WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Warm hellos and welcome back to a new semester, new challenges, and a flood of new students (who undoubtedly look five years younger than last year's freshmen).

In this first issue of the newsletter for the coming year, you'll find the usual array of articles, announcements, and calls for conference papers. You'll also find a column begun in the June newsletter, The Tutor's Corner, written by peer tutors. These articles focus on the concerns of tutors rather than matters of interest to directors of writing labs. Response to the June column was excellent, and I hope we'll have enough contributions from your tutors to continue this column as a regular feature.

Many thanks to the generous members of our group who remembered during the summer to send in yearly donations. For those who have not yet checked that item off their list of things to do, I offer a gentle reminder. The costs of duplicating and mailing the newsletter need to be shared by all. Since we do not attempt to send out bills or invoices and do not contact business offices to request payment, we rely instead on your voluntary contributions. (In terms that your business office understands, that means prepayment.) So, along with your articles, anouncements, reviews, inquiries, and names of new members, please send your $5/year checks (made payable to Purdue University and mailed to me) to:

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

1984 Writing Lab Directory

The 1984 Writing Lab Directory is a compilation of two-page questionnaires completed by writing lab directors. The questionnaire answers describe each lab's instructional staff, student population, types of instruction and materials, special programs, use of computers, and facilities.

Copies are obtainable for newsletter readers at the pre-publication cost of $6.50 each, including postage. Prepaid orders only. Please make all checks payable to Purdue University and send them to Muriel Harris, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana 47907.

TEACHING THERESA

When we first brought a microcomputer into the Writing Lab, it was kind of like putting a lion in the front seat of a Mercedes: it looked impressive, but who wants to get close enough to take it for a test drive? It seems that, immediately after creating the computer, humanity raised it to a super-human level. As a result, the writers in our lab were a little afraid to think of Time's 1983 "Man of the Year" as a mere tool. During the first few months, two people had almost exclusive use of the TRS-80 Model III.

Of course, once our staff and students became familiar with all the advantages of a word processor, the fears began to subside. Now, one year later, many of us are finding

it hard to get computer time.

While it's true that we use a Radio Shack product, we are not necessarily advocating any particular brand of computer. That's a decision that should be made carefully, and should be based on your needs as well as how much money you have to spend.

Our primary use of "Theresa," a more elegant nickname for our TRS-80 than the standard "Trash 80," is text editing. Since most of the people who use our machine know little about computing, and we are a writing lab, not a computer lab, the primary requirement for our word processing program is that it must be easy to use. This is the main reason we use Scripsit, a word processing program that even Radio Shack hints is outdated. While it isn't the most powerful program on the market, it is one of the easiest to learn. With the help of our wallcharts, a student can be writing with Scripsit in an hour. At first we stress the three main editing features of overstrike, insert, and delete; but with enough practice, a student can be using every feature of the word processor in two weeks.

One technique that we have found helpful in teaching text editing is to encourage the student to work on his own writing from the very beginning. As the student concentrates on his own thoughts, he tends to forget the strange machine in front of him. This is much more effective than repeatedly editing the line "Hi. This computer scares me." This approach also emphasizes to the student that a computer is only a tool, and while it can make writing easier, the writer still has to think.

After a year and a half of giving demonstrations, we have found that a little knowledge about the computer makes text editing easier to learn. At the same time, we found that reading a computer manual is about as easy as building a Boeing 747. The result is a manual that we are still working on, called, "An Idiot's Guide to Scripsit," a light, conversational description of the TRS-80 and Scripsit.

Right now text editing is our primary use, but it is only a small part of what a microcomputer is capable of doing. Recently we have been experimenting with a document repository, a handout index, and a student record-keeping program. We are still ex-

ploring the possibilities, and like many, we have a long way to go.

Daniel Reimer
U. of Wisconsin-Stevens
Point

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING LABS

Despite the fact that some writing laboratories, such as the one at the University of Iowa, have been operating for 50 years or more, most college writing centers are relatively new ventures. Furthermore, a disappointing majority of these laboratories were originally funded not in the bright light of enthusiasm, but under a dark cloud of desperation, the laboratory standing as the last hope in the battle against illiteracy. For example, consider Patrick Hartwell's description of the birth of the writing center at the University of Michigan at Flint: "'Well,' the department head said, pushing the chair back from the desk and pausing for a moment, 'nothing else seems to work; we might as well try a writing lab.' And so we did."[1]

For Patrick Hartwell and for hundreds of other writing center directors across the country, the paint was probably still drying on the doors when the first crush of students appeared for tutoring and guidance. As a result, staff members often faced two formidable obstacles to effective operation. First, only a small number of administrators, faculty members, and students knew precisely what to expect from a writing laboratory. Naturally then, they expected everything from a writing laboratory, and the directors did their best to oblige. Second, the laboratory directors, with few exceptions, were people denied access to the inner chambers of their own departments, many serving without tenure and at lower ranks. Nearly all were women. Unfortunately, a combined sense of insecurity and confusion seems to have forced many of them to accept a remarkable grab-bag of programs, mostly the least popular ones, without much bitterness or complaint. As if these major complications were not enough, the writing laboratory directors began their modest programs without the benefit of regular communication with others in the field; until recently there were no national or regional organizations for writing center

personnel, no journals or periodicals devoted entirely to their pedagogical concerns. It was not surprising, therefore, that when the laboratory movement began to bloom in America in the 70's, the various laboratories--like a hundred different species of wildflower--exhibited a stunning variety of shapes, sizes, and hues.

The pioneers of this discipline had little beyond instinct and imagination to guide them when they began their attacks on rapidly-plummeting SAT scores and other disturbing signs of the literacy crisis. They sought consistency and growth in the only ways possible: exchanging letters and phone calls; trading discoveries in coffee shops; swapping handouts and bibliographies in the hotel bar at yearly CCCC conferences. And like all pioneers, they milled about the frontier waiting for rumors of gold and greener pastures. In the process they followed dry beds and dusty trails, discovering through hard failures the methods that would and would not work in a tutorial setting. This was the period in the evolution of the laboratory discipline that gave birth to the Eureka Syndrome, a frenetic search for one way.

I first encountered the Eureka Syndrome when I attended the Conference on College Composition and Communication at Minneapolis in 1979. In sessions on basic writing and laboratory programs I heard speaker after speaker making enthusiastic claims for specific handbooks, pre-packaged worksheets, teaching methods, educational games, discourse models, and computer software. But the true disarray of these conflicting claims was not made clear to me until I wandered into one final session and sat in the back. As the first two speakers presented their papers, the third panelist sat patiently to the side, apparently absorbed in her own thoughts while she worked her knitting needles. As the second speaker concluded, she calmly gathered up her papers and shifted to the lectern. Then, in a voice that rang throughout the corners of the mezzanine, she yelled, "Eureka, I have found it!"

The Eureka Syndrome, I discovered, was pervasive within the laboratory movement at that time, although often expressed in more subtle ways. Isolated successes were being reported as though they had universal implications for the field when, in fact, these tutorial methods were often indistinguishable from those being used by respected classroom teachers. The Eureka Syndrome, a nagging belief that there is one undiscovered path to writing competence, tended to blind directors to the larger questions about their profession. Left unanswered were a series of critical questions about goals and direction, such as: What is a writing laboratory? What do you do in a writing laboratory? How do you measure what you do in a writing laboratory?

In a sense, the 70's were years of indecision and searching for the pioneers of the laboratory profession. New and not-so-new developments in discourse theory and in the study of rhetoric and linguistics brought forth a flood of information about the writing process. In the laboratories there was a subsequent scrambling toward some firm ground from which to strike a vantage point as the flood-waters roared by. Just when the writing center director began to feel secure with one method or approach, a new wave would come along, and everyone else would scramble onto that particular rock: sentence-combining, tagmemics, the generative rhetoric of the sentence, sentence chunks, Burke's pentad, peer-group tutoring, Peter Elbow's delicious method of cooking up compositions, and programed tapes from the Educulture Corporation, to name a few. Although each of these innovations has its place in the laboratory, problems occurred in the tutorial programs where the directors, suffering the natural consequences of a collective identity crisis, introduced new materials (or resurrected traditional ones) because they were rumored successful at State University or the local community college. Finally, the unstill center of the laboratory movement created a remarkable "paper chase" that still afflicts the movement in the 80's. In defense of their methods, directors began to generate pages and pages of statistics about student-traffic through the programs. In my correspondence with other center directors in the late years of the last decade, I was constantly amazed at the reams of pages, filled with charts and graphs and numbers, that invariably accompanied written answers to my inquiries. And yet, most of these numbers merely served to show that students arrived, stayed for x minutes or hours, and departed with handouts a, b, and c. This excursive fascination with record-keeping was, in my opinion, a sign of the relative insecurity that laboratory directors felt about the directions, methods, and goals of their programs.

To put the writing center in perspective during the last decade, it is useful to understand that any nascent discipline must undergo an "immature" period where confusion and disorder are the hallmarks. E.D. Hirsch, borrowing phrases from Thomas Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, says that any field of inquiry begins in chaos, or at least in discord. "This period is marked by controversies like our own, in which people 'confronting the same phenomena describe and interpret them in different ways.' With the gradual advance of knowledge, the conflicts subside, and a consensus builds up which forms the discipline into a genuine intellectual community. Members of this community can then take the foundations of their field for granted and can therefore direct their attention to the problems and subproblems to be solved."[2] In the 70's, far too many laboratories were operating without foundation, without direction, without discipline. In many cases, they were merely extensions of the composition classroom.

When Mina Shaughnessy surveyed the literature on methods of teaching "basic" writing in 1976, she underscored the depth of confusion in that field by pointing out that "the teaching of writing to severely unprepared freshmen is as yet but the frontier of a profession, lacking even an agreed upon name."[3] Of course, Shaughnessy coined the term "basic writing" that is now a convention across America. Laboratory specialists, however, have not yet progressed even that far. To demonstrate this point, I have pulled from my correspondence files an abbreviated list of the names by which we identify our services: the Writing Center, the Writing Laboratory, the Learning Resource Center, the Writing Room, the Developmental Writing Program, the Basic Writers' Laboratory, the Developmental Writing Program, the Study Skills Center, the Academic Support Center, the Learning Center, the Composition Corner, the Writing Place, the Writing Haven, the Reading and Writing Laboratory, the Reading and Study Skills Lab (RASSL), the Composition Corner, and the Composition Closet.

Names, of course--unimportant as they are--have little to do with the practical functioning of these centers. That is where the real divergence becomes clear. For example, some writing centers open their doors only to special admissions students; others, to the campus at-large. Some

laboratories are staffed by professors and instructors; others employ graduate students or college seniors as tutors. Some labs teach only grammar and usage; others, prewriting and invention. Some center directors keep vigorous appointments-schedules, gathering students into the quiet mausoleum-like bowels of the library; others encourage free-wheeling, anarchistic centers of interchange where the raised voices of students echo among the hollows of converted boilerrooms. Mary Croft at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point uses the laboratory as a center for humanistic studies, sponsoring poetry readings (Denise Levertov was a recent guest) and a newsletter called Exchange. Ulle Lewes at Ohio Wesleyan answers a grammar "hotline" and writes a column on composing for the campus newspaper. Kathleen Blake Yancey at Purdue introduced a Law School Admission Test cram-session, and one for the Graduate Management Admission Test as well. Around the country, the writing center may be the matrix for sign-language classes, speed-reading programs, ESL courses, and study-skills sessions. In a certain sense, it is amazing that the writing center directors recognize any sense of "community" at all, labs being so different across the land.

And yet, although many different varieties of wildflowers grow on the prairies, no traveler would exclude the most unusual plants from the genus. Likewise, we pioneers recognize one another by our common concerns and goals. However, as Shaughnessy says, the only evidence of these common directions so far is "a miscellany of articles on what has been working, or appears to have been working, in a variety of places, with a variety of teachers and pedagogies. We find among the articles much that has been going on in freshman English for years " (p. 147). Shaughnessy's implications for the laboratory movement are painfully valid. We have been discovering and rediscovering the truths of our narrow discipline independently, as the wheel must have been invented and reinvented, in a hundred different villages over the span of several centuries. To be taken seriously by academicians in other disciplines (and in our own departments), we must now turn to the larger questions about the tutorial method and its relationship to traditional classroom practices. Our critics have a right to make us answer the essential ones first. The primary question seems simple enough: What is a writing laboratory? In attempting the answer, however, I must also

tackle a number of complex questions about the function of a tutorial center, the clientele of such a center, and the reasonable expectations for a successful writing center.

The laboratory is a resource center, containing hundreds and hundreds of writing texts, copies of composition journals, often a set of encyclopedias, the occasional Great Books series, handouts on documentation, spelling workbooks, prepared tapes on sentence fragments, computer terminals for information retrieval, and a score of other possibilities, depending on the resources, funding, and needs of the department and the university. Furthermore, the laboratory is a training center, where tutors learn to teach. In many schools, the training of graduate and peer-group tutors is the most important by-product of this service, for it provides instant feedback for the teacher. Invariably, young graduate assistants who work diligently and conscientiously in the laboratory report with amazement the unexpected benefits for them as classroom teachers. Often the tutorial setting teaches the tutor the logic of error, an insight so important to Mina Shaughnessy's thesis in Errors and Expectations. For instance, consider the comments of one of the Auburn graduate tutors in his quarterly evaluation of The Writing Center:

> I had been marking CS in margins for two years now, but the comma splice errors didn't seem to diminish. I tried lecturing, small group discussion, diagramming, and outright tyranny, but nothing worked. Finally, one day when I was working at the Center, I was helping a girl who had brought a paper full of comma splices to the lab. They were all the same kinds of errors; the second half of the splice began with he, she, it, or some other personal pronoun. In desperation, I asked her to reconstruct her thinking when she wrote the sentence "Baldwin was scared, he wanted to run away." To my surprise, she had a reason for writing this construction with the comma. She knew enough not to put a comma between otherwise unconnected independent clauses. But she could only find the one subject (Baldwin), and she saw this as a simple sentence. I asked about the word he, but she said that he was a personal pronoun that renamed the first subject. Therefore, he could not be a second

subject because the word was merely a placeholder for the word Baldwin. After I explained more about the nature of personal pronouns, she began to understand the reason behind her comma splices.

Besides serving as a training center and a resource center, the laboratory is a community learning center. At many universities, the writing center provides telephone "hotline" services for writing instruction; other schools openly advertise their programs as a type of Writing Extension Service for the townsfolk. When the laboratory thus fulfills its responsibilities to the community that supports the college, there can be unexpected benefits. For instance, Tom Waldrep at the University of South Carolina, after opening the center's services to the town, found that local business owners were willing to provide generous financial support for the South Carolina laboratory.[4] On the campus itself, a writing laboratory may become a multi farious resource area for special interest groups. Most laboratories are open-ended operations, growing to meet the needs of the university and community. However, in spite of the tremendous differences in scope and operating methods, the writing laboratories can be defined as "centers of learning where writing theory collides with writing practice." Sometimes the collision produces fusion; sometimes, fission. But they are always the scenes of great energy.

This last point provides perhaps the most important definition of the writing laboratory. Let us for a moment consider the paradox of the title Writing "Laboratory," for it is both appropriate and inappropriate to describe the services in question. Frankly the term "laboratory" is now out of vogue, as the title of the newest periodical, The Writing Center Journal, implies. For many years now, people have been saying that the term "laboratory" suggests a clinic where grammatical ills can be cured in an antiseptic and dispassionate setting. The criticism is valid on that point. However, the term is also apt, for the laboratory shares some characteristics with the chemistry lab or the biology lab, where the process of investigation complements the instruction in the formal lecture-hall. In the writing laboratory, students "test" various approaches to composition, learning more often through failure and repeated trials than by any other means. They "play"

with language as a semiotic system, and the laboratory often serves as an experimentation station where students, after the cold and calculated lectures of the classroom, can try "new things" under the helpful eyes of their tutors. This aspect of teaching, often denegrated by traditionalists, may be the most indispensable. A physics lecture has little utility without the hands-on experiences of measuring forces by rolling steel balls into barriers. In the same way, the abstract notions about language that are forwarded in composition classrooms have little utility until the student gains some practical experience at embedding, subordination, and parallelism.

But the writing center is a "laboratory" for the directors and tutors as well. Most often overlooked about the laboratory is its enormous potential for empirical research. Here, in a controlled situation, are writers engaged in various stages of the process of writing. Although there are many excellent models of research conducted in the writing laboratory, perhaps the best comes from Muriel Harris, director of the Purdue Writing Laboratory. In a CCC article entitled "Mending the Fragmented Free Modifier," Harris sees a previously undetected pattern of construction for sentence fragments. In her study, Harris collected 100 samples of fragments from papers brought to the laboratory by student writers over the past several years. What she discovered was that "text book advice frequently does not match the reality we deal with in tutorials. Thus, after discarding the materials on fragments developed during the first few semesters of our existence, we were faced with the need to analyze the real fragments students write, fragments too often unlike anything in the text book examples."[5] What Harris found was that a majority of student fragments are best categorized as punctuation errors by writers attempting "late-blooming syntactic structures," to use Francis Christensen's phrase. Harris's study makes it clear that traditional textbook methods of discouraging fragments are really only effective at teaching students to avoid all types of modification after the base clause; short, choppy sentences are the unhappy result. In actual practice, sentence-combining and practice at punctuating end-modification (absolutes, participles, appositives) are far more reasonable approaches to dealing with most problems over fragments. Such research is a natural function of the writing center, and

it has useful application both in the laboratory and in the classroom.

The writing laboratory, in final analysis, is a resource center, a training center, a community learning center, a campus support service, and a research center. But the definition would not be complete without some not of popular misconceptions about the writing center. It is not a graveyard for failed teachers. It is not a "dumping grounds" for "problem students" or unpopular programs. It is not a babysitting service, a place for academic "hand-holding," for "learning games" or other vestiges of the 60's. It is not a sanctuary for academic failures, an escape from the realities of the university and its standards. As Frederick K. Moss says in the Report for the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha, sometimes the tutors encounter students "who cannot succeed in college no matter how hard they try. The lab helps these students see that college is not for them."[6] Finally, the laboratory is not the grandson of Bonehead English courses. True, a fair amount of remediation goes on in the typical writing center, but the clients also might include:

A graduate student in Natural Resources who worked for a semester on his master's thesis--a proposal for sports trails at our newly-formed lake. The thesis was finished and accepted; the trails are now being developed.

A League of Women Voters member who is revising their public service brochure on housing.

An English major, working in our Independent Writing course, who submitted two articles for publication; one was accepted by Glamour, the other by Woman's Day.

A freshman who, to Americanize his English, is writing about his six months in Saigon after the fall of Vietnam, and his escape into Cambodia.

A 79-year-old patient at the Portage County Home who is registered for Independent Writing under Wisconsin's provision for over 65ers. A lab tutor visits her once a week and they edit her anecdotes and episodes into stories for children.

An English major who was hired by the

local school system to administer a Title I grant for a remedial writing program at the junior high school.[7]

With these broad definitions in mind (and these myths debunked), we should now return to the metaphor of the writing center as a frontier out-post through which an increasing number of pioneers will travel. Perhaps it is useful for writing laboratory personnel to adopt the term "frontier" in attempting to articulate the obstacles that impede progress in this discipline. Moving the boundaries of any frontier is difficult because the pioneers get caught up in the mundane details of daily life, neglecting to pay heed to the call for continual progress. Although most historians are fond of making the overland treks of American discovery sound vastly heroic, I doubt that the pioneers would have seen themselves as extraordinary in any sense--only the victims of some injustice or unhappiness, men and women who were setting forth in a new direction. Mostly they were disorganized, harboring only a vague sense of where the mules were taking them. In fact, they probably spent most of their time doing the wash, skinning hides, building campfires, and shooting at one another. Finally, they ceased their searches not because they had reached the Promised Land, but because they could not fix one more broken axle or climb over one more mountain.

So it is on this frontier. For the writing laboratory director, each Monday brings more students to teach, more tutors to direct, more forms to complete, more letters to write. As we plod along, concerns with the mundane details of the writing center tend to obscure the view of the paths ahead. And, whenever we meet on these trails, we are forced to admit that, here on the frontier, we are a motley group: psychologists, educationists, teachers of the handicapped and disabled, sociologists, Ph.D.'s in literature, business writers, speech pathologists, teachers of English as a foreign language, scientists, humanists. We espouse many theories and owe religious devotion to many creeds. Along the trails we recognize the shadows, lurking in the bush, of a common enemy: those who would deny the existence of basic writers. But we cannot seem to get organized against this threat, partly because our numbers are so diverse, and partly because the enemy holds all the high ground. Besides, we have clothes to wash, hides to skin, fires to build, and occasionally we find it necessary

to take a potshot at one of our fellow-travelers.

Despite all this confusion and divergence in the laboratory discipline, tutors, and directors are beginning to share a sense of "community," even though we could probably not agree on more than a single set of goals and assertions. Nevertheless, a compact is what we pioneers need at this point in our travels. Without such a document, we remain vulnerable to the wrath of our well-established critics.

Thomas Nash
Southern Oregon
State College

[1]Patrick Hartwell, "A Writing Laboratory Model," in Basic Writing, ed. L. N. Kasden and D. R. Hoeber (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1980), p. 3.

[2]"Research in Writing: The Issues," in Basic Writing, p. 154.

[3]"Basic Writing," in Teaching Composition: Ten Bibliographic Essays, ed. Gary Tate (Fort Worth, Texas: Texas Christian U. Press, 1976), p. 137.

[4]As reported in a paper delivered to the first annual conference of the Southeastern Writing Centers Association on February 7, 1980 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

[5]Muriel Harris, "Mending the Fragmented Free Modifier," CCC, 32 (1981), 179.

[6]Frederick K. Moss and others, The Learning Lab Report 1979 (Waukesha, Wisconsin: n.p., 1979), p. 20.

[7]Mary K. Croft, "A Lab For All Reasons," Wisconsin English Journal, 21 (January 1979), 1.

Note: This Writing Center will **not** correct your dangling modifiers, teach you comma rules, or have you underline nouns once, verbs twice.

The Consultation Center for Writing in the School of Education at Syracuse University is intended to provide undergraduates, graduates and faculty with a "live" audience for writing in progress.

Remedial writing instruction is not the purpose of the Center. Director Cynthia Onore designed the Center to provide a sounding board against which writers can judge the effectiveness of their work. The Center's statement of purpose is the development of writing abilities--responding to the writer during the composing process instead of responding to the written product.

The Center is staffed with ten graduate assistants and three faculty members from the university's Reading and Language Arts Department. During a typical half-hour session, a consultant listens as a writer reads what he/she has written. The consultant then responds to the meaning the writer is attempting to convey.

Recently I was revising a paper (for the third time) intended for publication and needed an informed response. I brought the paper to the Center for a reading. The consultant responded along these lines: "This is what I hear you saying in this piece; is this the connection you want your reader to make between these ideas? I wonder if there is enough information for your audience to follow your line of thinking; I'm not moved to action or genuinely affected by what I read...is this how you want your audience to react?" Looking at my draft from this new perspective enabled me to revise draft number four to address my audience's preconceptions more closely.

It was useful to have someone respond to my writing before the editor passed judgment on the final product. Having a respondent for frequent and intermittent feedback prevented weaknesses and inconsistencies in the manuscript before it was sent out.

Jacqueline Lauby
Syracuse University

WRITING LAB DIRECTOR BREAKS RECORDS!

While some writing lab directors keep records, one member of our group, Myra J. Linden, breaks them. An ultra runner, she recently set a women's masters world record, for women over 40, of 330.25 miles in a six-day run. For women in the age group 50-59, she holds U.S. records for six-day and 48-hour runs. Myra, the director of the writing lab at Joliet Junior College, has been running since the tender young age of 48 1/2 and regularly runs 75 miles/week. She describes one race last December in Peoria, Illinois, as so cold (-9^0 F, -54^0 wind chill factor) that her clothes froze to her and she couldn't bend her elbow.

Between running and directing her lab, Myra has also compiled an index of publications on writing labs which she will describe in a future newsletter article. She'll also include ordering information.
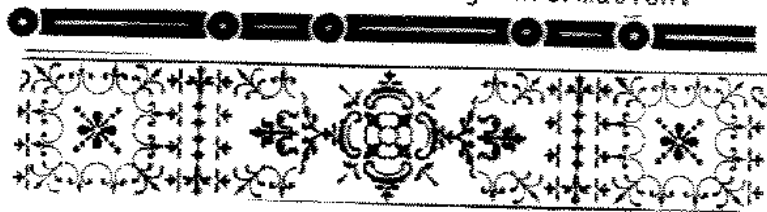
A READER COMMENTS . . .

I continue to read each issue of the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER with great interest. It is always well edited and chocked full of information of high value for practitioners. Thanks to you and your conscientious contributors, the NEWSLETTER remains one of the best in the field.

Milton G. Spann, Jr.
Editor
JOURNAL OF DEVELOPMENTAL
EDUCATION

(Editor's note: Indeed, we all owe a large round of applause and thanks to the authors of our newsletter articles who continue to provide us with useful, thought-provoking ideas and information. MH)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL FOR PAPERS

The first PACIFIC COAST WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION meeting will be held on Saturday, February 9, 1985, at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California. Relevant topics include Writing Across the Curriculum, Research and the Writing Center, theoretical concerns of Writing Centers, the use of computers, tutor training, the history of Labs/Centers and others. Interested participants should send 150 word abstracts to the Program Chairs listed below:

Irene Lurkis Clark
Director of the Writing Center
Freshman Writing Program
University of Southern California
University Park MC-1291
Los Angeles, California
    90089-1291

Thom Hawkins, Coordinator
Tutor Services in Writing
Student Learning Center
Building T8
University of California
Berkeley, California 94720

Indiana Teachers of Writing
Fourth Annual Conference
"The WRITE Kind of Competency"
Sept. 28-29, 1984
Indianapolis Hilton

Conferees include elementary, middle, secondary, and college teachers of writing. For further information write or call Dr. Barbara Cambridge, IUPUI, 425 Agnes St., Indianapolis, IN 46202   (3177264-3824).

COMPUTERS AND BASIC SKILLS

A new publication of the Instructional Resource Center of The City University of New York is entitled Microcomputers and Basic Skills in College: Applications in Reading, Writing, English as a Second Language, and Mathematics. This 94-page collection of articles is available for $2 from the Instructional Resource Center, City University of New York, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

SOUTHEASTERN WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATION

CALL FOR PAPERS

"Theory and Reality: the Ideal Writing Center" is the theme for the 1985 annual conference, April 18 to 20, in Atlanta. Presentations (no more than 20 minutes) should address one of the following topics: use of computers in writing centers; training of peer tutors; practical or theoretical aspects of training faculty to teach writing across the curriculum; using the writing center to foster research in the theory and teaching of writing; organization, administration and funding of writing centers.

Send double-spaced manuscript (or photocopy) by DECEMBER 1st to Dr. Dabney Hart, English Department, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA 30303-3083. Enclose s.a.s.e. if you want the MS returned.

The Ohio College English Association will hold its fall meeting –

Oct. 19-20, 1984

"The Creative Process in Composition."

Featured speaker will be William E. Coles, Jr.

For further information contact:
    Robert P. Merrix
    University of Akron
    Akron, Ohio 44325

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

The New York State College Learning Skills Association will publish a journal, Research and Teaching in Developmental Education, in the Fall of 1984. Manuscripts are invited which address research, theory, and practice related to the teaching of remedial or developmental writing. To submit a manuscript or receive a copy of the editorial policy, write to:
    Rita Pollard, Editor
    RTDE
    Learning Center
    Niagara University
    Niagara University, NY 14109

TUTORS' CORNER

The Writing Center at the University of Vermont is a fairly new establishment. As tutors at the Writing Center, we feel it is necessary to help our director in molding the program into a functional and respected mini-organization. In doing so, we peer tutors turned the once-shunned office space area of the Living/Learning Center complex into a well-attended Writing Center. Students of all academic disciplines and varied level of skill bring their papers to us.

But although our services are not altogether unusual or "unique," our training may be. As a Living/Learning Center faculty-directed program, the Writing Center tutors commit themselves to the Center by attending class once a week in addition to tutoring. I find that we're a unified group. We're always tuned into all that goes on in connection with the Writing Center.

The course is a year-long writing and editing class where we study sample papers as a group or in mock tutoring situations with one another. We go over organization, development, grammar, punctuation, style, paragraphs, and sentences; we discuss issues that arise during our tutoring sessions and suggest possible means for improvement; we critique freshman writing texts and other handbooks; we discover other tutor-tutee interactions through reading logs, journals and books on the subject; and we keep our own journals to inform our director of our practices, both in tutoring and writing, and for our own purposes. Although individuals like ourselves all have different tutoring styles, in this way we can all be sure that our training and experiences are shared, adding standardization to variation.

But that's not all we do in class. The class is divided into three committees: Administration, Advertising and Speaker Series. The committees work together. Every member of the Writing Center provides input to committee activities. Therefore, since there is a time commitment and an effort to insure proper implementation of ideas, it is in our best interests to see the Writing Center work. Here's how we do it:

The Administration Committee assists in the actual execution of the program. Besides decorating our cubby of office space, they deal with, yes, statistics, statistics, statistics. How many students came in? What year were they? What were their majors? How long did the sessions last? What hours was the Center most heavily attended? Therefore, what hours should we be open? How did students find out about our free service? Do students tend to return to the Center? What handbooks and texts should we purchase for tutoring as a result of our analyses and tutees' needs? The Administration Committee compiles all of this information, subsequently feeds it to the other tutors, and makes decisions based on tutor-director input.

The Advertising Committee speaks for itself somewhat. They channel our message to the UVM student body. In essence, "we are not a proof-reading service, but we are skilled tutors here to help you improve your writing skills," or something to that effect. This committee designs flyers, posters and letters to faculty, resident assistants and hall advisors. One member writes an article for publication in the school newspaper; another member composes a flowing public service announcement to be aired on the school radio station; someone else races through campus tacking up posters in classrooms, residence halls, dining halls, restrooms. Things like that.

Last, but not least, as the ol' cliche' goes, we have the Speaker Series Committee. Again, the title may be self-explanatory. Part of the Writing Center budget includes funding for speakers. The Speaker Series Committee arranges for speakers to lead workshops for the UVM and outside communities. Thus far, we've had mostly freelance writers, editors, novelists, columnists and professors. Most recently, we've set up an informal poetry reading forum where students will have an opportunity to read their own poetry aloud and get reactions from peers.

What does all this make UVM's Writing Center? Well, being of service to the student body and the instructors is automatically implied. But even more than that, we like to think that an organization such

as this can flourish with marked partici-
pation from all of those involved. Actively
promoting the Center with equal director-
tutor give and take allows everyone to bene-
fit. The enthusiasm to achieve an end
(i.e., get tutees in the Center and have
successful tutoring sessions) requires ex-
penditure of energies on all parts--the
director, the administration and the tutors.
The tutors, in our case, are the students.
Since the students are in full force within
the organization, they must provide the man
and woman-power. Increased responsibility
for the outcome and guiding it to success
adds to self-confidence. In this way, the
tutors feels good about their training,
their involvement and their abilities,
yielding better tutor-tutee relationships
and, thus, better tutoring sessions. And
the director feels good that there's
campus-wide interest to expand the Center
within the next two years!

Amy Carmusin
Peer Tutor
University of Vermont

WRITING LAB TUTORS DESIGN A TUTOR TRAINING PROGRAM

I recently surveyed the tutors at our
writing center. I wanted to find out if
they had any ideas or opinions about what a
tutor training program should include. We
employ sixteen tutors, and most of the
tutors have been working at the center for
more than a year. So I was not too
surprised to find that the tutors had very
definite ideas about structuring a tutor
training program. Here are some of the
things that they would include:

* A discussion about how thesis statements
  can be developed. Even though we have
  no problem coming up with a thesis in
  our own papers, it can be difficult to
  know what makes a good one in someone
  else's.

* A discussion about how to make students
  do more of the work and how we can make
  them get more of the answers.

* More emphasis on dealing with real
  "basket cases."

* A question and answer session in which
  new tutors could speak to experienced
  tutors.

* Observation of experienced tutors.

* Discussion about the importance of
  getting students to laugh at their
  mistakes. This can work wonders in
  motivating students, especially those
  who are getting a little frustrated or
  depressed about their writing.

* Sample student papers to practice on.

* It would be helpful to have some sort of
  outline concerning the stylistic
  expectations in English 105 and 109
  (our basic composition courses). I have
  never taken these courses, having
  received credit for them in high school,
  and so do not know what standards the
  students in these classes must approach.

* I would like group practice sessions,
  with the group reviewing a sample paper
  to get a feel for various ways to
  approach the same problem.

The tutors also had quite a number of
questions about specific aspects of their
job which they felt should be addressed in
the training sessions:

* The most common technical problem I
  encounter is comma usage. I need to
  know more about the arcana of this
  subject--not just "comma before
  coordinating conjunction," etc.

* What happens if a student doesn't
  respond to leading questions? Do we
  allow students to walk out with glaring
  errors or unsolved problems only to get
  complaints from instructors later ("Look
  what you left in his paper!").

* What should a tutor do when a student
  comes into the center with a bad
  attitude ("This tutor will write my
  paper for me.") and all attempts to
  start the student thinking and writing
  on his or her own are answered by
  silence? Sometimes it's difficult to be
  tactful when the student won't budge.

* What do teachers think of our work?

• How do you get a student to really listen when you explain why something is wrong. A lot of them just want a quick fix.

• I would like to know what the professors of the basic English courses emphasize in grading. Content? Style? Technical facility? Many of the students don't know.

• Sometimes a student will leave the center with an attitude that suggests that I was no help to him. When this happens, how much should I blame myself? The student? What can I do to avoid this problem?

• Tutors need patience and good listening abilities. Is there any way to teach or improve these qualities?

• How do you deal with the student who is lazy and expects you to supply all the ideas for the paper?

Although the tutors were not asked to comment on their tutoring techniques, one tutor, in an obviously mock-sinister mood, did offer his opinion on this subject:

> A tutor must be totally insensitive to the tutee's quivering upper lip and expressions of hurt imcomprehension. A tutor must be able to cuss eloquently and at length without repetition. And the ability to make students feel that their least grammatical error is evidence that they are terminally, hopelessly incompetent doesn't hurt either.

His comments, like many of the comments above, serve to remind us that tutors, perhaps even more than classroom instructors, need good interpersonal skills. A good portion of our effectivenss depends on our ability to put students at ease so that they are able to listen attentively and to accept criticism. Of course we need to discuss strategies for developing thesis statements and other technical matters in our training sessions, but it is also important to discuss techniques for motivating and reassuring students as well.

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