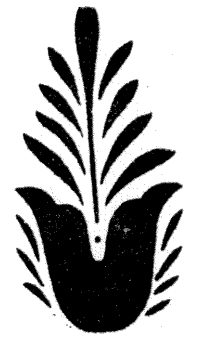




WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER



Vol. IV, No. 9 (May, 1980)

This month's issue is yet another lively potpourri of articles, announcements, queries, responses, and calls for papers. If you have another query to include in the June newsletter, the last issue for this academic year, please see that it arrives here by May 15th. And keep sending those useful articles, names of new members, and donations of \$3 (with checks made payable to me) to:

Muriel Harris, editor
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

P.S. A very appreciative thank you from my department's keeper of the budget to all those who have recently sent in munificent contributions to newsletter costs.



A CALL FOR PAPERS

The planning committee for the VIII Annual Ohio Developmental Education Conference is soliciting program proposals for workshops, panels or other formats. The conference is sponsored by Raymond Walters General & Technical College, University of Cincinnati, and will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio, November 5-7, 1980. The conference theme is "Intelligence Can be Taught!?" The deadline for submission of proposals is June 15, 1980. For proposal forms, write to Dr. Tanya Ludutsky or Dr. Phyllis Sherwood, Raymond Walters General & Technical College, 9555 Plainfield Road, Cincinnati, Ohio 45236 (513-745-4202).

CALL FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Special Interest Session
for Writing Lab Directors and Staff
1981 CCCC (Dallas, Texas)

Although the recent 4C's meeting is barely behind us, it is already necessary to begin

making plans for the 1981 CCCC in Dallas. In order to prepare a proposal for a Special Interest Session for Writing Lab Directors for this next conference, we must put together a program and submit a proposal to James Hill, the program chairman for next year, by June 30, 1980. Therefore, those of you who are interested in (1) giving one of the two keynote speeches at the session or (2) leading one of the eight workshops should submit your proposals to me by June 1, 1980, so that I can meet the proposal deadline.

Those interested in being workshop leaders should send a detailed abstract of the proposed content and format. Since the workshop sessions are approximately 45 minutes in length, proposals should be designed to conform to that time constraint. If you are interested in being one of the two keynote speakers, please send completed papers (approximately 15 minutes reading time). Please submit your proposals as soon as possible so that I will have ample time to study the submissions and to make the selections.

Due to the efforts of last year's chairperson, Lil Brannon, the recent session in Washington, D.C. was as successful as the previous ones have been, and we have every hope of a place on the program again next year. I would like to have a large number of proposals from which to choose so that our program will be as competitive as it has been in the past.

Pat Bates of Louisiana State University has volunteered to be in charge of Materials Exchange Table; I am sure you will find announcements from her in future issues of the Writing Lab Newsletter.

Please send proposals to - -
Jeanette Harris
Writing Center
East Texas State University
Commerce, Texas 75428



Ricks College Writing
Lab Survey

In April of 1979 the Ricks College (Rexburg, Idaho) Writing Lab sent a survey to 350 people on the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER mailing list, so kindly sent to me by Helen Naugle. Response was almost 30%, which is very good considering the pressures on lab directors at semester's end (if Ricks is any indication). I appreciate the time and care given to the survey questionnaire.

Perhaps you will be interested most in the responses from apparently successful labs-- that is labs whose attendance figures are significantly higher than the rest, averaging above 40% of available composition students or logging a number of visits approximating total school enrollment. These schools included approximately 40% two-year schools (including Ricks College) dealing largely with remedial work: that is, the majority of student "customers" were seriously deficient in basic grammar, spelling, and punctuation skills. The other 60% were rather evenly divided between four-year universities and universities with graduate degree programs. Generally, schools with more elevated programs were less concerned with remedial work.

The size of the institution (500 to 50,000; Ricks at 6,000) and the writing lab budgets (zero to \$100,000; Ricks at \$2000) had no specific bearing on success as indicated by attendance, the number of students reached, or cost effectiveness. It is interesting to note here the ratios of cost per student customer (Range: \$1.17 to \$63.00; Average: \$11.00; Ricks: \$4.00) and cost per student visit (Range: \$.12 to \$28.00; Average: \$4.50; Ricks: \$.67). It appears that cost effectiveness studies would be essential to labs still negotiating funding.

Virtually every "successful" lab offered diagnostic testing, generally in classes or in some phase of registration (few labs were large enough to permit large-scale testing in the lab itself). Study programs suggested by that testing were made available to the student. 83% of the successful schools required writing lab attendance, but fully 50% allowed the student to choose his own study programs. Most study programs were supported by texts and audio-visual materials, though primary emphasis was placed on the one-to-one tutor-student relationship. (The Ricks College lab trained 83 tutors during the year, peers of the student customers, as

the mainstay of its operation.)

The average successful lab had 1200 sq. ft. of floor space and utilized tape players (heavily), projectors, and other audio-visual equipment to allow the student auto-tutorial studies as a supplement to his sessions with tutors.

Only two or three successful labs (including Ricks) did not house their own equipment and study materials. Most apparently provide a centralized area where the student can review his individual file, confer with a tutor, and study his program with the tutor at hand for feedback.

Success, of course, ought not to be measured solely in terms of numbers of students reached, numbers of visits, and cost effectiveness. Most successful labs expressed concern for the individual student, keeping detailed files of his activity and progress and sending progress reports to his teachers. The Ricks College Writing Lab (in its second year of operation) reached 1134 individual students (student-body 6,000; composition students 2,800) who made 5283 visits. Estimates of visits to the library, which houses all our study materials, would triple that figure at the least. Most of our lab students are remedial, and come largely at the suggestion of their composition teachers. The average entry level of lab students into basic programs of grammar, spelling, punctuation, mechanics, and sentence structure was 40%. Students completed 1,940 study programs in these remedial areas with an average of 85%--another measurable level of success.

The real successes are more difficult to measure: Student tutors who grow socially and intellectually through their preparation for and contact with other students; tutors who take interest in the nuances of structure and tone in their teaching and in their own writing; tutors who radiate their own progress to the students they serve; students who suddenly discover they can spell, or punctuate; students who cease to "hate" English or to consider it their hardest subject; students who come to understand their own thinking and become seriously concerned with communication; staff, student tutors, and lab students who enjoy the challenges of learning and who enjoy each other. Combine these aesthetic successes with the objectively measurable successes and a writing lab is worth all the perspiration.

Ralph W. Thompson, Director
Writing Lab
Ricks College



A

READER

ASKS---

The Newsletter is directed to the growing number of teachers making career commitments in the writing field. And many of us have come the traditional route, with B.A. and M.A. degrees in literature. At times I hear bits and pieces of information about Ph.D. programs in composition, but as yet I have no idea which schools offer such programs. Talking with other Lab directors, I discover I am not alone in my ignorance.

I would like to suggest (and request) that the Newsletter print a list of colleges and universities that offer a program in rhetoric or composition.

Paula Scheye
Loyola College in Maryland

A

RESPONSE AND A

FURTHER QUERY - - -

Paula Scheye has raised an important question for many of us, and responses are invited from anyone who can help piece together such a list. To begin this task of compiling, I offer here the names of colleges and universities listed in a recent report by Janice Redish and Kathryn Racette, "Teaching College Students How to Write," issued by the Document Design Center of the American Institutes for Research.

I've added Purdue University to the list as we have a well established M.A. in Teaching English in the Two Year College which includes graduate courses in composition and teaching opportunities in a variety of writing courses. There is also a newly structured Ph.D. program with a special field in rhetoric and composition. This too includes teaching opportunities in developmental composition, freshman composition, the Writing Lab, business writing, technical writing, and English As a Second Language courses.

With this addition to the graduate programs in rhetoric and/or composition in the Redish and Racette report, the list is as follows:

1. Carnegie-Mellon University
2. Kansas State University
3. Ohio State University

4. Purdue University
5. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
6. State University of New York/Albany
7. University of California/Berkeley
8. University of California/ San Diego
9. University of Chicago
10. University of Iowa
11. University of Michigan
12. University of Southern California
13. University of Texas
14. University of Tulsa

Can you supply additional names and program descriptions?

Muriel Harris
Purdue University



A SMALL COLLEGE WRITING CENTER:
WRITING IMPROVEMENT
ON A NO FRILLS BUDGET

Like many other small liberal arts colleges, the University of LaVerne has come up against two opposing realities: the appalling writing difficulties of many of our students countered by an English department budget so small that a fully equipped skills center to aid these students was (and is) no more than a dream in the latest five year projection. Two years ago when I started making plans for a modest writing lab, I soon discovered how tiny a writing center could be and still serve as an effective tutoring center for students who need to improve their written English.

The main campus of the University of LaVerne has an undergraduate enrollment of just under 1000 students with a wide spectrum of writing abilities ranging from a few just barely literate students to the budding poets whose work fills the campus literary magazine. Most of our students fall between these extremes, of course, and find themselves in our one semester freshman English course, where their writing improves steadily under the eye of the instructor.

But we discovered that when they left their writing classes the students regressed to their old habits, backsliding without the encouragement and pressure to maintain a reasonable level of competence in their papers. A writing center seemed a possible solution: it would provide a tutoring center where students could receive free advice on how to improve their papers; equally important, it would give faculty members a place to refer students who were turning in substandard papers.

So armed with a budget of around \$2000 for the year (\$1000 for the part-time instructor who would teach the class I would have taught if I weren't directing the Writing Center, \$1000 for the tutors' salaries), I gathered the necessary elements of our writing lab, starting with the room.

The Writing Center shares a converted classroom that doubles as the foreign language lab. (The carrels have proven to be handy for students working on papers before or after seeing one of the tutors.) Our own furniture consists of a large table where students discuss work with the tutor on duty, book shelves filled with reference materials, and a filing cabinet with handouts on specific writing problems as well as Writing Center forms and records.

The tutors - the most important single element - are good student writers recommended by faculty members from any discipline in the University. Each semester I interview and then hire six regular tutors, with one or two others in reserve. The Center is open three afternoons a week from 1:00 until 5:00; each tutor works one two hour shift per week, plus a one hour a week training session. Pay (including the training sessions) is around \$3.00 an hour.

Most of the tutors have taken either College Writing or Advanced Writing, both taught by the majority of our instructors as one-to-one tutorial courses, so the tutors know roughly what they are expected to do when a fellow student brings in a paper for advice. Obviously the switch from the role of student to the role of teacher is significant, but at least the tutors are familiar with the approach.

Formal training of the tutors is still evolving. During the first two semesters of the Center I met and trained the tutors individually because of scheduling problems. Tutors saw only the tutor working during the other shift on their day, resulting in almost no interaction among tutors, no spirit of camaraderie, and a relatively high rate of absenteeism among tutors. At the beginning of the third semester I held four one-hour training sessions during the week before the Center opened in the fall to discuss techniques useful for peer tutoring as well as various procedural matters. During the semester we met once a month to discuss problems and suggestions that may have come up during actual tutoring. As a result of this

increased interaction, tutors often dropped by the Writing Center to chat with the tutor on duty - or to help out if several students were waiting for the tutor. Tutor absenteeism dropped significantly: only one no-show all semester.

Because of the encouraging results of the monthly meetings, this semester I am meeting with the tutors for an hour each week. One week I invited the ESL teacher to visit in order to give the tutors pointers on helping some of our many international students.

During most of the training sessions, we chat about problems that may have surfaced during the week, discuss sample student papers, or dream up new publicity tactics. When time permits, the tutors practice tutoring each other, polishing both their tutoring and their writing skills.

So far the student and faculty response to the Writing Center has been positive. Students who have visited the Center have reported that the tutoring was useful; faculty members who have referred students have noted improvement in the students' papers. We are continuing to bolster our publicity campaign and, as they realize such a useful free service is available, students are using the Center in gradually increasing numbers. I would appreciate any suggestions for encouraging even more students to use the Center.

Kathleen Irace
Writing Center
University of LaVerne



...And Now Grad School Labs

Four Harvard professors have recently received a grant to aid in the development of a new writing lab in the Harvard Graduate School of Education. As described in the March 1980 issue of Academe, "the center is being designed to encourage good writing at all levels of education, although it will limit its initial work to teachers and graduate students."

"N. S."

SOME WRITING LABS ARE FAILING:
REASONS WHY

It's 12:01 and I sit alone at my desk. Sam's folder is open before me, and beside it are a handout and an exercise I plan to use in helping him. At 12:05, I decide to sharpen my pencil. At 12:08, I think of a second exercise. At 12:10, I sigh, record "N. S." in Sam's folder, and file it. Sam has skipped his appointment and I think sadly of the two students who had asked for the time earlier but had been turned away.

Do you, dear readers, have some ideas that will help our Writing Clinic reduce the number of "no shows"? You need to know that attendance here is free, non-credit, and also voluntary, except for students from some instructors who keep a strict account. Most students come from freshman English.

We are trying in many ways to encourage students to keep their appointments; the first is that we maintain a friendly, encouraging atmosphere and a focus on the individual student. Another is that we usually conclude a conference with a pertinent exercise to be done and returned for discussion. Also, we post our sign-up sheets for five days ahead so that students can choose a time that is convenient for them to come. Next to the daily schedules is a manila pocket containing slips on which the students can record their conference time for their own reference. The slips have our telephone number and a request that students call us if they cannot come.

A final procedure, one we use when a student has attended but then missed two consecutive appointments, is to notify the instructor and ask that the student be reminded to keep any future appointments. We are reluctant to trouble the instructors to any greater degree.

So here is our request: will you let Writing Lab Newsletter know of ways you have devised to minimize the no-show problem? We'll appreciate it!

Lorraine Perkins
St. Cloud State University



Based on the attention they have received and the time and money that have been committed to them, one would think that writing laboratories are not only the panacea for flagging student skills in composition, but a rock upon which English departments can reaffirm their existence and their worth. Unfortunately, some writing labs are failing; a few may have already closed their doors. One must ask why such a logical and practical concept should fail in a climate that seems so right for its success. The answer heard most often is insufficient funding, but such an answer has perhaps become more of an excuse than a valid reason. For there are notable numbers of successful writing laboratories operating in borrowed space with volunteer help and little or no equipment. What then is the reason for failure? Actually, there is no single reason, but a number of reasons, and any combination of them is deadly.

First, there is the "I want one like yours" syndrome. Writing labs have been "bought" solely on the plan of some other writing lab, without the "buying" department and institution devoting more than a brief survey to its own particular type of students, their needs, and what, specifically, would be required to meet their needs through the writing lab concept. Some departments and institutions have committed more money to a writing lab than could be reasonably justified by their own particular circumstances. They have "bought" writing labs like the modern consumer who buys a car because he is attracted to a neighbor's, then finds it is too large or too small, too expensive or too ill-equipped for his needs. Inadequate study brings these labs into existence, and that same carelessness insures their failure.

A second reason writing labs fail is close kin to the first. Machinery is purchased as opposed to a writing laboratory being created. Rows of shiny projectors and recorders sit almost useless within vacant carrels. Shelves of programmed texts collect dust, unused. Canned A-V programs look impressive in metal files, but many have never been viewed once through by a student; many were never even previewed. Into such writing laboratories students are sometimes forced en masse to justify the expenditure. But novelty is not equivalent to planned instruction,

and machines are totally inefficient without human beings knowledgeable in the writing lab concept to suggest and monitor their use.

Inadequate preliminary study and direction are implicit in the first two causes of writing lab failure. But even in a lab that has been sufficiently well planned, continuing competent direction is imperative, whether the director is a part-time volunteer or a full-time professional. Writing laboratories do not run themselves. They require constant meddling by a director. They demand constant change to meet the changing needs of students. And questions which must be answered are not only, "How can we best meet our students' needs next semester?" but "How can we meet them next week?" Without direction, writing laboratories often boom and then decline. Having met one need, and having anticipated no others, they are soon unable to attract students.

And attracting students, serving students, making them feel they have been helped and making them want to return for more help is the bottom line. Without students, the size and magnificence of a writing laboratory matters little. True, students can, and sometimes are, compelled into writing labs, but once a lab becomes an obstacle to be negotiated rather than a means of negotiation, it rapidly loses credibility with the students. It is up to the director, and whatever staff he or she may have, to create an atmosphere into which the students will walk willingly and wish to return. Creating such an atmosphere is often a long-time endeavor. But the reputation and worth of a writing laboratory is acknowledged and disseminated by the students who use it.

Unfortunately, student enthusiasm for a writing laboratory is often most severely damaged by those who should, for many reasons, be the lab's chief promoters. The teachers themselves are probably the major source of writing laboratory failure. Without their support, without their willingness to get involved in the writing lab and, through their example, get the students involved, any writing laboratory is destined for ultimate failure. Too many times an entire English Department has acknowledged the need for a writing laboratory, supported its creation, and then contributed to its demise through willful neglect. They thought that other teachers would use it. They never knew what programs were available. They didn't, after all, trust machinery. They didn't, after all, trust the

ability of student tutors. They didn't, after all, have the time to devote to the project that they thought they would have. What is most apparent is that they consented to a project that they did not fully attempt to understand, nor did they ever understand that their dedication and involvement were critical.

The writing laboratory is a logical, realistic way of meeting student deficiency in language use and of enhancing the claim of almost every English department that it "serves" the entire academic community. It is one means of supporting the range of departmental curricula while convincing students that they do matter as individuals. But for all the worth that can be attributed to them, they sometimes fail. And the causes of failure are so prevalent that they must be acknowledged and studied by all those who have created writing laboratories or who hope to.

Marc Nigliazzo, Director
The English Learning Center
Del Mar College



A

READER

RESPONDS . . .

In response to Matthew Diomedes's query in the January 1980 issue, I want to recommend Solving Writing Problems by Louise Clara and Betty Nelson (Holt, 1979). This is a new self-paced workbook with extensive use of pre-tests and post-tests, all designed for students needing instruction at a fundamental level.

Deborah E. Arfken
Coordinator of Writing Services
Special Services Program
University of Tennessee at
Chattanooga

The article from Gary L. Krewald (University Writing Clinic-UW-Oskosh) was most informative, with just the right amount of detail regarding the program itself and its relation to the other clinic services. I would appreciate more articles of such a nature from persons who have used PLATO, CAI, and other in-house developed materials to help me in planning and integrating computer programs.



Barbara Shollar, Director
Learning Skills Center
College of New Rochelle

The Research Paper Tutorial Project
at Mass. Bay C. C.

Now that writing labs are becoming more and more established as a valuable teaching model, it is time to demonstrate their flexibility. Thus far it seems that most writing labs are an adjunct to either the English department or the developmental (remedial) program. Massachusetts Bay Community College (Wellesley, Mass.) has successfully attempted a different option: a mini-writing lab that functions as part of the Learning Resource Center (formerly known as the library).

The LRC at Mass. Bay really does deserve its expanded title. It is not simply a place where books and journals are housed; for many years the LRC staff has actively engaged in teaching students, both classes and individuals, how to use the library. However, the LRC staff had two problems. First, student demand for research help outstripped the ability of two research librarians to respond. Secondly, and more importantly, students needed help not only finding library material but knowing what to do with the material once it was in their hands. Notetaking, quoting, paraphrasing, outlining, and writing the required paper were all as mysterious as using the card catalogue and the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature.

The response to this need was to add one more link to the LRC chain: an English instructor who would offer tutorial instruction in writing the research paper. In the 1979 spring semester, I was that person. I taught two courses and spent the other half of my time running the Research Paper Tutorial Project.

The workings of the project were fairly simple. My desk was located in the library directly across from the research librarians. I was scheduled to sit at that desk twelve hours a week and tutor students in research paper writing. In addition, I was responsible for developing handouts on understanding research paper techniques, taking notes (usually the most difficult research skill for students to master), and writing the paper. These handouts were available to the teaching faculty to use in their classrooms as well. Also, the LRC staff and I conferred with the faculty members so that the faculty understood what materials and services the library could offer and we were familiar

with the specific requirements of each research assignment. Finally, I trained four students to act as peer tutor research assistants. These peer tutors, scheduled to spend 5-12 hours a week each in the library for which they were paid \$2.90 an hour, helped students find library materials. Thus relieving some of the burden of never-ending "Where is . . . ?" and "How do I find . . . ?" requests from the LRC staff.

Now the LRC could truly offer students a complete education in writing the research paper. Students were initially oriented in large groups to the library. As they began their individual research projects, they could ask for research help from the student tutors if the question was fairly routine and from the research librarians if it was more complex. Once they found the material they needed, they could ask help from me in transferring information from a library book or journal onto notecards and transforming their notecards into a paper. All this, of course, was supplementary to the classroom instruction in the paper (the amount of which varied greatly).

Student and staff response to this system was universally positive. The LRC staff felt that their work yielded much better results because there was a follow-through to the completed paper. The classroom instructors felt that they could with confidence assign research papers knowing that the LRC offered complete tutorial help. And the students felt that they need no longer fear the once formidable research paper.

Frances Winter
Writing Lab Coordinator
Mass. Bay Community College



OHIO WRITING LABS CONFERENCE

May 10th
to be held at Ohio Northern University
Ada, Ohio

For further information, contact
Elizabeth Roberts
Communications Skills Program
Ohio Northern University
Ada, Ohio 45810
(419) 634-9921 ext. 409



The Learning Proficiency Center

The Learning Proficiency Center is in its eighth year of operation at St. Mary of the Plains College, Dodge City, Kansas. It is presently housed in one room in the library area and serves fifty to seventy students per semester. Principal emphasis is placed on reading efficiency and writing skills. In addition, students are given assistance with phonics and spelling, grammar, and study skills. A few math and science students sought aid last semester, but they could not be helped for lack of personnel.

Work is normally done on an individual basis from 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Testing is sometimes used to determine the student's needs, but most students are painfully aware of their areas of impoverishment. Those who are not normally do not come to the Center.

Numerous textbooks for all phases of reading and writing, sets of transparencies and tapes, and reading, spelling, and math film

for the Tach 500 are basic materials. Supplementary handouts are freely used. Available are an overhead projector, cassette players with headsets, a Tach 500 and Tachomatic 150, SRA accelerators and reading labs. Students may work at study carrels or tables.

Students may be self-referred or they may be referred by the academic dean, the student's adviser, or a classroom instructor. Progress reports are given at mid-term and at semester end to the individual who made the referral.

The Center has recently moved from a class-work-credit system to individual-no credit. It is difficult to evaluate the change just now--we have lost in terms of faithful attendance but gained in efficiency and effectiveness.



Sister Vinnetia Greenawalt, Director
Learning Proficiency Center
St. Mary of the Plains College

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER-Supplementary Mailing List - #30

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