

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

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...FROM THE EDITOR...

This month two authors find fresh metaphors to use as jumping off places. Virginia Davidson invokes the intertwined connectedness of Siamese twins to explore how to help writers with the concept of audience, and Derek Boczkowski recalls a scene in which Groucho and Chico Marx duel over entry into a speakeasy, offering it as a frame for tutors' struggles with how much to inform students. Greg Mueller argues for more high school writing centers while Jake Gaskins contrasts the real world of his writing center with "the idea" of one.

With this June issue we bring to a close Vol. 30 of *WLN*. We'll resume in September, and during the summer hiatus, I'll be wrestling with InDesign software so that we can finally update *WLN*'s appearance. In the meantime, the new *WLN* Web site, <owl.english.purdue.edu>, can do word searches of the many years of *WLN* now available online. The old Web site with issues in PDF format, <<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/newsletter/index.html>>, is still online but has no search engine.

I wish us all a summer of productive relaxation (whatever that is) and some quiet time to clear off our desks and recharge our batteries.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Siamese Twins: Helping Writers Cope with the Elusive Concept of Audience

• Virginia Davidson 1

Swordfish: Of Writing Centers and Speakeasies

• Derek Boczkowski 6

Tutor's Column:

"A Call to Action: Embracing the Need for High School Writing Centers"

• Greg Mueller 10

Comparing the Idea with the Reality of a Writing Center

• Jake Gaskins 13

Conference Calendar 16

Siamese twins: Helping writers cope with the elusive concept of audience

Writing tutors may be familiar with the following scenario. A freshman saunters into the Writing Center with his composition paper. He does not understand why his professor has encouraged him to see us about the assignment, but here he is. After introducing ourselves, we ask Mike to explain what the task involves. He is to write an essay on something of interest to him which he wants to share with readers. Mike, an avid mountain biker, chose racing as his topic. So far so good. We talk for a few minutes about biking (a topic about which we are unfamiliar) and realize Mike is an expert. He has been biking for five years and regularly competes in races. His verbal explanation is quite clear and we learn a lot about racing from Mike.

But his professor is not as pleased with his written essay explaining what to do when a biker crashes in the middle of a race. Mike's professor comments that although his essay has potential, it needs to be focused keep-

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P. 1 One spelling error is in your editor's column--searchs instead of searches.

P. 2 In the third column, 2nd paragraph, close the gap between " and "most." (I think it's an extra space.)

P. 5 Insert a (paragprah) space after "Works Cited," which may automatically bump the Russell Long citation into the third column.

P. 6 Toward the end of Baravelli's statement, I think it would read better if there were a "you" in the sentence. "Hey, I tell YOU what I do." However, I went back to Boczowski's original manuscript, and that's exactly what he has there. Short of watching the 1932 film until it gets to that point, it's probably best to leave the direct quote as he quoted it.

P. 8 Middle column, middle of the page: does "Consultant" need to be capitalized?

P. 9 Middle column, last sentence of the article: Is "their selves" preferable to "theirselves"? (I think it is because of the meaning of self in this instance, but I just thought I'd ask.)

P.10 Last column, second to last line: Does "Web Sites" need to be capitalized?

P. 12 Last column, "Call for manuscripts": Can this be centered?
Same column: Can you carry "Feb-" to the next line since you're using another line anyway? (I just think it's neater when you can keep a date together visually.)

P. 16 Box for WCA calendar: Put a period after the last URL to be consistent. (So, be the hobgoblin for my small mind.)

ing his audience in mind. She warns that readers may not be as familiar with bike racing as he is.

We agree that what he is saying may be perfectly clear to bikers, but the technical language Mike uses throughout the essay, like derailleurs, aero levers and allen keys, may be foreign to others. Likewise, many of his descriptions are confusing to those of us unfamiliar with bike racing. How can Mike revise the paper for readers who are not experts? How can he focus the writing for a different kind of audience? As tutors, it is our job to help Mike answer those questions. But what do we really mean when we admonish writers to keep their audiences in mind? What exactly is that nebulous term, and how can we help Mike understand it better?

Theoretical research on audience clearly indicates these questions are not new. In the Western world, interest in audience analysis is as old as the Greeks and oftentimes based on the rhetorical tradition outlined in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Aristotle's purpose was to show orators how they could effectively persuade listeners to think or behave in certain ways. His cardinal rule was: know your audience (136). But how can tutors help writers adapt to their readers? What specific advice do we give someone like Mike? According to Aristotle, Mike needs to "psych out" his audience, knowing their ages, habits and backgrounds. The stereotypical descriptions of the various periods of life and varieties of good fortune outlined in Book II of the *Rhetoric* read like a 21st century advertising or public relations textbook—or even a handbook like Kirsznner and Mandell's: "As you plan your essay, keep a specific audience in mind" (99).

Winifred Horner, who thinks beginning writers must develop a clear sense of audience, suggests: "the possibility of requiring the student to address a particular reader or group of

readers . . . well defined by either the student or the professor. (Qtd. in Long, 223).

Echoes of Aristotle reverberate in these contemporary dicta about audience which have fostered the debate about the efficacy of classical concepts in modern rhetorical thought (see Knoblauch and Brannon, for instance). Are these ideas useful for a 21st century college writer like Mike? Russell Long finds two problems inherent in the advice of Aristotle and of handbooks. First of all, this advice promotes what he calls noxious stereotyping: "most teachers of composition fight diligently against the superficial overgeneralization and the simplistic stereotype" (223). Long thinks our texts and handbooks create the opposite effect; they promote sweeping generalizations.

Although tutors certainly do not want to encourage stereotyping or fallacious reasoning, we are responsible for helping writers identify their audiences. Like advertisers and politicians, writers do have to think about their "typical" reader; they must investigate who these readers are, what they share in terms of attitudes, tastes and interests. Since Mike's assignment asked him to communicate to the world at large, our job is to help him expand his audience beyond avid bikers like himself. Perhaps an example would be helpful: explain the difference between a medical doctor's description of a rare disease in a medical journal as opposed to the description of the same disease to a patient. Help Mike see how different the language may be. Long is correct that we must not foster "noxious stereotypes," but as tutors, we cannot avoid having Mike understand the necessary transaction that must occur between him and his readers who are not expert bike racers.

Long's second concern is the assumption of an antagonistic relationship between writer and reader (222). Long does not suggest the audience play a passive role in a text; on the

contrary, he believes the writer must be acutely aware of the reader (221). What he finds objectionable is the basic premise that there is a tension between the writer/audience:

The classical rhetorician was addressing a person very like himself . . . but who had taken a stand upon a specific issue very different from the writer's own. The tension resulting from these differences of opinion or belief was to be, or could be, resolved through the wise and proper use of rhetoric. The assumed relationship, then, between writer and reader was one of clear intent—persuasion on one side and clear attitude—resistance to persuasion—on the other. (222)

But, according to Long, most of the prose written in composition classes is not primarily persuasive, nor is there a stable, fixed group for the writer to analyze. If we return to our hypothetical writer, Long's point seems well taken. Mike is not trying to convince an audience of anything; his task is to explain what happens when a biker crashes. He is certainly not advocating taking a spill in the middle of a race. Nor is he persuading his audience to become mountain bikers. So what advice can we give him? Long's suggestion is that instead of looking to classical rhetorical theory for answers, we should examine contemporary literary theory, particularly the creative relationship between writer and reader outlined by Walter Ong, Stanley Fish, and Wolfgang Iser. Instead of asking: who is my reader? The question now would be: who do I want my reader to be? "Rather than encouraging a superficial, stereotyped view of reader, we are asking the student to begin with a statement about the audience she wants to create. . . . Such questions shift the burden of responsibility upon the writer from that of an amateur detective to that of creator, and the role of creator is the most important and most basic the writer must play" (226).

Douglas Park also thinks the Aristotelian model is inadequate for anything

but persuasive writing. Outside of that context the idea of an audience is far from clear or straightforward, and locating and discussing an audience can be frustrating for a student. When we urge our student writers to think about audience, what exactly do we mean? Obviously the notion of concentrating on a particular person or persons is too simplistic and rarely applies. In different kinds of rhetorical situations audience can have many different meanings. For example, Mike may have thought about audience when he was writing his essay. He had in mind a group of fellow racers, familiar with all the jargon of racing. However, his teacher had a different group of readers in mind. According to Park, this kind of confusion contributes to the elusive and hazy notion of what constitutes audience.

However, within the range of possible conceptions, Park thinks there are some identifiable extremes. At one end of the spectrum is the defined presence of an audience with certain attitudes and ideas who are external to the text. Park is suggesting that this notion of audience is closer to the ancient, rhetorical one, but it also ". . . opens up a conceptual trap by making it easy to associate 'audience' simply and literally with the people listening" (249). In its simplest sense, Park says that may be true. But "audience as we use it in discussions of rhetoric means much more . . . 'audience' really uses a very concrete image to evoke a much more abstract and dynamic concept" (249).

At the other extreme is Ong's fictive audience created by the writer. Park says this idea of unidentifiable, invented audience is more akin to what constitutes audience for our students. ". . . the writer must create a context into which readers may enter and to varying degrees become the audience that is implied there" (249). This is what Mike did. He created an audience of racing enthusiasts like himself. It did not occur to him that many of his

readers would be unable to enter that environment because of their unfamiliarity with his created context. As Park points out, this is what makes discussion of audience so elusive and difficult. Student writers like Mike may have notions of audience quite different from their teachers or tutors.

So do we urge Mike to write for that "general" amorphous audience? Park thinks this is even more problematic. Audience in this sense is not only an abstraction, but actually a metaphor. "It evokes the form of the discourse in the guise of a set of ideal readers or listeners. But this image is itself only a fiction" (252). Having Mike use the composition class as his audience still does not solve the problem for Park because reading other students' essays does not mean that these readers will be rhetorically involved, nor does it help the writer find his "appropriate rhetorical contexts" (255). The problem, Park concludes, is that while asking our tutees to be aware of and sensitive to their audiences, we have not yet mapped the territory of audience:

We need to be able to place specific assignments or tasks of audience analysis within a larger frame of reference. We need to be able to break audience problems down into specific issues, to identify for students the ways and the strategies by which audience contexts exist in different kinds of prose. (256)

Park's advice here is helpful for tutors. First, we can encourage Mike to reexamine his assignment. Since the teacher wants him to engage more than fellow racing enthusiasts, tutors might suggest having Mike reread his piece for unfamiliar jargon. He need not eliminate this language, but expand it by using examples, analogies or more familiar terms. For instance, "derailleur" may be problematic, but not if Mike explains what this mechanism is and how it works. Secondly, Mike may need to change the point of view. Instead of addressing other bikers, recommend he use a first-person narra-

tive. This will make the essay more personal and eliminate the problem of addressing too narrow a group. It will also help Mike focus on the question: how can I get my readers to want to read this? We might suggest he exchange roles with readers. Pretend he is in their shoes. Perhaps this will help him decide who his readers actually should be and what they need to know. Have Mike reread his essay to see if it would appeal to non-bikers. What changes need to be made so that Mike can establish rapport with a broader audience? Strategies like these may help Mike map out the territory, as Park suggests.

Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford concur with Parks that neither the idea of a real audience (the audience addressed) nor a fictive one (the audience invoked) is very helpful for writing teachers. They argue that, considered separately, neither acknowledges the interdependence of reading and writing. For Ede and Lunsford both the real and invoked senses must be considered: “the most complete understanding of audience . . . involves a synthesis of the perspectives we have termed audience addressed . . . and audience invoked” (167). Thus, they think we must urge writers to think of audience as actual readers reading their texts, as well as invoked, fictive creations of their own imaginations. Ede and Lunsford’s approach may be helpful for us in clarifying Mike’s problem for him. The fictive audience he has created (biking experts) is something quite different from the real people (the non-experts) who are reading his paper. Tutors could point out this discrepancy and explain that he needs to synthesize, as Ede and Lunsford would say. Unfortunately his imagined audience does not jibe with the addressed audience. Our job is to show Mike why.

Perhaps one good way to do that would be to ask Mike if he reads a

magazine like *Mountain Biking*. Since he probably does, tutors could explain that stories there are written for bikers who share a common interest and expertise. But in more generic magazines a story on racing would be handled differently because writers cannot assume readers are as knowledgeable about the sport. Giving Mike some concrete examples may help him in reworking his essay. Perhaps by pointing to actual publications geared to very different kinds of audiences, Mike’s own handling of audience can be enhanced. Since Mike is a biker, we could also mention Peter Elbow’s biking metaphor. Have Mike picture himself and his readers as two people on the same bicycle; Mike, the writer, is steering and his readers are pedaling. If Mike does not explain where he is going and why his readers should want to join him, they may stop pedaling and everyone will take a tumble.

Obviously there has been much debate about this elusive notion of audience. But how does all of the theorizing help with students like Mike who come to us in writing centers? What do we tell writers who have problems identifying their audiences; how can tutors assist them in mapping territories? Here are a few suggestions.

- Have writers make a list of questions and help them answer those questions. Perhaps a good place to begin is with the journalistic 5 W’s. Who wants to read what I am writing? What do I know about my readers and what kind of writing is appropriate for them? When have I gathered enough information not only about my readers but also about my subject? How can I interest readers?
- Have writers brainstorm about techniques to get an audience hooked. Have them ask how they can engage readers. Here tutors could outline strategies to create effective introductions: for example, begin with an intriguing

question, contradict a commonly held opinion, use a metaphor or analogy, narrate an interesting story, refer to a situation with which the audience can identify, tell a joke. If tutees have already written something, explain why the writing has or has not hooked you. Be open and honest. Use your own instincts and visceral reactions. Explain to the writer why the introduction is OK, but lacks luster. Show what essential ingredients are missing—maybe vivid, concrete details or interesting word choices.

- Be sure the tutee is clear about the differences between the real and fictive audience, i.e., her addressed and intended audience. Is the writer sure the intended readers are the same as the actual readers? If not, have the writer check for any discrepancies or contradictions. One good way to do this would be to have lots of different magazines and journals in the writing center. Our bookshelves contain reference tools that are certainly essential. But the ideal writing center should be a place where writers can go to see how real writers do it. Perhaps tutors could bring in old copies of their magazines of choice: *Rolling Stone*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *Ebony*, etc. Tutors could ask their directors for faculty help. Maybe old copies of *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *The New Republic*, and *The Nation* could be donated. Make sure the center has at least one major newspaper on hand. Do not forget the local and student newspapers. Also have specific interest magazines in the writing center. Surely faculty would be willing to donate some of their old *Gourmets*, *Architectural Digests*, or *Scientific American*. Tutors would have another repertoire of magazines to contribute depending on their individual

interests. If examples of scholarly journals are necessary, send tutees to the library or have tutors show writers how to do this on-line by getting into the various data bases. Our tutees need concrete, specific examples of how the nebulous concept of audience can become real. Magazines provide one easy and specific way to achieve this.

So despite the many contradictions and theoretical debates concerning audience, tutors can facilitate and clarify in many different ways. Perhaps the most important thing is to have our writers remember the words of Margaret Atwood: "Writer and audience are Siamese twins. Kill one and you run the risk of killing the other. Try to separate them, and you may simply have two half-dead people" (*Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*).

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NCPTW Tutor Awards

The program for the 2006 National Conference on Peer Tutors in Writing is just about finalized, and applicants for the program will soon be notified. We have generous support for travel and scholarship awards for undergraduate and graduate students, 25 Sweetland Awards of \$200 each and 10 Bedford/St. Martin's awards of \$75 each. The due date for these applications is not until September 30th, but we hope that you will be aware to encourage students of yours to apply. More information about how and when to apply is available on the conference website: <<http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc/ncptw/>>.

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Punctuation for the creative writer

Lukeman, Noah. *A Dash of Style: The Art and Mastery of Punctuation*. NY: Norton, 2006. (ISBN: 0-393-06087-X; 224 pp. hard cover, \$23.95. Order from W.W. Norton <www.wwnorton.com>.)

(The publisher's press release describes this book intended for creative writers as follows:)

"Starting with the period and ending with the hyphen, A DASH OF STYLE is an indispensable guide to the various ways that punctuation marks can be used by creative writers to make their works teem with life and, of course, style. Lukeman begins with what he calls "The Triumvirate": the period ("the stop sign"), the comma ("the speed bump"), and the semicolon ("the bridge"). These are the crucial marks, primarily responsible for sentence construction. Lukeman then moves on in subsequent chapters to discuss "the drama queens of the punctuation world," those marks that propel words or clauses into the limelight, that add flair to writing: the colon ("the magician"), the dash and the parentheses ("the interrupter and the advisor"), the quotation mark ("the trumpets"), and the paragraph and section break ("the stoplight and the town line"). Finally, he ends with those marks that the creative writer should use sparingly, like the question and exclamation marks.

Swordfish: Of writing centers and speakeasies

“Any member of the literacy club can help children become readers or writers. The teacher’s role is to make sure that the club exists and that every child is in it.”

—Frank Smith, *Joining the Literacy Club* (12).

[Admonishing Chico Marx for entering the speakeasy on all fours] “That’s no way to go into a speakeasy. That’s the way you come out.”

—Groucho Marx, *Horsefeathers*

A freshman writer stands just within the writing center’s doors. She is well on her way to become a college-level writer, but there are mysteries, esoteric rituals, that are just beyond her reach. That is why she is here. She is looking to, as David Bartholomae suggests, “assume privilege by locating [herself] within the discourse of a particular community” —the academic community, which like all communities involves “common places, set phrases, rituals, gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions, and necessary connections that might determine ‘what might be said’ and constitute knowledge” (408). She is looking for sponsorship from someone on the inside, a current member of the academic literacy club, to inform her of the rites and rules of writing in the university. She probably does not suspect that her participation in a writing tutorial may slightly alter those very rites and rules she is hoping to ascertain.

Hers is a situation familiar to many writing center tutors and administrators, who, no doubt, are well acquainted with the idea of the writing center as an entryway for those who have yet to grasp an academic literacy. Indeed, the writing center workshop at the 2005 Conference on College Composition and Communication reflected this notion, sporting the title “The Writing Center: Gateway to Diversity.” Students who grapple with the codes of writing at a college level often make their way to us, whether by their own volition, at the direction of an instructor, or as a result of a course requirement. The Writing Center at Columbia College Chicago sees many such writ-

ers. Columbia, located in the south of Chicago’s famed Loop, is a liberal arts school with a focus on arts and communications majors and has an open-enrollment policy. Thus, many writers we see in the center have “atypical” secondary schooling experiences or learn best via nontraditional methods (many of our visual arts majors, for example, respond best to visual texts). These students enter the Writing Center at different points of negotiation with academic writing, yet nearly all come with the hope that the time they spend at the Center will bring them closer to membership in the academy.

While it might be expected that school officials would rally around a department that is providing the college’s students a vital scholarly service, it is not always so. To our good fortune, our center—unlike many others—has had few major budgetary concerns; however, we find ourselves contending with the same misconceptions about our work that centers across that country encounter:

- The center is a remedial tutoring service.
- Only students (not faculty, staff, nor alumni) can attend sessions.
- We work only with essays (and no other genre of writing nor reading).
- The center is a place to get grammar “fixed” or “cleaned up.”
- Working with another is academically dishonest and can contaminate one’s “authentic voice.”
- We are supplemental learning, peripheral to the *real* academic instruction in classrooms.

While there are many tales of support as well, these and many other myths have confined center work within “the margins of the university,” as Janice M. Wolff has noted, despite the center’s function as “a point of entry for the student into new academic discourses” (46). Considering our standing in the academy, the gateway/gatekeeper metaphor does not apply. No, our work, despite our best intentions, remains clandestine, and the writer’s entrance into the academic literacy club is secret, even as it goes on right under the very nose of the academy. Students who approach this club find, unsurprisingly, that it is pass-word-protected and that there is a writing consultant at the door. What they and, most likely, the consultants themselves do not know at point of first contact is that entry into the club is rarely neat and formulaic, not unlike the exchange in the movie *Horse Feathers* between Chico Marx’s Baravelli and Groucho Marx’s Professor Wagstaff at the door of the speakeasy where Baravelli stands guard.

Baravelli: Who are you?

Wagstaff: I’m fine thanks, who are you?

Baravelli: I’m fine too, but you can’t come in unless you give the password.

Wagstaff: Well, what is the password?

Baravelli: Aw, no! You gotta tell me. Hey, I tell what I do. I give you three guesses. It’s the name of a fish.

When charged with the role of institutional authority, many tutors face an interesting dilemma: in “Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?” John

Trimbur notes how “new tutors experience cognitive dissonance as a conflict of loyalties” (23). Truly, their compassion and desire to help others is what often leads them to working in the center in the first place, but as members of the institution they feel a sense of loyalty to respect its policies, including those regarding academic dishonesty and individual merit. Additionally, many neophyte consultants are inundated with articles lauding “student-based tutoring” and minimalism. This conflict often leads many of Columbia’s Writing Consultants-in-training through a process not unlike Chico Marx at the speakeasy door. At first, they hesitate to give out the “password,” whether it be in the form of structuring methods, ways to analyze, or diction choices. Yet, they root for the visiting writer, the pledge who is rushing for membership into the club. So, like Chico, they might engage in the “guess-what’s-in-my-head” method of instruction.

Not all exchanges are as absurd or hilarious as Groucho and Chico’s, but they can be just as frustrating, for both writer and consultant. Lawson, an undergraduate writing consultant at Columbia, describes his experiences with the guess-what’s-in-my-head approach: “I feel ashamed that I resort to it, but it’s hard to detect when I’m doing it, just as it’s hard to dismiss a solution that I believe to be good.” Lawson’s experience is typical for many consultants, his loyalty torn between upholding the standards of institutionalized writing (and a non-interfering pedagogy) and assisting a peer.

Baravelli: Hey, what-sa matter, you no understand English? You can’t come in here unless you say “swordfish.” Now I’ll give you one more guess.

Wagstaff: (to himself: Swordfish. Swordfish.) I think I got it. Is it “swordfish”?

Baravelli: Hah! That’s-a it! You guess it!

Minimalist methodology does little to alert the non-initiate to the codes of

the university; it does not demystify the conventions of academic writing. In fact, this hands-off approach might help maintain the status quo of insiders and non-initiates: in *Good Intentions*, Nancy Grimm decries minimalism in the writing center and encourages writing center consultants to talk about literacy and the academy as cultural artifacts, reminding non-initiates that the academy “wasn’t designed with them in mind” (30). She suggests moving away from “communication practices that do not feel ‘right’ or ‘comfortable,’” toward a more heavy-handed approach, including giving writers specific details of what is expected in academic work—making sure to remind the writers that “these expectations are quite arbitrary” (116-117). The writing center, often well-hidden in plain sight of the institution, would seem the ideal place for such a dialogue and the risks that it invites.

One such risk is the threat of “giving away the answers.” Often, whether it develops from a sense of annoyance at the guessing method or from the strong inclination of the consultant to help a writer along, the consultant may in fact “bend the rules” and give the writer the password, as Chico does for Groucho. They may do so by modeling their own practice or they may just provide direct answers to students’ questions, with—one should expect—the sort of explanation necessary for a non-initiate to gain insight into the academic community.

I have discovered that at Columbia, many of the native speakers, the non-initiates, are faced with the same “unfamiliar rhetoric” of academic writing that Judith Powers, in “Rethinking Writing Center Conferencing Strategies for the ESL Writer,” claims flummoxes ESL writers. Thus, consultants may find themselves becoming, as Powers describes, “cultural informants about American academic expectations” (41) and take a heavy-handed approach to tutoring. Tippi, who recently completed her writing

consultant training class and first semester of tutoring, considers “giving away the password” part of her job: “telling a student an answer, like the format for MLA documentation or when to use a period, is often a more effective way to help writers learn, a way to show them so they know for the future,” she explains. Tippi realizes that such a practice must have its parameters, stopping short of “writing the paper for the student or interfering with their style or voice.” When Tippi gives the writers she works with the password, she does so with the hope that the writers themselves will someday be able to access the club on their own.

[Wagstaff sneaks inside the door shutting Baravelli out. Baravelli knocks.]

Wagstaff: What do you want?

Baravelli: I wanna come in!

Wagstaff: What’s the password?

Baravelli: Oh, no. You’re no foolin’ me. Swordfish.

Wagstaff: No, I got tired of that. I changed it.

Traditionally, writing consultants are the “insiders” of the academic literacy club. They have proven their ability to think critically about the texts they face and respond to them in a manner that wins the approval of college professors and administrators. And students who enter “the institutionally labeled Writing Center,” as Nancy Grimm reminds us, “construct the tutors sitting inside the room as having institutional authority,” thus rendering any attempts at achieving a peer relationship between student and consultant “difficult, if not dishonest or impossible” (113). Yet, as most consultants can attest, this authority can be usurped, knowingly or not. There are moments in writing center sessions when, for myriad reasons, the tutoring table turns, and the consultant no longer feels in control. Perhaps the topic of writer’s essay is alien to the consultant; perhaps the writer offers an unfamiliar perspective on a familiar topic; perhaps the grammatical choices

that the writer makes differs from what the handbooks says, yet, in so doing, creates an exciting rhetorical effect. These moments can be challenging and a bit disconcerting to writing consultants, as their authority is challenged or even appropriated.

The summer after I completed my undergraduate work, a former classmate met with me for weekly sessions to discuss her fiction. I remember from class her writing being strong, at times sublime, and the work she brought to the sessions deepened my convictions. I soon felt my confidence oozing out of my puffed-up chest: after growing accustomed to meeting with writers who were required to come to the Center, I could not rely on my role as an authority on academic writing. She spliced commas and split infinitives, but the result was tangible and rich prose. She asked for feedback, and I tried, but for the most part I felt off my game and just took notes for my own writing. She was the expert in our sessions. Occasionally, I see other consultants who have been subjected to this usurpation of expertise walk out of sessions in a daze, amazed by how the writer was able to convey a response to a text through an intricate drawing or fervid poem.

While many times this taffy-pull of authority is unintentional, there are moments when writers deliberately challenge consultant authority. Investigating John Ogbu's theory of "oppositional culture," Tom Fox summarizes Ogbu's research, explaining that "African American cultural identity has developed in *opposition* [author's emphasis] to white majority culture" so that there are "economic, social, and cultural consequences" in any attempt to join the academic literacy club (74). Fox extends this conflict to "a great many students whose social and cultural backgrounds conflict with their idea of the university" (80), for whom a pedagogy valuing initiation would not work. These writers often come to their tutorials prepared to defend their

experiences and their ways of thinking and writing about these experiences.

Lance, an undergraduate writing consultant at Columbia, describes a session he had with a writer who felt put upon by the comments his instructor wrote on his experiential essay. The instructor was critical of the writer's use of slang. "The writer felt the slang was integral to his essay, as it was part of his experience, and I agreed," Lance explains. He decided to show the writer how he could revise the paper to address the instructor's marks, but he also explained the rhetorical effect he felt the writer was achieving by using slang. "Then I left it up to him whether he wanted to write for the grade or for himself." Not only did Lance locate a place for the writer's experience and literacy in the university, but he provided the writer with the terminology to defend it as well. Like Lance, all Consultants must be prepared to negotiate the parameters of the academic literacy club with the parameters of the literacies, the "voices," of all visiting writers.

Baravelli (knocking): What's the password now?

Wagstaff: Gee, I forgot it. I'd better come outside with you.

In my time spent as a writing center administrator, I have witnessed consultant pedagogy that challenged my understanding of center policy and procedure. Such moments are only possible after the writers have been assured that the academic literacy club "is *theirs* [author's emphasis], that it will not work against their identity and their interests" (Fox 75). These sessions occur when both consultant and writer have spent time "on the inside," when they have engaged in the discourses of the academic literacy club and, as Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Pelkowski suggest in "Postcolonialism in the Writing Center," have come to understand "how these discourses effect them—how these discourses rhetorically and socially function" (53). Although potentially challenging to an

administration, such sessions exemplify how the writing center occupies "a space both within and at the same time on the margins of the university," and has a "unique position to teach marginalized students how to negotiate diverse discourses" (Bawarshi and Pelkowski 53).

While Groucho and Chico ultimately want back inside the speakeasy, when Groucho chooses to come outside with Chico, he privileges the construction of meaning over entry to the club. Jeb, a graduate consultant at Columbia who has a reputation for conducting sessions that exist outside the norms of the institution, often reaches a similar point with writers. I have walked by his sessions, overhearing Jeb do "beatbox" while a writer raps freestyle. Jeb values the writer's literacy, opening the door to various forms of expression, intending to relax and empower the writer. "If we talk informally," he rationalizes, "as one writer to the next, it will be easier for writers to defend their choices, describe what they hope to accomplish, and talk about what they hope to improve." Jeb's "outside" sessions have taken him literally outside the Center's walls, to the park or coffeehouses. Once, a writer who was writing an essay on the Beatles' song "Yesterday" was struggling to explain why she appreciated the lyrics. She and Jeb went down the street where—after Jeb sang a verse of Billy Idol's "Rock 'n' Roll Child" to warm her up—she performed the song, Jeb taking notes on how she stressed the lyrics as she sang. "We even got some applause from some guys standing around," Jeb happily admits. After working outside the typical academic setting, Jeb and the writer reentered the Writing Center prepared to discuss the terminology and rhetoric of the essay.

The typical writing center does not come with all the entrapments of a speakeasy: few centers can boast ragtime music, gangsters and molls, or bootleg alcohol. Nevertheless, the

work that we can accomplish in the center, the work that introduces marginalized students to the academy while setting about to alter it, is possible due to the center's undercover status, its potential for student advocacy going largely unnoticed. Such work can be disquieting to writer, consultant, and administrator alike and is rarely easy or formulaic. But our focus must always be the empowerment of the writers, so that they may not only learn the "password" but also learn how to negotiate their own literacies with that of the club. Before leaving the speakeasy in *Horse Feathers* and faced with the prospect of paying for the drinks, Groucho asks the bartender if he is able to cash a check for fifteen dollars and twenty-two cents. When the bartender hands him the money, Groucho thanks him and explains that as soon as he gets a check for that amount, he'll send it along. As he hurries out of the club, Groucho shouts "Swordfish!" thus showing the speak-easy that although he has learned the language of the club, he has retained his own literacy, his own self. We can't promise the writers we see a tuition reimbursement akin to Groucho's,

but we can encourage them to enjoy club membership without sacrificing their selves.

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Writing Center positions James Madison University

We're hiring three additional folks this summer. I think these are terrific faculty positions: half-time in the Writing Resource Center and half-time teaching courses in our independent Writing & Rhetoric Program. Two of the positions are three-year renewable term appointments; the third is a renewable one-year gig. We'll begin reviewing applications June 19.

You can find details for the one-year position here: <<http://www.higheredjobs.com/search/details.cfm?JobCode=175180923>>. And please apply for both positions via JMU's Web site here: <<https://JobLink.jmu.edu>> ("search job openings" in the College of Arts & Letters).

I'd be more than happy to discuss JMU, the Writing & Rhetoric Program, and our Writing Resource Center with anyone who's interested. Just drop me an e-mail at schickke@jmu.edu.

*Kurt Schick
Interim Coordinator
Wilson Writing Resource Center*

IWCA Position Statement on Disability

On May 1, 2006 the IWCA Executive Board approved, by a vote of 18 to 0, a statement on disability and the writing center.

This statement is on the IWCA Web site: <<http://tinyurl.com/18r>>.

TUTORS' COLUMN

A call to action: Embracing the need for high school writing centers

Every week for the past year, students have visited me with writing concerns while I work at the Write Place—the writing center at the University of Dayton. Most of these visitors are first-year college students and are enrolled in first-year composition courses. Some will never take another English class in their academic careers. The majority of students bring assignments that are due the next day. Some have no knowledge of such basic writing elements as the writing process, the thesis, passive voice, or MLA. If I am lucky, the typical tutee will have at least heard of these concepts. What is a peer writing tutor to do? How much can we accomplish in a thirty-minute to fifty-minute tutorial? Who is responsible for this lack of fundamental knowledge in writing?

As I near the end of my first year as a Write Place tutor, I feel the need to reflect on writing education. I am currently three years out of high school and am heading into my final academic year as a secondary-education major with a concentration in language arts. Obviously, I have an interesting perspective on the role of writing centers and the process of teaching writing.

Before reflecting, however, I wish to share an anecdote from the first semester of my junior year at the University of Dayton. As I was sitting in a classroom during the first week of the semester, my Structure of English professor posed a question to the class. In hopes of gaining background knowledge of the enrolled students, the professor asked how many students had learned how to diagram sentences in their high school English classes. About one quarter of the class, includ-

ing me, raised their hands. I was astonished. Then my professor asked the next logical question: how many students were taught grammar in high school? This time, only about 50 percent of the class raised their hands. Granted, this was not a scientific survey: nevertheless, I was very surprised and concerned about the results. This 400-level, college English class seemed, from my perspective, not well educated in the basic skills of language arts. If this were not frightening enough, nearly all of the students in my class were future educators in an English classroom. I was and remain outraged.

As a result of my experience in my Structure of English class and my encounters with first-year student writing at the Write Place, I conclude that high schools, nationwide, are in grave need of more, organized, and efficient writing centers. I understand that I am not the first person to recognize this need, but I do not understand why it is taking so long for high school writing centers to become widely spread across the country. The high school writing center is the perfect and most logical solution to the problem of college students who lack effective writing skills. English departments and school administrators must realize that now is the time to start implementing high school writing centers.

After recently browsing the online archives of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, I discovered that the idea and need for writing centers in secondary schools first began in the 1970s. I found various articles discussing the struggles of opening writing labs in high schools. I unearthed even more articles and testa-

ments describing the tremendous successes and priceless intangibles that resulted from high school writing centers. The need for more high school and even elementary writing centers is now decades old. My question, then, is why has the process of expansion into secondary schools been so slow? Thirty years is ample time to plan, build, and implement high school writing centers.

In these past three decades since writing labs began to surface, some incredible individuals have continued to act as helpful resources for anyone interested in high school writing centers. Since 1989, Pamela Farrell Childer's *The High School Writing Center: Establishing and Maintaining One* has acted as the ultimate text for information on the subject. It contains information on anything and everything that a writing center director could possibly need. Various contributors discuss writing center philosophies, goals, training ideas, public relations, and the need for computers. In addition, a listserv for directors of high school writing centers exists for anyone who is interested in sharing ideas and information. As I have personally experienced, the individuals who have invested their lives to the continuing of high school writing centers are more than willing to assist anyone interested in starting a new writing center.

Once I finished my research of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and Pamela Farrell Childers's book, I conducted some further informal research. As a member of the generation of online researchers, I performed numerous investigations to find Web Sites and/or articles about high school writing cen-

ters. I found only a handful of sites dedicated specifically to high school writing centers, but the ones that I did discover were excellent. I wholeheartedly appreciate the hard work of teachers and directors who have already accepted the challenge to initiate their own high school writing centers. My own high school, however, never had a writing center, and from what I have observed in my community, high school writing centers are still few and far between. Dedicated teachers and administrators need to take the next step and, instead of spending so much time and money on building extravagant athletic complexes, build writing centers. If the focus of schools is truly on academics, then creating a writing center should take precedence over building a new gymnasium, for instance.

Building a writing center has many, far-reaching benefits. Many journal articles acknowledge the advantages of high school writing centers. For example, first and foremost, the writing center develops better student writers. The one-to-one instruction that a tutor provides enhances the personal education of all students. Peer tutoring in a high school setting also creates a safe, comfortable, and less formal environment where a tutee can share concerns and ideas freely. A peer tutor is generally less threatening than an English teacher who ultimately decides one's grade. Secondly, the high school writing center benefits not only the tutee, but also the tutor. With experience, peer tutors achieve greater communication and research skills. Moreover, writing centers also become valuable school resources. Faculty and staff benefit from a writing center just as much as the students. For instance, administrators and teachers with grant proposals or lecture materials benefit from the dialogue at a writing center. The writing center, in theory, acts as

the central location for any issue concerning language arts. This resource is not limited to the English class; it is available to help with writing across the curriculum, ensuring consistency and unity in all academic writing. In addition, a high school writing center is available to help students prepare for college admission applications and even scholarship essays. By spending more time on developing writing skills, the writing center will improve SAT and ACT scores. Finally, the high school writing center, because of its relatively small size, fosters a stronger community atmosphere on the campus.

Consider the analogy of the growth of a pesky weed bush to the growing need for writing centers in secondary schools. Obviously, no one wants a giant weed bush to grow in his or her garden. What is the quickest and most efficient way to tackle this problem? The best solution would not be to continually trim the branches from the top. The quickest and most permanent solution is to dig up the weed from the bottom, thus eliminating the problem from its source. Similarly, it is only logical to attack the gradual decline in writing and grammatical instruction at one source of the problem—the high school writing programs. Only so much can be accomplished in college-level writing centers. As I have witnessed in my experiences at the Write Place, the weeds have already grown out of control by the first year of college. College writing centers are, in a sense, only trimming the weed branches from the top. High school writing centers, on the other hand, are able to attack the writing issues before they grow out of control. More peer tutors in high schools will help promote the healthy habits that carry over into those first-year composition classes. If every high school instituted a writing center, the days of college students not understanding terms like

passive voice, thesis, and MLA might be long gone.

If you agree that the needs and benefits of high school writing centers exist, it is time to take action. The research has already been compiled. The models for writing centers are already in place. Highly dedicated and motivated individuals in our writing center community need to step up and accept the challenge of filling the void in secondary schools across the United States. Directors of college writing centers should visit area high schools and act as mentors – provide ideas, share philosophies, establish a relationship. Undergraduate and graduate tutors must recognize the need and help to establish writing centers as they accept teaching positions in secondary schools. High school English departments should petition the administration for funds and materials. We must not accept mediocrity. For the future success of English students, high school writing centers must become the norm, not the minority.

I look forward to the day when I can teach English to high school students while supporting them in my very own high school writing center. This day needs to become a reality sooner rather than later.

Greg Mueller
University of Dayton
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Writing Consultant, The Writing Center College of Wooster

The College of Wooster is seeking Writing Consultants for the College Writing Center. Candidates must have graduate degrees and/or graduate-level training in the teaching or writing, writing centers, or a related field. Excellent writing skills are essential; teaching and/or tutoring experience is preferred. Writing Consultant's duties include tutoring student writers, especially junior and senior-level Independent Study students; working to assist and support writing curricula and programs; and assisting the Director of Writing with special projects related to writing instruction at the College.

Hours are flexible, based on the Writing Consultant's availability and the needs of the Writing Center. One evening per week is expected. This is a nine-month, part-time/no benefits salary position. Review of applications will begin immediately and will continue until the position is filled. Send a resume, cover letter, compensation expectations, and names, address, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses of three professional references to the address listed at the end of the description of the Intern Position below.

Intern, The Writing Center, 2006-2007 College of Wooster

Intern needed for The Writing Center, to support a program initiative to enhance the services of the Center. The intern will work with the Director to coordinate and present programs and workshops during the academic year.

The Intern is expected to work regularly with student writers in the Writing Center. Other duties include helping to increase student outreach plans and materials to promote awareness of the resources available; encouraging students to write by developing a writers series; assisting with the development of writing workshops; development and redesign of FYS resources, in cooperation with the Center for Academic Advising; and maintaining the Web page for the Center, as well as use of other electronic and print media; The successful candidate will possess excellent organizational skills, strong communication skills, and an interest in working with students. Reliable self-starters are preferred.

Review of applications will begin immediately and will continue until the position is filled. Please send cover letter, resume, and names and contact information for three references to:

The College of Wooster
The Department of Human Resources
536 East Wayne Avenue
Wooster, Ohio 44691

AA/EOE/Drug Free Workplace, <www.wooster.edu/human_resources>, humanresources@wooster.edu

Call for manuscripts

Next April, the *Writing Lab Newsletter* celebrates its 30th anniversary. In honor of this occasion, a special edition of the newsletter will be published. The focus of this edition will be on reflection—how *WLN* has helped tutors and directors improve their work through writing, reading, and sharing experiences. To that end, this anniversary edition will consist of essays in which contributors describe their favorite *WLN* article and explain how that article contributed to their professional growth and understanding of the work we do. Each reflection will also be accompanied by the original article. Possible areas of focus include, but are not limited to theoretical issues, tutoring strategies, and assessment. Please send your reflections to me, Kathy Gillis, Guest Editor, at kathleen.gillis@ttu.edu.

Essay length 1500 words.

Deadline for submissions:
February 1, 2007.

Comparing the idea with the reality of a writing center

Despite Stephen M. North's "amendment" ten years later (in "Revisiting 'The Idea of a Writing Center'"), "The Idea of a Writing Center"—both as article and Idea—persists with the immutability of something Platonic to influence, for better or worse (as North would admit), the work of writing centers everywhere. At least it does in the case of the center I direct at Southeast Missouri State University, Cape Girardeau. Our writing center—with a staff of eight graduate students, four part-time faculty, and myself—conducts approximately 2,500 tutorials with walk-ins each semester while struggling to realize North's vision, however idealistic, or even "romantic," it might seem to be.

Indeed, we have felt ever more keenly the tension between *the Idea* and *the Reality* as the number of students visiting the center has increased¹, and with the inauguration five years ago of our OWL. In fact, it was our experience conducting online, asynchronous "conferences" and the attendant concerns about compromising our principles of best practice that brought the issue to the fore—that is, the question of just how far we had strayed from North's un-re-visited vision. Pedagogy aside, simply allowing students to send drafts for our response online seemed tantamount to allowing them to drop off their drafts and pick them up later, which is something we'd never allowed students to do, of course. I began seeing other ways in which I thought we had "sold out." We said we didn't "fix papers," to give another example, but I suspected we were doing just that.

In this context, then, I began gathering data to determine just how bankrupt we had become or, more charitably, just how "realistic" the Idea of a Writing Center might be under the

real-world conditions of our particular situation. In brief, during the fall semester, 2004, tutors filled out a form after each conference indicating the percentage of time spent on "higher-order concerns" (i.e., focus, development, organization), on sentence-level matters (syntax, word choice), on correctness (e.g., spelling, use of the apostrophe, punctuation), on assignment directions, and on documentation (MLA, APA, or some other style). The assumption was that, all else being equal, the more time spent on higher-order concerns, the closer we were approaching our ideal of helping students become better writers, as opposed to merely "fixing papers" or merely proofreading. Tutors recorded the date the assignment was due. They noted what went well and what went badly. In addition, tutors reported their impression of the student's attitude, circling a number from 5 to 1, to indicate most to least positive. I asked for this last bit of information because we know how important this variable can be in determining how well or badly a conference goes—which is not to absolve us tutors from having to meet whatever challenges present themselves, of course.

The surveys gave us a picture (admittedly impressionistic and self-reported) of what was going on in the Writing Center. That we discussed the nature of the ideal tutorial/conference in staff meetings *before* we began the study does not invalidate the results since the goal was not to evaluate our performance but rather to describe what was happening in the Writing Center in terms of those principles or values we had established as "best."² If a tutor wanted to adjust his or her methods to adhere more closely to our agreed-upon principles, then so much the better.

The results

Were we following the principles of "best practice"? The answer is a resounding yes and no. Tutors reported spending an average 40.7% of conference time on higher order concerns/global matters, compared to 21.4% on sentence-level matters, 18.7% on correctness, 7.1% on assignment directions, and 11.8% on documentation. This means we spent about the same time on technical matters (not including documentation) [40.1%] as on global matters [40.7%]. We were encouraged to learn that our clients allowed more time for revising their papers than we had suspected; the average number of days before the due date was 1.7. The average score for student attitude was 4.3/5.0 (n = 626).

More interesting than these statistics are the tutors' written comments (samples of which are below). Their descriptions of successful conferences included a number of common features that, taken together, exemplify the ideal:

1. The student is engaged, contributing his or her own ideas:
 - "He seemed to be already thinking of how to [revise] his problem areas even before I made a suggestion."
 - "When I told him he should expand his conclusion, I was trying to think of a suggestion, and he immediately came up with an idea."
 - "She had already thought about what she could do to improve the essay before coming to the Writing Center. She asked many questions."
2. The student's involvement increases as the conference moves along:
 - "Student was nervous at first.

But she realized she hadn't developed her ideas enough, so as I questioned her about her job, she opened up, relaxed, and talked about how much she'd hated being the one to pop the popcorn in the movie theatre."

3. Conversation does occur, sometimes one-sided (on either the student's or tutor's part):
"We discussed the issue of health insurance. As we talked, we shared experiences, observations. She needed a required third perspective on the issue, and she thought of one—or we did, collaboratively—as we talked. She works in a doctor's office."
4. The student maintains some degree of independence from the tutor:
"I've worked with [this student] two or three times before, and she is always very receptive. She does not, however, simply "take orders." Often she wants to know why changes should be made. She takes an active part in the conference."
5. The tutor asks questions, and the student replies:
"I asked questions, helping him make connections between the assignment and his personal experience of 'isolation.' We talked about how a person's isolation can be 'self-created' (to quote the assignment directions) and then applied our thinking to the short-story characters he was to discuss in writing."
6. Collaborative learning occurs:
 - "There were four group members here, all trying to figure out the assignment, and it got a little confusing. They were polite, though."
 - "Had trouble, so asked for help. Mike, Jason, and Ben [other tutors] came to the rescue and helped give the

student a foothold with examples."

7. Students recognize the value of in-person conferences compared to e-mail exchanges:
 - "Student had sent paper via e-mail and then decided to come in."
 - "I had worked with [student] via e-mail. She decided to come in. She was glad that I had suggested this. She asked many questions and made notes."

Common features of the *unsuccessful* conference emerged as well:

1. The student is struggling with the content of the course or dislikes the course in general:
 - "I decided not to discuss the draft right away because it was so weak in content and mechanics. . . . He hadn't read the short stories or couldn't remember them. He wanted me to proofread anyway. I didn't oblige. He excused himself to take a cell phone call. He seemed totally lost. He didn't understand the idea he was supposed to discuss with reference to the stories."
 - "The first thing she said when she sat down was that she hated the class [and] the assignment and she didn't think she "did good" on the essay. When I gave comments or corrections, she would ignore me. She looked around the room or stared off into space."
2. The assignment or the topic is problematic for the student:
 - [The student was supposed to interview someone in a chosen profession about the writing he or she does on the job.] "But the person she had chosen to interview, a graphic designer, did almost no writing."

3. The student has not allowed enough time for revision before the due date, or the student simply doesn't want to take time to discuss the draft:
 - "I started to help her at 1:05, and her paper was due at 1:30."
 - "He needed to be at a meeting at 4:00, so why he came in at 3:40, I don't know."
 - "She was in a hurry. Wanted me to revise. Did not have questions."
4. The student is adamant that he or she wants the paper proofread only:
 - "I told her my concerns about word choice, style, and detail. She only responded when I talked about punctuation."
 - "He didn't seem to appreciate my suggestions [about global matters]. He just wanted me to proofread."
5. The student has been required to come to the Writing Center, or the visit is for extra credit:
 - "He said the only reason he was here was that it was required. He seemed indifferent. . . ."
 - "She didn't bring her assignment sheet or her brainstorming web, so the conference didn't go smoothly. She didn't really seem to want to be here. She was required to bring her draft to the Writing Center."
6. The student won't talk:
 - "I asked him questions to get more detail. He didn't really respond. . . . He was difficult to get a response from."
 - "I tried to give her examples

of how to get the reader involved in her paper, but she never responded.”

7. “The student is having a bad day: “She was belligerent, saying ‘This better be right’ and that she couldn’t afford to lose points.”

Discussion

We learned from this project that, despite the pressures of a busy walk-in service and the occasional “belligerent” or otherwise uncooperative student, we do manage to conduct *some* conferences that approach what we consider to be the ideal. Despite the more convenient option of sending papers for response via e-mail, many students *do* recognize the advantages of talking with a tutor about their writing face-to-face.

The reasons conferences fail are many, of course, and complicated. Our hands are tied when students don’t allow enough time between a visit to the Writing Center and the paper’s due date. Our best efforts are stymied when the student doesn’t have a firm grasp of the assignment (or the assignment directions are unclear). On the other hand, we tutors have to ask ourselves what we could have done to help those silent students open up. How could we have persuaded that student to choose a different topic and start over? How might we have calmed that student who was belligerent and insisted, “This better be right!”? We can comb the professional literature for suggestions. And as one Writing Center TA wrote, “We can encourage [students’] independence and participation in the conference by asking specific questions that are not just surface-level. We can get acquainted with the writers’ process as writers, so we can tailor our questions accordingly.”

It is worth noting that in a number of conferences described as unsuccessful, the student was required to visit the Writing Center. In the past, I have welcomed all comers, whether they were coerced or not, and indeed prided myself on the relationship we have established

with certain departments whose faculty make it a regular practice of including a visit to the Writing Center as a required step in one or more writing assignments over a semester. Our research suggests there are some disadvantages as well as advantages in continuing this practice.

Conclusion

In “Revisiting ‘The Idea of a Writing Center,’” North proposes abandoning the kind of situation represented by Southeast’s writing center in favor of something like the center at SUNY Albany: a “Center directly [tied] to [the university’s] Writing Sequence through the English major: . . . the center of consciousness . . . not for the entire, lumbering university—but for the approximately 10 faculty members, the 20 graduate students, and the 250 or so undergraduates that we can actually, sanely, responsibly bring together” (“Revisiting” 17). At least in one respect, we have been moving in the same direction—as we plan to create junior- and senior-level writing-intensive courses that will spread the “center of consciousness” into the disciplines. The current status of the Albany program aside³, for the time being, however, we don’t have the option of making such a change. For the foreseeable future, we will continue along the same path, and so it is encouraging to find evidence of success in our own terms. In addition to its assessment value, the project was worthwhile as a staff training activity. And finally, by publishing the results in our Writing Outcomes Program’s newsletter, distributed campus-wide, we are contributing to a dialogue with faculty across the disciplines on the topics of writing and the teaching of writing. We know that successful tutorials depend, in the end, not only on the skill and training of the tutor, not only on the attitude and engagement of the student, but also on the collaboration of faculty who share our goals.

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Notes

¹The number of sessions with “walk-ins” increased steadily from 4,575 in AC 2000-01 to 5,749 in AC 2002-03. During AC 2003-04, 5,673 sessions were conducted. The number of online “conferences” has increased each year since the OWL’s inception. A total of 634 drafts or questions were submitted during the fall 2004 semester. The OWL itself had 5,357 hits.

²Our principles reflect those propounded by Stephen M. North in “The Idea of a Writing Center”:

(1) Our goal is to help students become better writers. Our goal is *not* to “fix this paper.” (John Edlund, director of the Writing Center at Cal Poly Pomona, writes, “Of course, this does not mean that we ignore the paper at hand. In fact, I think it would be fair to say that Stephen North’s slogan could be re-written to say “Better writers *and* better writing.”)

(2) Our job is to talk with students who are authentically engaged in their writing. We hope to have a *conversation* with them, in addition to providing instruction. North compares the modern writing center with the “shop” that Socrates set up in Athens: “open to all comers, no fees charged, offering, on whatever subject a visitor might propose, a continuous dialectic that is, finally, its own end” (35-36).

³Since the publication of “Revisiting” eleven years ago, North has moved on to another position at Albany, and according to Jil Hanifan, the director of the writing center there, “the writing sequence was dropped when the English department redesigned its curriculum—a process that began about 5 years ago, and is only this year being implemented.”

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

June 24-26, 2006. European Writing Centers Association, in Istanbul, Turkey

Contact: Dilek Tokay, email: dilekt@sabanciuniv.edu. Conference website: <<http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/ewca2006>>.

October 25-29, 2006: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in St. Louis, MO

Contact: Susan Mueller at smueller@stlcop.edu or Dawn Fels at dfels@earthlink.net. Conference Web site: <<http://www.ku.edu/~mwca/>>.

February 8-10, 2007: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Nashville, TN

Contact: E-mail: SWCA@Comcast.net. Conference Web site: <www.mtsu.edu/~uwcenter/swca2007>.

April 12-14, 2007: South Central and International Writing Centers Associations, in Houston, TX

Contact: Dagmar Corrigan at corrigan@uhd.edu; Conference Web site: <<http://ahss.ualr.edu/iwca>>.

THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

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