salary maximum:** \$36,709 —\$45,891 <<http://204.134.102.4/jobs2.asp#04-115>>.

**Hiring Department:** Academic Support and Student Retention; **Person hiring:** Mildred Lovato  
**SFCC required training:** all new hires are required to complete a 20-hour new employee orientation program their first week of employment.

**Summary:** Under general supervision, provides leadership in developing and maintaining tutoring and

supplemental instruction programs aimed at increasing student success. Also responsible for working closely with the Office of Information Technology and the CIO to ensure that SFCC's open computer labs are staffed with lab assistants who have the skills and training to support student learning, and that policies and procedures implemented in SFCC's open computer labs meet the needs of the students. Works with faculty, staff, and administrators across disciplines, departments, and divisions to provide academic support programs that enhance students' learning experiences.

## International Writing Centers Association and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Call for Proposals  
October 19-23, 2005  
Minneapolis, MN

"Navigating the Boundary Waters: The Politics of Identity, Location, and Stewardship"

Writing Center tutors, directors, and staff are cordially invited to submit proposals that address one of the questions or prompts on the Conference Web site. You may also choose to develop and propose your own topic. Proposals should include a 50-word abstract and a 350-word description. Please consider a variety of formats as you write your proposals including, but not limited to workshops and mini-workshops, facilitated discussions, roundtable discussions, panels, and/or presentation of research at the research fair.

Information about submitting proposals as well as general information about the conference will be forthcoming soon at the IWCA website <[www.writingcenters.org](http://www.writingcenters.org)>. Questions about the 2005 IWCA/NCPTW Conference and Call For Papers may be directed to Frankie Condon at [fvcondon@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:fvcondon@stcloudstate.edu). Deadline for submissions is March 1, 2005.

## What's on your Web site?

*WLN invites writing center folks who want to share some feature or new material on their OWL to let us know. Send your URL, a title, and a few sentences about what you want to share, to the editor (harrism@cc.purdue.edu).*

### • Clarion University Writing Center

**<<http://www.clarion.edu/relations/poster.shtml>>**

### Writing center posters available

The Writing Center at Clarion University joined forces with our Student & University Relations Center to create posters for writing centers with an eye to the language/inside joke/interests of other disciplines. Student writing center consultants created the concepts for the posters, and the Student & University Relations Center translated them into professional posters.

The aim of the posters is three-fold:

- To create advertisements for writing centers that appeal to a range of disciplines
- To reach students outside of the English department
- To attract students with writing assignments in courses other than English.

All of the posters are available for purchase online at minimal cost (charges cover the cost of reproducing posters and shipping). Each poster is 11" x 17" and can be personalized to include your writing center name, location, and hours. Our aim is not to make a profit on the posters; instead, we are invested in helping other writing centers promote their services across campus.

*Kathleen A. Welsch (kwelsch@clarion.edu)  
Clarion University of PA  
Clarion, PA*

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

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