WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Included in this issue are several comments, anecdotes, reports of work in progress, and reactions to newsletter articles. These short notes are, I think, particularly useful in letting each other know what's happening in our labs, and they are particularly welcomed. And I hope more of you join in our conversation.

I also invite you to continue sending in your articles, reviews, announcements, names of new members, and $3 donations (with checks made payable to me) to help defray duplicating and mailing costs to:

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

WORKSHOP ON WRITING LABS

A workshop-conference for administrators and teachers who are interested in writing laboratories will be offered at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, June 8-19, 1981. The workshop is sponsored by the UW-Madison and UW-Stevens Point in cooperation with the University Extension. Leaders Joyce S. Steward, director of the lab at Madison, and Mary K. Croft, director at Stevens Point, plan a rigorous but stimulating program covering many facets of lab planning, staffing, teaching, and administering. There will be time for both group sessions and individual conferences. The fee for the two weeks (including materials) is $215, with reasonably priced attractive housing available near the conference center. For more information write or call either of the leaders: Steward at 6185 Helen C. White Hall, UW-Madison, 53706 (608-263-3820); Croft at Stevens Point Writing Lab, UW-Stevens Point, 54481 (715-346-3568).

THE TUTOR-TEACHER SYSTEM

I've been tutoring for one full year in the University of Hartford's Learning Skills Center (LSC), a service provided, free of charge, to all undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in any of the University's eight colleges. While all students are urged to visit the Center on a voluntary basis, some are referred directly by their classroom teachers to work on reading comprehension, study skills, and, most often, writing skills. The Center is staffed with four adjunct faculty members, who also teach composition, two graduate students, one undergraduate English major, and a reading consultant who also handles study skills.
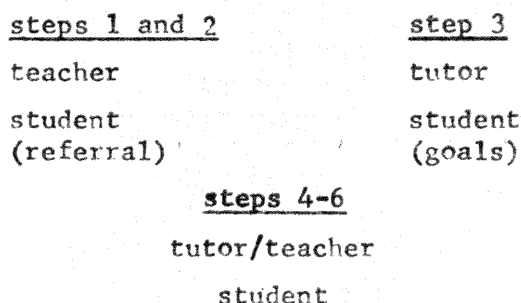
Because I was the lone tutor who worked during the two six-weeks-each summer sessions, I found myself devising new tutoring strategies so that I could better organize my work. One technique I used is what I have recently termed "the tutor-teacher system," a method which enabled me to work closely with three instructors who taught freshman English courses. First, I familiarized myself with the different texts each teacher used in his class; second, I secured copies of their syllabi so I would know what each class was working on; finally, I conferred with each teacher to learn about their student's strengths and weaknesses so that I could create more effective tutoring activities that would complement class work. I found that this close network of communication, something I hadn't worked too hard to achieve during the regular fall/spring semesters, helped me, the teachers, and most importantly, the students, to feel organized about the work we did together. Because tutor and teacher and tutee all worked toward shared goals, each member of the three-sided "team" was greatly satisfied in the relationship. Best of all, the students were able to learn much more, even during a shorter term, because they felt they were an important part of the tutoring program,

which in turn, was an important part of the composition program.

Because of the students' successes (all 50 of the students I tutored improved significantly and passed their classes with grades of C or better), I decided to write up a formal six-step procedure which I'm going to experiment with in the fall. The six steps are:

1. The teacher will take two to three weeks to work with students in class to assess their strengths and weaknesses and overall needs.

2. The teacher will send those students who need extra work to the tutor with a referral form based on the student's oral and written class performances.

3. The tutor will also make his own assessment of the student's needs, relying on his own expertise, as well as the classroom teacher's referral form.

4. The tutor will meet with the teacher to review the tutor-tutee goals and adjust them based on what they mutually agree the student needs so that both tutor and teacher will be working toward a common goal--overall improvement--for each student.

5. After the initial meeting (step 4), the teacher and tutor will meet once a month (more often if necessary) to discuss each student's progress.

6. At the end of the semester the tutor will write an evaluation (number of visits, report of work accomplished, progress made) of each student for the teacher to use in evaluating the student's cumulative performance.

I envision the steps to look something like the following diagram, which shows both tutor and teacher working toward a common goal--the student's improvement--in an organized way.

steps 1 and 2	step 3
teacher	tutor
student (referral)	student (goals)

steps 4-6

tutor/teacher

student

I've asked four composition teachers to work directly with me during the fall semester, following these six steps. I'm hoping I'll see a dramatic difference between tutorials which include shared communication between tutor, teacher, and student, and regular tutorials which don't include any special relationship between tutor, teacher, and student. If I do note a difference, then I'll propose that all tutors who work in the Learning Skills Center systematize their tutorials to include a network of communication between themselves, composition instructors, and students enrolled in freshman composition.

Susan H. Goldberg
University of Hartford
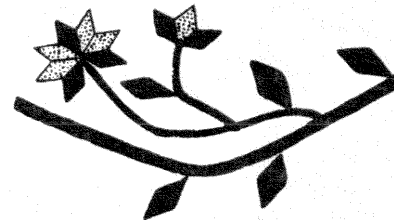
A
READER
COMMENTS...

I am the English Language Training (ELT) Administrator in Saudi Arabia for Lockheed Aircraft International, A.G. Although we are involved in teaching the four language skills in English, we are increasing the emphasis on reading and writing skills. This is because it is essential our trainees be able to read technical manuals, fill in forms and write reports in order to successfully do their jobs. We teach military personnel, as opposed to college students, but I suspect that the writing lab concept can be modified for our use.

Steven F. Lewis
Lockheed Aircraft
Saudi Arabia

As Diana Freisinger pointed out in a recent edition of The Writing Lab Newsletter ("Stretch the Lab," June 1980), it is extremely important that the Writing Lab maintain active communication with the classroom instructors whose students attend the lab. Yet, far too frequently, instructors in the lab find themselves isolated with their students; they are rarely approached by classroom instructors, and consequently, referring classroom instructors often know little of what actually occurs in the lab. This disassociation between lab and classroom was a particularly significant problem at the University of Southern California, whose Freshman Writing Program involves ninety teaching assistants and two thousand students, far too large a group for extemporaneous chats in hallways. Despite the size of our program, however, we have developed several methods by which we have generated productive communication between lab and classroom.

Our first method was based upon the rationale that classroom instructors would be more likely to communicate with the Writing Lab if they had actually visited the lab themselves, both with and without their students. We, therefore, instituted a required lab tour for every Freshman Writing class during the first two weeks of the semester, a tour which included instructors as well as students. As may be imagined, arranging lab tours for so many classes required ingenious scheduling, to say the least, but, on the whole, these tours enabled both students and instructors to be introduced to the lab early in the semester, establishing at least a preliminary connection between lab and class.

In addition to the lab tours, we were able to attract composition instructors down to the lab by setting up an instructional lab file as a resource for the teaching of writing. Our file consisted of xeroxed copies of every request for copying which passed through the Freshman Writing Office and included suggestions for essay topics, paragraph exercises, sample student essays--in short, a collection of valuable ideas for teaching Freshman Composition. We also placed copies in the lab of various publications of interest to writing instructors, such as College English, College Composition and Communication, and The Writing Lab Newsletter; and we established a small reference library of composition textbooks, including resources such as Mina Shaugnessy's Errors and Expectations and James Moffett's

Teaching the Universe of Discourse. Once again, we reasoned that if instructors were motivated to come down to the lab themselves, they would be more likely to involve themselves in lab activities, thereby facilitating integration between lab and classroom.

We also instituted a sign-in procedure which insured that every classroom instructor be informed on a weekly basis of his students' attendance in the Writing Lab. Our procedure utilized a Sign-In Book, consisting of separate sheets of paper for every instructor involved in the program. Under this procedure, every time that a student attended the Writing Lab, he signed his name and the date on the sheet bearing his instructor's name, and, every week, these sheets were xeroxed and copies placed in the mailbox of every composition instructor in the program. Informing classroom instructors about their students' attendance in the lab enabled them to give positive reinforcement to those students who had been attending the lab regularly and to urge those who had procrastinated to attend before the semester had progressed too far.

The final method by which we were able to engender faculty interest in the Writing Lab was by developing our own Writing Lab Newsletter, which was issued about once a month, and which was distributed to every faculty member involved in the Freshman Writing program. The main purpose of our newsletter was to generate publicity for the lab; however, at the same time, we also wanted the faculty to know that some valuable work was being done in the lab. Above all, we wanted the faculty actually to read our newsletter, not just toss it into the wastebasket along with numerous other memos. Based on these concerns, we, therefore, came to the conclusion that the U.S.C. Writing Lab Newsletter ought to be 1) eye-catching, 2) informal and pleasant to read, yet 3) informative about what actually occurs in the lab. Our newsletter is, to some extent, intended to be amusing, but, nevertheless, reflects a genuine concern with important issues in the teaching of writing within a lab setting.

The lab tour, the instructional file, the sign-in book, and the newsletter have been successful in fostering productive integration between lab and classroom. In a

program as large as ours, it is encouraging to discover that effective communication is still possible.

Irene Lurkis Clark
Director of Writing Lab
University of Southern California

EFFICIENT USE OF WRITING LAB STAFF

Simple quantitative analysis of lab use patterns can enable you, the writing lab director, to more effectively organize available staff time. First, you must determine if any services in addition to one-to-one tutoring--such as offering regularly scheduled classes in subjects like remedial writing itself, study skills, reading development, or ESL--will reduce the individual tutoring load. Second, you should institute a well-planned program of class-structured group meetings on the most common student writing problems to further reduce unnecessary one-to-one tutoring. Finally, staffing schedules for the one-to-one tutoring program itself can be finely tuned to yield optimum efficiency for the staff time invested.

This last process involves several steps. First, data on student use of the tutoring program must be compiled through use of a writing lab log; this information will easily reveal the relative number of hours of student use of the program each term in the year--and thus the relative number of staff-hours that should be allotted to each. Next, the data can be analyzed more closely as an aid in creating each term's schedule; this evaluation will reveal how many hours per week the lab should be open, which hours it should be open, and how many staff members should be on duty each of these hours. Lastly, if staff scheduling is sufficiently flexible, through another look at the data you can divide each term into lightly used and heavily used weeks and can then develop a different schedule, one that more accurately corresponds to actual student use patterns, for each set of weeks in each term.

Using a different log sheet for each day of lab operation, tutors should have each student sign in and out of the lab, noting both times of arrival and departure and thus leaving a record, not only of which students visit, but also of how many students are actually using the lab at any given hour of the week and during each week of the year. The resulting record of student visits should be used as it is gathered to keep faculty informed as to which of their students are using the lab and how often. Each week's record of lab visits should then be summarized from the log onto a weekly chart that lists the days of the week the lab is open and a "total" column across the top and the hours of the day the lab is open and a "total" row down the side. The empty blocks on this weekly chart should record the number of students using the lab each hour of that week as this is revealed on each day's log sheet.

This data enables you to discover the relative numbers of hours of student use of the lab during each term in the academic year--and thus to determine the relative number of staff-hours to be allotted to each term. You merely add together all the data accumulated on each term's weekly charts to compile one master chart for each term. A comparison of the total hours of student use for each term indicates how many staff-hours should be used in each. Thus, if your lab logs X hours of student use in the Fall Term, and Y hours of use in the Spring Term, you will allot $X/X+Y$ of its remaining available staff-hours for the year (after non-tutoring services have been scheduled) to the next Fall Term and the rest, or $Y/X+Y$ of the remaining available staff-hours to the next Spring Term. However, as a lab actually operates more efficiently the more frequently it is used, it is probably best to average together the resulting Fall and Spring Term staff-hour per week ration with that of a schedule that doesn't differentiate between the two terms: in that case you would allot $\frac{1}{2}(X/X+Y + \frac{1}{2})$ of the remaining available staff-hours per year to the Fall Term and the rest, or $\frac{1}{2}(Y/X+Y + \frac{1}{2})$, to the Winter Term.

Now each term's master chart can be analyzed more closely as an aid in creating each term's actual lab staffing schedule. If, for instance, you choose to keep the lab open the same hours per week each term as in the previous year, a look at each term's master chart from the previous year will reveal which were the average week's busiest hours each term that year and thus which hours should be double staffed each term this year. Just as the amount of use differs from the Fall to the Spring Terms, so too will the pattern of use differ; therefore, efficient scheduling will probably result in a different schedule, and most likely different hours of operation, for

each term.

And it is best to continue to experiment with hours of operation and, in doing so, to use the previous year's data to set up new hours of lab operation that will be potentially still more effective in anticipating patterns of student lab use for the coming year. The total number of hours of student use in the past Fall Term, say, can be divided by the number of staff-hours to be allotted each week of the next Fall Term to reveal how many hours of student use one staff-hour should absorb. Keeping this number in mind, refer again to the Fall Term master chart and divide each cumulative daily total by this number; this will reveal how many staff-hours should be allotted to each day. Then, observing the pattern of use evident on the master chart, decide how many hours and which particular hours the lab should remain open within these limits to best match this pattern. Finally, if you have scheduled fewer open hours on some days than you have staff-hours allotted for those days (which is a good idea), simply double-staff the apparent peak hours until all staff-hours are used up.

Moreover, if staff scheduling is sufficiently flexible, you can look again at the original stack of weekly charts, from which each term's master chart was compiled, to discover what the lab use patterns are from week to week within each term. Treating each term independently, as always, you can then divide either term, if the figures warrant it, into heavily and lightly used weeks and rearrange double-staffing so that all or most double-staffing occurs during the heavily used weeks and none or little occurs during the off weeks. In making the necessary calculations treat the two sets of weeks as if they were two different terms of differing lengths that have identical hours of lab operation. In effect, then, while the hours the lab is open will still remain constant throughout the term to avoid confusing students, each term will have two different staffing schedules, one for peak use periods and another for slack periods. It is best to refrain from so creating two different staffing schedules in one term until several years' data is accumulated, however, for you should be certain that there actually are habitual and predictable patterns of lightly and heavily used weeks in a term before rigging the schedule to accomodate them. Finally, you should bear in mind that, in this matter also, different

patterns are likely to emerge for the Fall and Spring Terms, if any coherent patterns emerge at all.

I have prepared a more detailed, fifteen page explanation of this method of increasing lab efficiency that I will be glad to mail to any lab director who requests it.

Donald Palumbo
Department of English
Northern Michigan University
Marquette, MI 49855

A
READER
RESPONDS...

I just received my issue of the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER and, as always, enjoyed reading it. I found the article on using sentence combining especially useful because we're doing a similar program with students in remedial English composition classes. Since I don't get much of an opportunity to speak with colleagues outside this immediate geographic area, I feel that the NEWSLETTER is my contact with the outside world.

I cannot resist sending in the enclosed anecdote in response to the call for humorous incidents. This is something that happened to me last year, and I've been eager to share it with colleagues.

As the director of a writing center, I often get requests from colleagues to visit our program. Thus, receiving a phone call from a secretary in a neighboring college to make an appointment for the dean to talk with me about beginning a writing center never gave cause for a second thought.

When the dean came to visit, I first inquired about the background of the proposed program. The dean informed me that someone had recently left his school land which included a stable that the administration was hoping to use. Although I was somewhat surprised by this information, it seemed to confirm that writing centers often are assigned to the least desirable location in a school and that writing center directors need to be flexible. I could almost see the stable being cleaned for its new use; the stalls, I thought, would make excellent places for individualized and small group instruction.

.Next, the dean explained that the college would also like a summer program. He told me that the school is located near a bay, and thus, the administration was thinking of including sailing instruction. Because we run a summer program to prepare incoming freshmen for college, I immediately became interested in this idea. I liked this innovative approach and thought it would be appealing to combine a writing program with a sailing program. I was anxious to hear what else the dean had to tell me.

Finally, the dean looked around at our facilities for a few seconds, paused, and asked, "But where do you keep your horses?" I then began to realize that I had been misled by the mispronunciation of American English: the dean had come to learn about a riding center, not a writing center.

Susan Glassman
Southeastern Massachusetts University
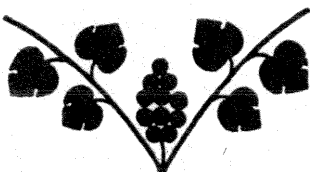
MOUNT ROYAL COLLEGE

Mount Royal College is a two-year, open door community college in Calgary, Alberta with a student population of approximately 3,500. One of its objectives is to assist the student in "overcoming any limitations so that he can choose reasonable alternatives in the successful pursuit of his educational goals."

The Learning Skills Program is one effort toward providing options which help students improve their basic learning abilities. There are four facets to the program: upgrading courses; short or long term drop-in assistance; content course presentations; and professional development.

Upgrading Courses. The following full-term, non-credit courses are offered: Basic Writing Skills, Basic Arithmetic Skills, Basic Reading Skills, and College Prep. These courses meet three to four hours a week for the full fifteen week term, and although they are non-credit, they do count towards qualifying students applying for educational loans. Several six week courses

are also offered including Speed Reading, How to Write a Research Paper, Word Usage, and Developing Good Study Skills.

Students enroll in these courses by one of three routes.

1. Advisor suggestion. During registration, all new students take a series of objective tests and write a one-hour essay designed to assess their proficiency in the major learning skills. The results of these tests are available the following day to their advisors, who indicate to them the possible need for a developmental course. None of these courses, however, is mandatory.

2. Registration. Any student may enter these courses, regardless of test scores.

3. Transfer. Throughout the term, students may agree to be transferred into the Basic Writing Skills course from a higher level English course at the advice of their instructors.

College Prep, one of the courses offered, is a full time, one term program of studies for students who lack the necessary skills to proceed directly into a career program. It embodies the essence of the Learning Skills Program in that it deals with the students' entire college program and life attitudes. Enrollment is limited to 50 students each term. A student's program would consist of the course entitled College Prep, usually two developmental courses, and only one traditional course.

The objective of College Prep is to provide an alternative method of academic and personal preparation for entry into post-secondary programs. It recognizes that students who lack necessary skills can best be prepared in the school where they will most likely continue their studies.

Drop-in assistance. The Learning Skills Center is open four days a week for six hours a day, offering assistance in reading, writing, or study skills. Five instructors, all from the Language Arts Department, work in the lab and at least one is available during these times for thirty minute appointments. As well, the Center's paraprofessional works full time scheduling appointments and administering initial testing. A busy month could mean some 300 student sessions.

Presentation in content areas. An alternative framework for Learning Skills

instruction is now taking place within subject classrooms. This program was begun in an effort to publicize the Center and generate more staff and self-referrals. During its first year, approximately 550 students in thirteen classrooms were exposed to from one to four hours of instruction in some aspect of Learning Skills.

Professional development. Faculty workshops are also given by the Center's staff. Some topics have been Readability of Texts, Speed Reading for Faculty, Preparation of Written Assignments, and Grammar Brush-Up for Secretaries.

The programs offered by Mount Royal's Learning Skills Program are becoming increasingly diversified and now serve remedial preventive and developmental needs. The continued growth of the program is a reflection of the school's determination to meet the needs of all of its students.

Susan Warters
Colorado Women's College
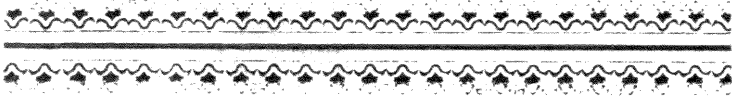
WHAT'S HAPPENING

In response to a number of inquiries asking how and where information on writing labs is available, I offer the following and invite you to add to the list.
(M. Harris)

A. UPCOMING CONFERENCES:

1. CCCC in Dallas, March 26-28. There will be a Special Interest Session on Writing Labs, chaired by Jeanette Harris, Dept. of Lit. and Lang., East Texas State Univ., Commerce, TX 75428.

2. The Third Annual Writing Centers Conference-May 8, at Clarion State College in Pennsylvania, chaired by Kathy Osterholm, Dept. of English, Clarion State College, Clarion, PA 16214.

3. Fifth Annual Institute for Directors and Staff of College Learning Centers, June 21-26, at the University of California-Berkeley. (See p. 10 for further details.)

B. PUBLICATIONS:

1. Goldenberg, Myrna, ed. The Writing Lab Newsletter Directory. (a directory of the mailing list of the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER). For a copy, send $2 to Myrna Goldenberg, Dept. of English, Montgomery College, Rockville, MD 20854.

2. Harris, Muriel, ed. Tutoring Writing: A Sourcebook for Writing Labs. Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, and Co., forthcoming. (28 original articles by members of the newsletter group on the one-to-one process, diagnosing writing problems, training tutors, choosing multi-media and self instruction, structuring the high school and college lab, keeping records, evaluating the lab, etc.)

3. Hawkins, Thom and Phyllis Brooks, eds. "Improving Student Writing Skills." New Directions for College Learning Assistance. No. 3. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., March, 1981. (a collection of articles focusing mainly on the concerns of writing labs)

4. Writing Center Journal, eds. Stephen North (SUNY-Albany) and Lil Brannon (NYU). For further information, write to Stephen North, Dept. of English, SUNY-Albany, Albany, NY 12222.

5. Writing Lab Newsletter, ed. Muriel Harris (See my note on p. 1 for new members and see the Sept. 1980 issue for information on back issues.)

C. WORKSHOP:

June 8-19, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for administrators and teachers interested in writing labs (See p. 1 of this issue of the newsletter for details.)

ESTABLISHMENT OF UAPB WRITING CENTER

Although the idea had been discussed long before it became a reality, the development of a Writing Center Program at the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff was begun during the summer of 1979 by the Advanced Institution of Developmental Programs--now called the Strengthening Developing Institutions Program--in collaboration with the Department of English. Because the center had no foundation from which to expand, not even a permanent location, much work was to be done. Supplies had to be ordered, forms devised, location acquired, plans organized, publicity circulated, special instructor hired, and goals determined.

During that summer in my temporary office (which actually belonged to a chemistry professor), I began compiling materials and devising forms for the new center. When fall arrived, much of the paper work had been completed and a housing area for the center had been provided. Aside from its location being isolated from the originating departments and the classrooms, and it being non-restrictive to Writing Center activities during the evening hours (at which time the lab is periodically used as an activity/study room), the lab is ideal with its spacious writing area and adequate storage space.

At first the student entrance rate was low but rapidly increased as the existence of the Center became apparent to both faculty and students. When the students began to pour in, operations of the Center were hectic and seemed a bit unorganized, but time and experience smoothed the rough edges, determining what should be added to the program and what should be deleted. By the spring semester, operations had become quite understandable, new needs assessed and fulfilled and staffing complete with two writing specialists and one special instructor.

At present, a student may enter the lab as a participant by either of two ways. Recognizing that he needs special training in writing, he may personally seek assistance by use of the lab facilities, thus being considered a walk-in. On the other hand, an instructor, in an effort to correct obvious writing problems of the student, may make lab referrals by using the Student Referral Form. After a participant has entered the lab by either of these methods, he and the writing specialist proceed to arrange scheduled lab hours.

A participant's assignment begins with two pre-tests, an essay and an objective exam, and moves from completing brief writing exercises and drills on to writing essays and taking the post-test, which is also two-fold. In this process such writing aspects as grammar, vocabulary, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, paragraph organization, essay development, and documentation are highlighted. Oral reading of papers is encouraged to allow the participants an opportunity to "hear their writing" in an effort to better their writing by comparing the correlation of writing and speaking. This activity provokes the student to differentiate between his written and oral communication if they are not synonymous. The result is that the participant becomes more capable of narrowing the gap and alleviating personal flaws in both speech and writing.

A participant has successfully completed his assignment in the lab institute when comparison of the pre-test and post-test results indicates that his writing has improved by at least thirty percent.

Although the program faced many difficulties in taking flight, it has proved to be a success. As they learn of its existence, more and more students are improving their writing skills by taking advantage of the lab. (During its first school year of existence, 1979-80, the Writing Center made over 900 contacts.) Feedback reports on the lab evaluation forms show that most students and referring instructors feel that the lab helps improve writing skills tremendously, is a great asset to UAPB, and should be widely recommended. Moreover, a comparison of pre- and post-test results for 1979-80 proves that the lab surpasses its main objective (now set higher) of decreasing by thirty percent the errors of written communication of fifty percent of the students enrolled in the program. Thus, although it is yet in the process of development and has much room for improvement, the UAPB Writing Center feels that its purpose is being served and hopes to continuously double its number of student contacts.

Shirley L. Coleman
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

What strikes me as the most exciting development at the University of Hartford Learning Skills Center this year is something that can't be counted. I believe we have finally gotten past the "remedial" barrier--a barrier that stands in the way of every writing lab. At last we have convinced the students and the faculty that we do our best work long before the disaster--that we can even prevent the disaster. These days, we do a lot of pre-writing tutorials and fewer and fewer "post-mortems." I'm going to write up something for the newsletter on how we managed this turn-about. Believe me, it improves the quality of life around the Center!

William L. Stull
Director of the Writing Program
University of Hartford

Since I run a Reading and Study Skills Department, and Writing Skills is one of the courses taught within that department, I do not face quite the same problems as the tutors in the laboratories do. However, we do encounter the problem of ethics which was so well written about in the December newsletter.

Frances Pletcher, Head
Reading and Study Skills Dept.
Vancouver Community College
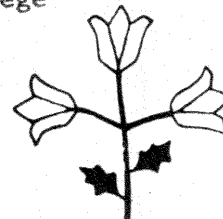
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Fifth Annual

INSTITUTE FOR DIRECTORS AND STAFF OF

COLLEGE LEARNING CENTERS

June 21-26, 1981
University of California-Berkeley

Director: Martha Maxwell, Ph.D.

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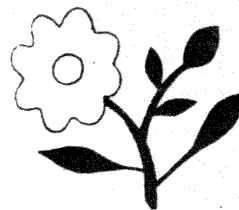
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