



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER



Vol. IV, No. 10 (June, 1980)

By the time this newsletter arrives in everyone's mailbox, most of the end-of-the-semester work such as gathering statistics and evaluations and/or report writing should be done. Though you are looking forward to a well-deserved rest, I hope that you'll reserve some time during your summer leisure to write an article for the newsletter sharing something that other readers will find useful.

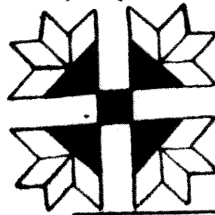
People just starting labs are looking for help as are a number of high school English teachers who are considering labs for their high schools. People working in existing labs ask about instructional techniques, tutor training, expanded uses of the lab, evaluation procedures, materials, funding, etc. In short, the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER can continue to be of use if we take the time to share with each other.

Recently, I heard a new lab director describe a problem that many of us probably have, namely, the constant interruptions of our tutoring as we teach in the lab or center. No one walks into a classroom to tell a teacher that there is a phone call or that a book salesman wants a few minutes or that some student wants to reschedule tomorrow's tutoring session. Yet, in the informal setting of labs, this frequently happens. Do the students being tutored lose too much because of these interruptions, or do all the stops and starts and intervening human concerns help keep the lab an informal place, a comfortable learning situation which is clearly not a classroom? Or does this casual attitude contribute to devaluing in other people's minds what we do? Any comments? Suggestions?

In addition, I would appreciate hearing

your suggestions for improving the newsletter. What do you find useful? What would you like changed? Since people continue to tell me that they find the supplementary mailing lists useful (to note the presence of labs in nearby colleges, to find where old friends have moved, etc.), I've continued to include names of new members. If the lists are not useful, please speak up. Some suggestions, such as including queries from members of our group, asking for responses from the rest of us, have proved successful. Another recent suggestion, that we try to have a few special issues devoted to particular topics (see the announcement on p. 5) may come to fruition also. In short, send me your comments and suggestions.

This issue of the newsletter is the last for this academic year, but I look forward to hearing from you and to starting up again next September. Have a pleasant, leisurely summer, but do continue to send in your articles, names of new members, and donations of \$3 (with checks made payable to me) to:



Muriel Harris, editor
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
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Funding and Maintaining a Learning Lab

Inventing methods and strategies to generate the funds required to originate and maintain a learning lab produces perhaps the most perplexing problems encountered by potential and/or persistent lab directors. At North Lake College of the Dallas County Community College District, we are lucky to have administrators who understand the need

for and value of our Communications Lab; however, such understanding does not preclude the necessity to justify our existence during budget development. Our lab is supported by the regular instructional budget, approximately \$30,000 allocated for staff and \$6,000 for materials, supplies and equipment (not including substantial initial investment). Attempting to replace at least a fraction of this money, we have used a number of common, and some not-so-common, techniques that might be of interest to others facing similar financial dilemmas.

Since tuition and the matching money it generates represent a major source of funds, students are encouraged to gain access to the Communications Lab staff and facilities through registration in one or more of various lab courses. Developmental Reading, Reading 101, Reading 102 (speed reading), and Developmental Writing classes are physically conducted in the Lab's two open classrooms, which are separated by a heavy curtain and open out onto sixty individual study carrels. English 101 Long, a four credit hour course for students not prepared for freshman English but too advanced for developmental writing, is also held in the Lab classrooms. In addition to classrooms and study carrels, our facility also has a separate room for materials and two for office and tutoring purposes. Flexibility to meet the individual student's needs provides the opportunity to serve more students; consequently, College Learning Skills 100, a one credit hour elective course that allows students the option to study reading, writing and/or study skills, has become a very popular course. The course operates on an individual diagnosis/prescription basis; virtually any type of learning experience is possible.

Perhaps more important than the number and variety of courses is the number and variety of ways to enter those courses. Communications Lab courses are available both at regular registration dates at the first of each semester and at "flexible-entry" registration dates at monthly intervals during the fall and spring. With this many registration opportunities and with the use of video and audio course orientations/sessions, we are able to allow students to enter Lab courses at any time and register later.

Without a doubt, more important than the existence and availability of Lab courses is

the appearance of students to fill them. With considerable success, we have formulated and implemented a number of "student enticing" strategies that may be categorized as drop-in and tutoring services, outreach services and special programs and projects.

Drop-in and tutoring services are, simply, exactly what their names imply. Lab staff members, predominately highly-qualified para-professionals, are available during open hours, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Friday, to students needing a limited amount of assistance in reading, writing and/or study skills. When appropriate, drop-in students are referred to Lab courses that will more completely fulfill their needs. Of course, drop-in students are not pressured to register for a course if their needs can otherwise be met. Our tutoring services are still in the development process. Currently, a course to train tutors, Human Development 107, is offered in conjunction with the Counseling Center. The tutors are assigned to work with the individual instructors who recommended them and/or in the Lab as part of their course requirements. Eventually, we hope to organize a comprehensive tutoring service through the Community Service division whereby persons desiring a tutor may register for and be referred directly to a qualified tutor. This service will serve as an effective recruitment tool for potential as well as current students. Both drop-in and tutoring services provide students with much needed assistance as well as acquaint them with the existence and purpose of the Communications Lab.

Outreach services also combine "public relations" with instructional assistance. Communications Lab specialists are available to North Lake faculty members who wish to consult about learning skills particularly useful to their students. Lab staff members will present appropriate "mini-lessons" or information on Lab services, develop and/or administer special study packages, or conduct skill diagnosis sessions for North Lake classes upon request. Textbook readability studies are also provided in the Lab. Our facilities as well as our staff members may be reserved at selected times for appropriate functions. For example, local high schools held a foreign language contest in the Lab one Friday afternoon. Finally, to disseminate information about the Lab, brochures, posters, class announcements, etc. have been and will continue to be distributed throughout the college and community.

REPORT OF WORKSHOP GIVEN AT 4C'S 1980
SPECIAL INTEREST SESSION FOR
WRITING LAB DIRECTORS

Special programs and projects sponsored by the Lab, while not always directly related to our primary functions, do increase our visibility and broaden our scope. Texas Literature Fair Northeast is an annual event, usually held late in November, that features a display of books and journals published by widely-published authors. The program is co-sponsored by the Texas Circuit (of small presses), the Texas Commission on the Arts and Humanities, the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. Duck Soup, North Lake's magazine of creative expression, is planned, compiled, edited, designed and distributed in the Lab by a committee of students and faculty from throughout the college. The magazine, which has won five first place awards from the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association, features a High School Writing Contest and a Guest Author Series as well as fiction, poetry, essays, photographs and drawings by persons associated with the college. Within the coming year, we hope to change our name to "Center for Independent Study" or something similar in an attempt to insure that the Lab does not acquire a "penalty box" reputation among the students. Also in the planning stages is a conversion to a more relaxed and inviting atmosphere, complete with plants, pillows and posters, and hopefully a room designed for reading and/or the free exchange of ideas. Such a lounge will also be used to house a collection of books and magazines and to host receptions for Texas Literature Fair Northeast, Duck Soup and other events.

I will, of course, be happy to respond to requests for more information about the Communications Lab at North Lake College (2000 Walnut Hill Lane, Irving, TX 75062).

David England, Coordinator
Communications Lab
North Lake College



Workshop title--Expanding the Writing Center's Program Offerings: An NEH Pilot Grant for Writing in the Humanities

In addition to providing supplementary financial resources, grants offer writing labs an effective means of improving their images and expanding the scope of their programs. Because writing labs usually serve the entire university community, they are in a particularly good position to offer writing instruction across the curriculum and to sponsor faculty development programs, two subjects which seem to be currently in favor with grant agencies.

At the recent 4C's conference in Washington, D.C., one of the workshops which comprised the Writing Lab Special Interest Session described in detail the National Endowment for the Humanities pilot project directed by the Writing Center of the Communication Skills Center at East Texas State University. This project incorporated both of these emphases into its design.

The project, entitled Individualizing Writing Instruction in the Humanities, extended writing instruction across the curriculum by selecting five instructors--one each from art, music, drama, history, and political science--to attend a five-week workshop during which each received the training and assistance needed to design or restructure a course in his or her own discipline so that it included writing instruction as well as the usual course content. During the fall semester the instructors taught these experimental courses with the help of graduate assistants from the English Department who had previously had experience as tutors in the Writing Center.

As a result of the project, which emphasized writing as a process and as a tool for learning, the Writing Center became involved in several new disciplines and established itself as a resource for instructors as well as students.

Jeanette Harris
East Texas State University



ANNOUNCEMENTS

A CALL FOR PAPERS on "Reading, Writing, and Thinking"

At this year's Mid-Hudson Modern Language Association Conference, to be held on December 1 and 2 at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, New York, the Rhetoric and Composition Seminar will focus on the interdisciplinary topic "Reading, Writing, and Thinking."

The Chairman seeks three or four papers of approximately eight to ten pages addressing the topic from the standpoint of rhetorical theory, learning theory, psycholinguistics, or any related discipline. Papers may be theoretical, practical, or a mixture of both with an emphasis on classroom applications. Likely topics include cognitive development, problem solving, and memory, as well as information processing.

Those interested in submitting papers for consideration should send one-page abstracts as soon as possible to

William L. Stull
Director of the Writing Program
Department of English
University of Hartford
200 Bloomfield Avenue
West Hartford, CT 06002

Completed papers will be due by September 15, 1980. After presentation at the Conference, papers may be submitted for publication in Mid-Hudson Language Studies, the journal of the MHMLA.

For further information on the Conference, please write

George J. Sommer
Department of English
Marist College
Poughkeepsie, NY 12601
(914) 471-3240 (Ext. 213)

Fourth Annual
INSTITUTE FOR DIRECTORS AND STAFF
of

COLLEGE LEARNING CENTERS
June 22-27, 1980
University of California
Berkeley Campus

Coordinator: Dr. Martha Maxwell

This institute addresses the changing roles of college learning centers and provides an in-depth learning experience for administrators who plan to start or improve centers,

and for staff who want to develop or update their skills and knowledge. The institute offers participants opportunities to describe their programs and share problems and solutions in discussion groups and informal conversation sessions, to hear from speakers and to participate in workshops.

For further information, contact:

Education Extension
2223 Fulton Street
Berkeley, CA 94720
(415) 642-1171

THE WRITING CENTER JOURNAL

Editors: Lil Brannon (U. of North Carolina - Wilmington)

Stephen North (SUNY-Albany)

Beginning Fall/Winter 1980 (published bi-yearly)

Subscriptions: \$5 per year (send checks payable to:

Stephen North
Department of English
SUNY-Albany, New York 12222

Call for Manuscripts: The Writing Center: Its Function and Scope (10-12 typed pages), manuscripts on other topics welcome, especially for regular department features:

Materials, The Tutors Talk

Deadline: August 15, 1980. Manuscripts may be sent to either editor.

CALL FOR CONFERENCE PAPERS

A conference on "The Writer's Mind: Writing as a Mode of Thinking" will be held at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, New York, October 3-4, 1980. Richard L. Larson, editor of College Composition and Composition, will be the keynote speaker; Donald McQuade of Queens College, City University of New York, will be the opening speaker. The conference will feature both invited and unsolicited papers dealing with writing and cognition from either a theoretical or a pedagogical perspective. The conference will be sponsored by the New York College English Association, the Hudson-Mohawk Association of Colleges and Universities, and Skidmore College.

For information, write to:

Robert Foulke
Department of English
Skidmore College
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

WESTERN COLLEGE READING ASSOCIATION

The Fourteenth Annual Conference of the Western College Reading Association will be held April 9-12, 1981 at the North Park Inn in Dallas. Proposals for papers and pre-conference institutes are invited. The conference program will highlight the issues of Challenge, Reassessment, and Affirmation. Tentative plans call for each of three major speakers to address one of the issues: Challenges from within higher education and from the society at large to the learning assistance profession; Reassessment of traditional roles, methods, and theories; and Affirmation of those aspects of our profession which ought to endure.

The deadline for receipt of all proposals is November 15, 1980. Proposals for paper presentations (which will typically be scheduled two per each 1½-hour session) should include a 250-word abstract, a description of the format and length of the presentation, and a brief resume of each of the presenters. Papers presented at the conference will be considered for publication in the Conference Proceedings.

Pre-conference institutes will be held on Thursday, April 9, 1981 from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and, if necessary, later that evening also. Proposals for pre-conference institutes should include specific objectives for the workshop, a description of the target population (i.e., background, needs, and interests of the prospective participants), a specification of the format and length of the institute, and a brief resume of each institute leader and resource person, indicating his or her qualifications for presenting the workshop.

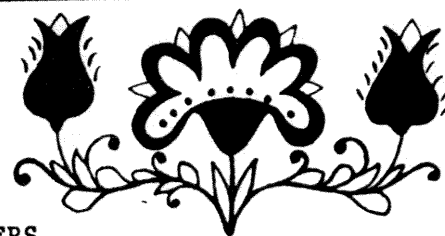
Papers and institutes will be selected with consideration given to the need for a balanced program which is reflective of the theme issues. Consideration will also be given to the significance of proposed topics to members of WCRA and to their specializations in reading, learning assistance, developmental education, and tutorial services. Program presenters should expect to pay membership fees and to register for the conference.

All proposals for papers and pre-conference institutes should be sent to Ann Faulkner, WCRA President-Elect, Mountain View College, 4849 West Illinois, Dallas, TX 75211.

Next year, in the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER, we hope to have several issues concentrate on particular topics or aspects of writing labs: business and professional writing in the lab, teaching English as a second language in the lab, and tutor training. Three to five page articles on these subjects will be particularly welcome, as will suggestions for other "special issue" topics that you would find useful. Please send articles, queries, and suggestions for further topics to:

Muriel Harris, editor
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OUR
READERS



RESPOND

In the May issue of the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER, Paula Scheye asked for a list of colleges and universities that offer a graduate program in rhetoric and composition. To add to the list which appeared in the May issue, Susan Helgeson (University of Louisville) has sent in a program description of the "Ph.D. in English with Concentration in Rhetoric and Composition" offered at the University of Louisville, in Kentucky. In addition, Patricia Burnes (University of Maine at Orono) sent the following description of their program:

The University of Maine at Orono offers an MA in English with a concentration in writing. Depending on preference and prior experience, students electing the concentration take from nine to fifteen hours of course work in the theory and practice of composition instruction. Regularly available are courses in composition theory, rhetoric, linguistics, and composition pedagogy at both the high school and college level.

Because most students choosing the concentration are teaching assistants, they supplement their course work with extensive practical experience. As assistants, they teach one or two divisions

of freshman writing during each semester of their two years in the program. When scheduling and preference permit, they substitute work in the department's writing laboratory--tutoring and/or program development--for part of their regular assignment. Also, they are encouraged to audit any of the five advanced courses in expository and technical writing the department offers.



Midnight Oil:

A Journal for Student Essays

At the interdisciplinary seminar in writing I conducted in June 1979 we brainstormed how to improve the writing of Wheaton College students. After the initial gruesome suggestions (the purpose of brainstorming is to free internal censors, and free them we did), we came up with several workable ideas. One was to publish a journal of outstanding student papers, written for diverse disciplines.

Our immediate goals related to student writing. We wanted to show students that faculty across the curriculum value good writing, that well-written papers are appreciated outside of the English department. We also wanted to honor student academic achievement and to provide the student body with models of good writing and research.

So we set to work: we started last fall with a meeting to which all members of the faculty were invited. We soon had an editorial board of twenty, representing not only English but also physics, not only art, history and philosophy but also government and sociology. And we eventually agreed on a title: the tongue-in-cheek Midnight Oil: The Wheaton Undergraduate Review.

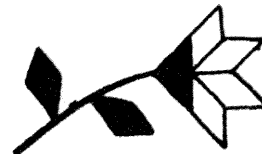
The editorial board decided to invite each member of the Wheaton faculty to nominate one student essay a semester. After preliminary readings we narrowed our choice to nine essays, out of which we chose three to appear in the journal. (We are publishing the names and authors of the other nominated essays as well, since these students deserve recognition too. And we are placing copies of their essays on reserve in the library, since we want to make a range of models available to students.)

In puzzling our way through the first issue

we've discovered that in addition to honoring student achievement and providing models, we're actually doing quite a bit more. One unexpected benefit is that selecting which essays to include continues faculty dialogue on what constitutes good writing and how to foster it. Another is that the journal shows the Wheaton community what is happening in various disciplines. After reading essays for the first issue, members of the editorial board mentioned how fascinating it was to find out what students are learning in other disciplines and what, in many cases, is happening in the disciplines themselves. In fact, our first issue, due out May 15th includes essays from biology, classics, and art history: a review essay on cellular aging, exploring the limits of the span of life; a critical re-evaluation of Nietzsche's interpretation of Euripides: and a research paper on the contexts and meanings of Picasso's Guernica, which is likely soon to return to Spain forever. (If you'd like to see what the journal looks like and are willing to send \$1.50, I'd be happy to send you a copy of the first issue.)

Our enthusiasm has been sufficiently contagious to interest the Dean and the Provost, who are funding the first issue. And I take the following as another sign that we are thriving: when I announced that I would like to serve as editor only every other semester, two volunteers were readily forthcoming to edit the next issue.

Beverly Lyon Clark
English Department
Wheaton College
Norton, Massachusetts 02766



Stretch the Lab

Despite our protests, one mistake many faculty and students make regarding the writing lab is to define it in too narrow a way. If we think of the lab only as an adjunct to freshman composition, we have the old problem reinforced. That is, students (and some faculty) tend to view correctness in writing as the peevishness of an English department that is losing literature majors and must justify its existence by requiring

writing of all entering freshmen--thus, the writing lab.

If, instead, we drop the idea that the lab can only function on the remedial level, then we can serve students across the campus at almost every level of their education. Most will come in voluntarily. Many will stay with the lab. But we must be willing to serve the entire university community. We must be prepared to serve a variety of students with a wide spectrum of writing problems. A graduate student writing a masters thesis in forestry ought to be able to walk into the lab and say, "I'm stuck, Can anyone here help me?" Obviously, if he is stuck with the content, we can only send him back to his advisor. But if they come to the lab, they usually are stuck for other reasons: They can't get started. They have pages of notes but cannot organize those notes into a coherent paper. Their advisor keeps shooting the thesis back to them and telling them to revise the "style" of the paper, whatever that means. We must have people in the lab who can help this graduate student as well as the remedial student sent to us because he cannot spell or punctuate or make subjects and verbs agree.

What is more important, we must somehow let the university community know that our people can handle several levels of writing problems. To do that, we must become our own public relations firm and stretch the lab far outside the bounds of the English department.

I would like to suggest just a few ways of getting the rest of the university into the writing lab.

Workshops - Both tutors and lab directors can take some time to visit different departments across campus and simply tell those departments about the lab and what the lab can do. This is especially important at those institutions which are stressing "Writing Across the Curriculum." In those places, we are asking other disciplines to require writing in their classes, but they are not being asked to teach writing. When these instructors isolate student problems, they should refer those problems to the lab where we can work with individual students.

Individualized Instruction - Writing labs succeed or fail often on the basis of their reputations with students. Therefore, we must

be flexible. Design each program for the individual who walks through the door. If a student tells you he got good grades in comp but still cannot write a decent business letter, teach him the business letter.

Faculty Input - Encourage faculty from other disciplines to design their own materials for the writing lab. If, for example, a chemistry professor has a very specific format for his lab reports and he is constantly frustrated because only about 30% of his students ever get the form correct, ask him to give you copies of the form and perhaps taped directions to take a student step by step through that report.

Encourage other faculty to constantly give you their ideas on how you can best serve their students. Ask for copies of their assignments if they have them.

Ask faculty to stop themselves from giving a grade to a really bad paper. Instead, they could send that student to the lab. If that idea is abhorrent to your faculty, at least encourage faculty to provide rewrite possibilities.

Communication - Be careful not to isolate yourself with a student in the lab. Contact the referring instructor when possible and let that instructor know what you are doing. Ask for advice.

Use open houses to acquaint faculty with the lab. Many faculty members know it exists but do not know where it is or what it looks like.

Mini-Courses - Offer special mini-courses to anyone who wants to attend for a couple of nights on organization, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, any topic that bothers most writers. Sometimes even faculty will attend these.

These are, as I say, simply suggestions to get you thinking. What is most important is that you learn to stretch the lab across the university community. Let them know you are there.

Diana Freisinger
Michigan Technological University



Phase Two in the Competency Program
at Del Mar College

At the beginning of the 1979 Fall Term, the English Department of Del Mar College, Corpus Christi, Texas, moved into Phase Two of its Competency Program for two remedial courses (English 606--a six semester hour course for ACT 11 or SAT 320 or under--and English 302--a three semester hour course for ACT 12-15 or SAT 330 to 390) and one regular freshman course (English 601a--ACT 16 or SAT 400 and above). The emphasis of Phase One on sentence-level skills will continue, but Phase Two will add emphasis on the process and techniques of composition.

The success of the Competency Program, which began one year ago with Phase One, was due in part to a strong support system which included classroom and English Learning Center instruction, along with special study sessions held by faculty and ELC staff during the week and on weekends. The faculty planned the program and wrote all materials specifically for Del Mar students. All tests continue to be checked by a Test Review Board, appointed by the department chairperson, for level and appropriateness of language, complexity of sentence structure, and potential racial and/or sexual bias.

The format for Minimum Competency testing will continue unchanged into the 1978-79 school year. Students will have three opportunities to score the required 80% for passing each section of the test (10 sections for English 606, 11 sections for English 302, and 12 sections for English 601A). Performance on the MC Tests has improved dramatically from a passing rate in the low 50's in fall of 1978 to a passing rate in the high 80's in the spring and summer of 1979. As these tests continue to be given, departmental attention will turn more specifically to application of the sentence-level skills in composition as well as to broader concerns about composition.

At a luncheon workshop on the first day of the term, a program by members of the English faculty was held in the English Learning Center. Dr. Virginia Stone, Chairperson of the Department, and Dr. Marc Nigliazzo, Director of the ELC and the new Co-Chairperson of the department, reviewed the overall program and discussed plans for the 1979-80 school year. A series of informal faculty workshops on composition will be held during the year, and a committee composed of the coordinators and associates of each course

will study the program during the fall semester and make plans for 1980-81. Dr. Nigliazzo, who conducted a training program for an engineering firm in Idaho and also held workshops at Boise State University on conducting an MC program during the first six weeks of the summer term, spoke on English proficiency in the professions, explained some special projects of the department, and introduced the faculty to new ELC materials. During 1978-79 Dr. Nigliazzo held a series of workshops for public school teachers on minimum competency and the ELC concept, and he has scheduled workshops on composition for in-service training week in the public schools in the area and the Rio Grande Valley. A workshop was held the latter part of the summer to train graders for the department, and some business writing workshops, such as the one Dr. Nigliazzo held for the Morrison-Knudsen Company in Idaho, will be held for local businesses this fall. Other faculty members in the department spoke on teaching composition and grading techniques that have worked for them.

The English Department will be glad to respond to inquiries about the Minimum Competency Program and about experience in learning center establishment and management at Del Mar College.



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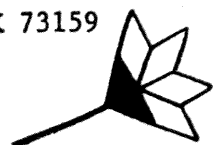
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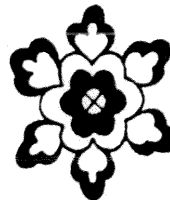
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