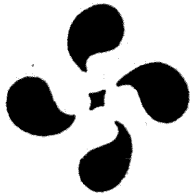


WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Vol. IV, No. 8 (April, 1980)

Once again, several long articles dictate the need for a lengthier than usual issue of the newsletter. But, keep on sending those excellent articles, as well as questions, comments, book reviews, names of new members, and those much appreciated (!) donations of \$3 (with checks made payable to me), to cover duplicating and mailing costs to:



Muriel Harris, Editor
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907

Our Learning Skills Center at Kishwaukee College is designed for full or part-time students who would like to improve their skills at any level. We have tutorial services in the form of peer-tutors, in subject areas such as math, English, accounting, data processing, nursing, Spanish, chemistry, physics, and biology. In addition, we have available various self-improvement materials (tapes, film strips, hand-outs, etc.) to assist the student in vocabulary, reading comprehension, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and the basic study skills. The students are directed to our Center either through a direct referral by an instructor or indirectly by fellow students or their own desire for assistance in a particular area of study. An appointment is not necessary to come to the Center unless a specific tutor is needed for a designated subject. We feel this flexibility best offers the student the opportunity for individualized help, affords him the time to work at his own pace, and encourages the building of his self-confidence.

Brenda Brunworth
Learning Skills Center
Kishwaukee College

SOUTH GEORGIA COLLEGE IS ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR A FACULTY POSITION TEACHING READING AND ENGLISH

Start September 1, 1980
Academic Year appointment
Rank: Instructor of Reading and English
Salary will range from \$13,500

Requirements for the position include:

- *At least one graduate degree in reading or English
- *The completion of graduate level courses in reading and English
- *Preference will be given to the candidate with experience in the instruction of the disadvantaged student and in supervision of reading and/or writing labs

The faculty member shall:

- *Teach in both the areas of reading and English, including off-campus or evening class assignments
- *Supervise labs
- *Participate in student advisement

Application deadline: April 4, 1980

Send vita, copies of transcripts, and names of three references to:

Dr. Louise P. Clara, Chairperson
Special Studies Division
South Georgia College
Douglas, Georgia 31533
(912) 384-1100



The Writing Lab:
An undergraduate's viewpoint

"I am going to graduate soon with a bachelor's degree in English, and I do not feel that my writing ability and knowledge of grammar is even adequate. So far, I have been writing with an 'intuition' that tells me a sentence sounds right. (My intuition is not always right, though.) When I write a paper, I want to know, at the very least, that it is grammatically correct. How can I be given a degree to teach English when I know so little about grammar and composition?"

A year ago in my junior year at Purdue, these words kept circling in my head becoming louder every time I had to write a paper for a class. Looking over the remaining required courses for my degree, I decided that most likely I would not obtain this greatly-desired knowledge and confidence. As a transfer student, I knew no professor well enough to talk with about my problem. Luckily, I noticed in the school newspaper that the Writing Lab was offering some mini-courses, one-hour review sessions on specific topics. The next day I attended one on spelling. After the session, I told Muriel Harris, who conducted the session, that I was impressed with the mini-course, and I asked about some of the other topics. We talked, and then she urged me to come to the lab for more help.

When we met later that week, I told her of my frustrations with grammar and composition. Together we designed an independent study course which involved working through a grammar book; utilizing the self-instruction tapes and response booklets, the lab handouts, mini-courses, and other lab resources; spending time talking about grammar and composition with Professor Harris and the graduate tutors; and finally tutoring once I felt confident enough. My objectives for the course were as follows: to gain confidence in grammar; to improve my writing ability; to gain skill in diagnosing students' writing problems and tutoring; and to acquaint myself with the workings of a writing lab.

I spent three hours per week, often times more, in the lab reading Warriner's English Grammar and Composition (a commonly-used high school text for this area) or listening to self-instruction tapes, working exercises and asking questions. With the help of one of the graduate tutors, I was able to dis-

tinguish between the major and minor topics of grammar discussed in Warriner's. I had soon realized that I couldn't memorize everything. After each session in the lab, I wrote my ideas, frustrations, and new discoveries in a journal. In one early entry, I expressed my lack of confidence.

September 13--"Sarah (a graduate tutor in the lab) and I worked with a student, who looked to be my age or older, on a paper he was writing. At first, I was terrified about working with someone my own age; so, I decided to just sit back and listen to Sarah. After all, I was only beginning--I was just like him--I was here to be tutored, also. But, as I was listening, I became involved in the discussion; I actually gave suggestions. It was a good feeling and added a little to my confidence."

On another occasion, I recorded my impression of three different methods of learning.

September 25--"By this writing, I have read Warriner's, listened to a tape, and gone to a mini-course on phrases and clauses. In evaluating their effectiveness, I would rate the mini-course first, the tape second, and Warriner's last. Yet, I must take into consideration that my understanding of the mini-course and of the tape was complemented by my study of Warriner's. No one really enjoys reading a grammar book, but seriously I do not think the mini-course and the tape would have been as helpful had I not first read Warriner's. Basically, if one really wants to learn something, he must put in the work, then the teachers and writing labs are there as complements. It is too bad that, today, the educational system doesn't feel that learning is primarily the responsibility of the student.

Finally, I share the reviews of my first tutoring session.

October 4--"My first 'solo' tutoring session! I have mixed feelings and am unsure of my ability to help John. I started by working with his spelling errors at his request. Spelling is difficult to teach because few rules exist, and of those the majority have exceptions. He seemed bored, at first, but he did increase his interest as he worked on exercises. It was rewarding for me when he used some of the

'clues' I had given him for catching and correcting his spelling errors. After the session, my first reaction was that I should spend weeks reading spelling books to evaluate them and learn from them. Realizing the impossibility, I only looked through a few in the lab. My opinion of these and others I have seen is not very high; although, for now at least, I have no other alternatives."

"Working in the lab is continuously defining my interests, my goals. I feel that I am learning something I can comfortably teach"

By the end of the semester, I had tutored quite a bit and gained confidence and knowledge in my work. As a tutor, I found that the grammar I had learned remained fresh in my mind as I helped students with their various problems. I decided my experience in the lab was too valuable to end, so I asked Professor Harris to allow me to continue tutoring the following semester. She replied, "You think you have to ask?"

This brings us to the present semester and my senior year. I tutor five hours per week and work one-to-one with three students on a semester-long basis. Two of the students are junior English majors who found themselves in a situation similar to mine. One of them shared a class, "The History of the English Language," with me last semester. We became acquainted when six from our class met to study together. We were preparing for a test on the history of grammar. I was shocked at how little these five English majors knew about grammar. It was absurd to expect them to understand how grammar had developed through history when they knew almost nothing about grammar today.

I had gone to the lab, in the first place, because I felt that my knowledge of grammar was inadequate and less than that of my fellow English majors! Unfortunately, this experience showed me that I was not the only one with inadequate skills in grammar and that the others did not really care or had not thought about it. Later, one of them did ask me where I had learned about grammar. I told him about the Writing Lab and my independent-study course. Thus, he is one of the students I am working with in the lab this semester.

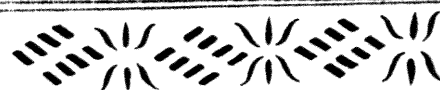
So far this term, I have worked with both of the English majors, designing a flexible but solid syllabus which will enable them to

learn grammar and improve their writing. (Their interests do not extend, as mine, to learning to tutor.) They are lucky in that I can give them the benefit of my past trial-and-error experience.

So ends my experience to this point in the Writing Lab. My reason for sharing my experiences stem from my belief in the Writing Lab's usefulness to developmental writers, experienced writers, and the writer who plans to teach English. I must make it clear that I am not pointing a finger at Purdue University as the only school lacking in adequate, required training in grammar and composition for its English majors. As a transfer student, I am a testament to this fact. Further, the university is not totally responsible for its students' education; the student himself has the major responsibility.

On the other hand, my purpose here is not to complain about the educational system or to provide a solution. Instead, I wish to share my experience, offering it as a valuable opportunity for other undergraduates, and as a different viewpoint of the Writing Lab for Lab directors. (Besides, it is a great way to increase your tutoring staff at no extra cost.) I invite questions, comments, and similar experiences addressed to me.

Joyce Anderson West
31-2 Hilltop Drive
West Lafayette, Indiana 47907



THE SCRANTON APPROACH

My colleagues at the University of Scranton and I were pleased to note in the October issue that the Writing Lab Newsletter would henceforth provide a question-and-answer forum for its subscribers. With this in mind, the following article is intended to supply information concerning the teaching of composition at our institution, as well as to pose several questions for the readership's consideration and (assuredly welcome!) response.

Located in Northeastern Pennsylvania, the University of Scranton has a full-time enrollment of approximately 5,000 students in four semi-autonomous administrative divisions. To accommodate the undergraduate enrollment, some 50+ sections of "Written Communication" are scheduled annually. A registration limit of 18 is maintained for all writing classes in the College of Arts and Sciences, although

this number is sometimes exceeded in evening sections.

Each year, six sections of composition are reserved during the first semester for students enrolled in the University's highly successful "Academic Development Program." The "ADP" is specifically designed to assist applicants who, albeit endowed with the potential for college-level study, nevertheless have some deficiencies in their high school backgrounds.

Upon admission, these students are initially assigned to an intensive three-week course in "Reading and Research" offered in co-operation with the Education Department. Having upgraded their basic skills in ancillary areas, they are then assigned to special writing sections. The distinctive feature differentiating "ADP" composition classes from others is that they meet for five 50-minute periods weekly over a five-to-six-week period. Generally, provision is made for three "standard" classroom presentations and two lab sessions each week.

It is the department's policy to staff "ADP" sections with experienced personnel who maintain excellent reputations as dynamic lecturers; lab sessions are normally conducted by specially-trained graduate assistants. We have, moreover, discovered that lab-related activities provide valuable practical classroom exposure for senior secondary English/Education majors, and have sought to use them accordingly. Through careful integration of our graduate assistants and teacher-trainees into the University's lab program, we have been able to maintain an extremely high level of individualized instruction which, in turn, contributes to fine faculty and student morale.

Physically, the University of Scranton writing lab is housed in a specially-designed facility on the fourth floor of the administration building. The room itself is immediately distinguishable from a regular classroom by its round tables (intended to accommodate informal small-group instruction), as well as several distinctive decorative features. Last year, large bulletin boards were installed on literally all available wall space not otherwise utilized. These were then covered with duplicate sets of attractive grammar and style charts which, in addition to their color and general aesthetic value, serve an important instructional purpose. During lab sessions, any student con-

fused on a specific point of grammar or style need not wait for an instructor or assistant to provide enlightenment; he/she can actually "see" the required information prominently displayed and depicted in attractive fashion. In fact, students are encouraged to leave their places, if necessary, and "go to the boards."

Similarly, the utility of the writing lab has been enhanced by the renovation of a heretofore under-utilized adjacent storage area. This room now provides space for three "writing counselors" who can confer privately with students in comfortable surroundings.

To foster a spirit of healthy self-discipline, the department has had special "composition packets" printed. These consist of standard 8½ x 11 sheets with a difference. Although they are lined, they include a clear white marginal area on all sides to provide abundant space for the instructor's corrections. Furthermore, they provide room for students to indicate the title or assignment designation, as well as space to record compositions in numerical sequence.

Stated bluntly, many professors were concerned by the wholly unsatisfactory physical appearance of student assignments (pages torn from spiral note pads, the absence of margins, etc.). The adoption of these composition sheets has, indeed, given our students an awareness that their writing is "special." Consequently, they take increased pride in the physical presentation of their work, with the welcome result that their assignments are actually easier to correct! Instead of viewing the institution of such requirements as contributing to "unhealthy regimentation," classes now seem to regard the basic composition course as something other than an "academic obstacle" to be overcome--an experience that merits their dignified attention and respect. (Our campus bookstore was able to arrange for both the printing of these composition packets and their distribution at minimal cost. The department will gladly supply samples to any readers expressing an interest.)

At least 15-20 full-and part-time staff members conduct the University's "regular" composition program. And their methods are characterized by a strikingly healthy diversity!

Some professors emphasize private conferences; others rely exclusively upon "tradi-

tional" classroom presentations. There are those who eschew films and tapes entirely; there are others who regard them as essential. Although virtually every "accepted" text is represented on semester book lists (including Strunk and White!), several instructors prefer to rely upon their own mimeographed/xeroxed materials.

Presently, the University is considering a complete (and somewhat drastic) revision of its writing program.

Instead of the traditional "freshman composition cum lab" offering, the department contemplates inaugurating a series of interest-oriented offerings which will allow students to fulfill the University's written communication requirement. Such courses would include "Writing for Pre-Law Majors," "Scientific Writing," "Business Communication" (which already exists in our curriculum), and a "Writing About Literature" offering designed for humanities majors. Several "standard" composition sections would be retained, as well as the six "ADP" courses.

As we prepare to re-structure our program on a fairly massive scale, my colleagues and I would welcome answers to the following questions.

1. Does your institution currently maintain an enrollment ceiling for freshman writing in general, and for lab sections in particular?

2. Does your department require a specific textbook for mandatory use by all composition teachers, or is "individual preference" encouraged?

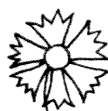
3. Does your department's writing lab operate on a year-round basis? (At Scranton, ours functions on a much-reduced scale during the summer, usually serving no more than two ADP sections.)

4. The University of Scranton has contemplated establishing an independent evening college course (involving lab activities) to assist those mature students who require intensive preparation in written communication as a prerequisite for successful performance in both degree and continuing education programs. Emphasis would be accorded standard expository prose, with provision for some interest-oriented assignments. Does your institution offer anything analogous? Has your program produced satisfactory results?

5. Finally, there are several general questions pertaining to the status of written communication offerings at other schools on which we would welcome the subscribers' views:

- Does your college/university presently enforce a mandatory writing-proficiency requirement? Does it provide for exemptions? If so, what criteria are generally employed to exempt students from "regular" courses in composition?
- Does your department maintain an interest-oriented sequence of writing courses as outlined above? If so, have these courses generally fulfilled faculty/student expectations?
- How popular is "creative" writing among your student population?

We, at Scranton, await the readers' responses to any or all of the above questions, and assure them of a prompt, cordial reply.



Henry J. Stauffenberg, Ph.D.,
Chairman
Department of English/Communications
University of Scranton
Scranton, Pennsylvania 18510

Teresa Ferster Glazier's The Least You Should Know about English (Holt, Rinehart and Winston) is one of those essential books which every Writing Lab should own. Because its philosophy is to simplify, it is a good book to use with students who have numerous writing problems, particularly in grammar and usage (although it can also be successfully used for those who need to review).

To help students avoid confusion, Glazier begins with the premise that there are only a few basic rules that everyone should know. These fundamental rules are well explained and clearly illustrated. Besides the simplified explanations, another strength of the book is that the exercises in each topic section contain one hundred sentences, thus providing plenty of practice for most students.

Using little terminology, Glazier covers the following areas: spelling, fragments, and run-together sentences, agreement, wordiness, and punctuation and capitalization. Because answers are provided in the back of the book, motivated students can use this text independently.

The author also purports that the book stresses writing, and it does indeed include a chapter of writing assignments and many helpful pointers suitable for under-prepared students. However, even though the importance of the writing assignments is emphasized, this part of the program is relegated to the small last chapter. After seeing approximately 190 pages devoted to grammar and usage instruction and about 20 pages of writing activities, one never quite gets the feeling that a major concern of The Least You Should Know about English is writing.

Although this book by itself, or for that matter any other book, will not solve all the writing deficiencies an under-prepared student may have, The Least You Should Know about English is a helpful resource for any Writing Lab, especially for tutors who need to assign exercises for specific problems or who need ideas for writing assignments.



Susan Glassman
Cooperative Learning Center
Southeastern Mass. Univ.

The Learning Center
as a Support System

To be effective, Learning Centers must reach out to students and faculty. At Detroit Institute of Technology, we are making a concerted effort to build the Learning Center into a support system for all students and faculty. We are trying to involve all levels of students as well as teachers from all departments. To accomplish this, we have taken the following steps:

Advertise our services. Since our Learning Center teaches developmental writing, reading, and math courses in the Center itself, some higher level students weren't aware that they could walk-in for short or long-term help in any of these areas.

Some students didn't know we had materials to help them with advanced writing and reading skills. To remedy this, we planned an advertising blitz that involved the following:

1. Making posters and handouts listing services and placing them in key locations.

2. Taking Center equipment such as the videotape, slide shows, and programmed materials to the registration area to stimulate students' interest and questions.
3. Publishing a continuing newsletter to describe Center services and activities.
4. Setting up a student lounge next to the Center where all students can eat, talk, read magazines the Center subscribes to, and use our P.E.T. computers for games or instructional materials.
5. Holding an Open House in our new lounge to acquaint students and faculty with our Center.

Meet the faculty in all departments. To operate effectively, we need to know the type of reading/writing problems students are having in different classes, how departments perceive these difficulties, how we can be of service. Our intention is to actively involve all faculty in teaching reading/writing and to work with them in improving students' skills. To evaluate students' and teachers' needs, we used three techniques: (1) informal, individual meetings, (2) departmental meetings, and (3) departmental surveys. As a result of these meetings, certain programs were initiated; others are at the planning stage.

1. Two steps were immediately taken to show students their teachers and the Center staff were working together.
 - a. Center staff were invited into classrooms to discuss how the Center could best serve teachers' and students' needs.
 - b. The Center compiled an annotated bibliography of all materials available. Teachers were then able to refer students to particular modules and activities.
2. Special workshops were set up in response to particular needs. For example:
 - (a) the academic counselor had probation students who needed training in study skills, (b) a court reporting school (housed in our building) had many students who needed refresher workshops in grammar, and (c) a conversational group was developed for inter-

national students who find language problems a barrier to learning. (We are presently developing workshops to meet additional needs.)

3. A problem all departments had was how to deal with the language problems of the international students. In response to this, we are evaluating and developing materials, setting up a language lab, and advising other departments about teaching methods. (This is still in the planning stage.)
4. Some teachers started to view the Center as a follow-up system for classwork. In this case, students who have difficulty comprehending or performing a task in class can come to the Center and work with material prepared by their classroom teachers. (This is not yet fully implemented.)
5. To maintain consistency between class and Center activities, we are comparing materials and concepts taught. For example, we discovered that students were often receiving contradictory instructions about preparing resumes. To avoid this, the English faculty, Co-op Department, and Center staff are working to agree on standard resume forms and preparing materials to teach them.
6. Teachers suggested they spend time in the Center to familiarize themselves with students in an individualized environment. We foresee and hope to encourage teachers' use of the Center for individual conferences and work.
7. Because of declining reading/writing abilities of entering students, the English faculty decided to require freshmen to spend one hour per week in the Center working on materials at their ability levels. For example, one student may work with subject-verb agreement while another works with logic.
8. The engineering faculty pointed out that their students did not see the need for reading/writing skills. In this case, a referral system would be doomed from the start. Instead, we discussed a method which involved the Center's staff going into the classroom for a specified time period each week and working with the engineering teacher on class required materials such as reading the text, specialized vocabulary, or report writing,

Follow-up materials would be available in the Center. (The mechanics of this program are in the planning stage.)

9. The Co-operative Education Department found that some students were having difficulty with on-the-job language skills. Together we're devising programs to aid these students. For example, we're in the process of writing typical interview questions and self-evaluation forms so students can come to the Center and spend as much time as necessary working with the videotape and tape recorders to improve their thinking ability, verbal responses, pronunciation, body movements, attitudes, etc.
10. Other departments, especially engineering, found our P.E.T. computers useful for instructional purposes and were able to make suggestions about how we might use them. (This is in the planning stage.)

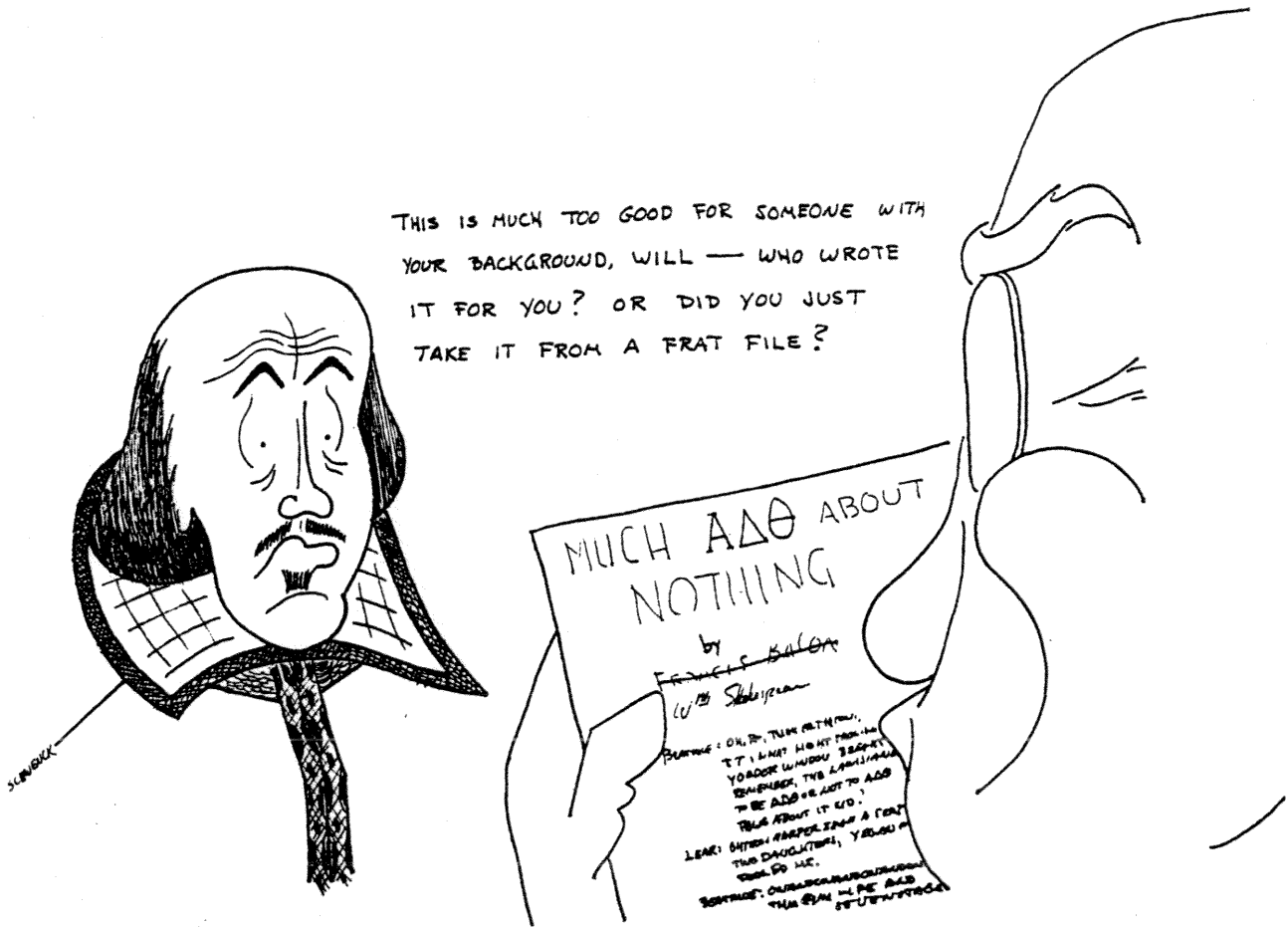
Meet with other support systems in the school.
A student with academic problems may also have personal, medical, job, or financial problems that interfere with the learning process. Therefore, we felt a need to connect with the other support systems. Additionally, we felt we could work with these departments in other areas. The results of these meetings were:

1. The counseling staff advised us about how to deal with particular students. Also, we are developing referral contacts with outside agencies.
2. In conjunction with the Financial Aid staff, we conducted workshops on how to write letters thanking scholarship sponsors.
3. We are also working with the Admissions and Testing departments to evaluate the testing and placement process, set up specific course objectives, investigate competency testing.

As we have discovered, the Learning Center need not become synonymous with "remedial work." It need not be isolated from the rest of the school. It can become a Learning Center where all students can develop and hone their skills, where Center staff and all departments of the college can work together. The Learning Center can explode its boundaries, can become part of a larger supportive system that aims to give students the best possible education.



Carol Carpenter, Learning Center
Detroit Institute of Technology



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER—Supplementary Mailing List— #29

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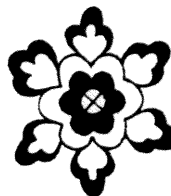
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A complete mailing list directory
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