



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER



Member of the NWCA:NCTE Assembly
Information Exchange Agreement

Vol. IX, No. 3 (November, 1984)

A new writing lab director who recently joined our newsletter group offers the following comment: "When I began reading about tutorial centers (before initiating ours), I wondered why every writing teacher doesn't hammer down the department head's office door demanding to teach in a writing center. It's the ideal format in which to teach writing. Now, after long hours in our new Center, I realize that departmental chairmen have little to fear. How many people can--or are willing to devote this much time? Do other directors find their jobs so demanding?"

Your responses to these not very rhetorical questions are invited. In addition, your yearly \$5 donation is also invited. Since we don't have the resources to send out reminders or bills, we have to rely on everyone's conscience and memory. And because some people's memories are a bit shorter than others and because the newsletter mailing list has gotten so large, we may soon have to remove names of people who haven't sent in any donations for the last year or so.

Please send your articles, announcements, queries, reviews, names of new members, and \$5 yearly donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University, but sent to me) to:



Muriel Harris, editor
Writing Lab Newsletter
Dept. 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 \$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.

(P.S. If you have ordered a copy of the 1984 Writing Lab Directory through your purchasing office and have not requested prepayment, you may experience some delay in receiving your copy. Purchase orders without accompanying checks are returned to the office--where they have a way of getting buried.)

FROM WRITING LAB TO INTERDISCIPLINARY

ACADEMIC SUPPORT CENTER:

COST-EFFECTIVE GUIDELINES

In recent years, two self-evident truths abound on our campuses: 1) there is a definite need for writing labs to expand and offer additional tutorial services; and 2) this need often falls victim to an ongoing academic budget crunch. As colleges and universities search out areas for cut-backs, it's imperative that writing lab directors produce cost-effective means to expand their lab's services, rather than accept cutbacks in funding. At Penn State-Behrend we've enjoyed a healthy rapport with and support from our administrators who've encouraged us to forge ahead with plans to expand our Center. This rapport, in part, results from our efforts to provide means of expansion that are "cost effective," i.e., inexpensive yet productive steps resulting in additional staffing and services. This paper will delineate means through which centers can expand services without requiring heavy

injections of capital.

The first step in an expansion program necessitates that the director and the current staff investigate the areas in which expansion is desirable and can feasibly occur. There are some immediate cautions within this phase. Don't try to jump too far too quickly. A writing lab which announces tutorial expansions into every discipline across the college's curriculum is likely to lose credibility during that crucial evaluation period when a scrutinizing eye is determining the effectiveness of the tutorial services offered. Labs considering expansion should formulate and conduct a type of needs assessment. Basically this procedure attempts to identify areas for which tutorial service is in greatest demand. Such a needs assessment can be conducted from two approaches. Students using the center are surveyed, asking them to identify disciplines in which they would utilize additional tutorial help. The other avenue is to address faculty, especially those faculty teaching freshman and sophomore courses. Questions should be designed to delineate the actual tutorial service required. For example, the professor who has 140 students in his beginning psychology section can help to distinguish whether his students need aid in study skills, writing competence on essay exams--areas already served by writing labs--or whether his students need tutorial help in grasping the tenets of basic psychology. If the latter is the case, the director can begin to establish a priority list of disciplines which might be added to the Center.

At Penn State-Behrend, we have moved our Center from writing and study skills, into the areas of math/calculus, chemistry, and computer science, after determining the need through the above process. We have requests for additional expansion, but we are proceeding carefully for several central reasons which this paper will continue to address: 1) we are attempting to expand into these disciplines without requesting additional capital for support; 2) we are determining the most cost-effective means of providing tutors for the expansion; and 3) quite frankly, as in most universities, there is only so much space available in which to expand without appearing to imitate the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. Once a selected and limited number of expansion areas is determined and with additional considerations for space and time, the director undertakes the task of staffing the new discipline.

To provide tutors in a cost-effective manner, the first place a director should look is to the faculty itself. If the director demonstrates that a significant number of students are requesting tutorial aid, say, from three different sections of computer science, then he can ask the faculty member to come on staff at the center, perhaps for a certain number of hours during one day of the week. There are basically two appeals to enlist the aid of the faculty. The professor can be asked to consider first that the faculty member might actually want to meet with students having difficulties. Secondly, consider that all faculty normally undergo a yearly review process. Donation of one's time to a tutorial center may be credited to the professor during his yearly evaluation in the categories of service to the university or scholarly activity. Moreover, this time in the center is more than just an extension of the professor's office hours since he is likely to encounter students from sections other than his own, including students interested and involved but not currently enrolled in his discipline.

Yet another possibility, which we have used at Penn State-Behrend, is to grant a faculty member a course reduction for a specified number of hours as a tutor. In institutions where this procedure is applicable, the professor, the director of the center, and the appropriate dean arrange a contractual agreement scheduling the faculty member as a tutor in lieu of one or more courses. The arrangement is subject to renewal or revision on a semester or yearly basis.

There are the obvious advantages, as writing centers expand, to staffing the center with representative faculty from the new disciplines offered, but there are likewise cautions. The director must carefully approach faculty. He needs and expects to staff the center with those faculty who have demonstrated a rapport and willingness to work with students who are not always the best in their studies. Faculty who conceivably see service to the tutorial center as only a means of reducing their teaching load must be encouraged to understand the expectations of their work and commitment to the center.

These two means of acquiring faculty in an expanded center can be argued as cost-effective: the first as completely voluntary; the second as in-kind service. As college administrators begin to grant more

faculty reduced teaching assignments for involvement in research projects or in faculty governance, time must also be appropriated to the tutorial center which has demonstrated its value to students. With careful scheduling and utilization, even space limitations are manageable as the center expands. The room that functions as a computer science center on Thursday afternoons may easily become the psychology center on Friday mornings. Don't forget that Saturdays and even Sundays are days when the center can be open, with proper planning. Dormitory residents have been known to do some semblance of academic work on weekends, and certainly, our libraries, science labs, and computer rooms are busy on these days.

Before moving on to a discussion of student tutors in expanded centers, there is an additional consideration in providing cost-effective faculty-staff tutoring: additional training for the staff of the center. This idea is especially feasible in currently popular disciplines. A writing tutor--staff or faculty member--may begin to study basic computer programming or English as a second language for his own benefit and development. That particular tutor can be asked to bring his additional expertise to the center for the E.S.L. or computer student. Ultimately the tutor, the center, and the students will all benefit from the possibility of this individual interdisciplinary approach.

One of the most exciting ideas being investigated at Penn State-Behrend is Student Internships in our Center. Director Michael Tkach is currently developing a program to establish credit internships for outstanding senior majors. Similar to any internship, the student will be granted academic credits, from one to three, for serving as a tutor in his major field within the Center. The number of hours per week depends upon the number of credits chosen. Director Tkach will supervise and train the student for his role within the Center; the student will have a faculty mentor in his major to whom he reports and for whom he will write a paper discussing his experience and function as a tutor at the conclusion of his internship. Again, there is an obvious cost-effectiveness to such a program. Internships must be co-ordinated and established with the In-Charge faculty in the particular major and must normally be approved by a program committee within the university. Among students, there is a great deal of enthusiasm for this type of

credit internship, especially for those majors planning on graduate study. Such a program is also a means of expanding the center's hours into the weekends and evenings, again making the greatest use of space and time limitations. In addition, excellent students in their junior and even sophomore years are enthusiastically donating their time for basic tutoring in their majors. These undergraduates see voluntary work as a practical contribution to their education, a worthwhile extracurricular activity, and a preparation for the credit internship in their senior years. As interest grows for this type of program, though, a caution is advisable. The director must remember not to over-expand, over-extend the functions of the center. The results of the needs assessment should have focused a limited number of areas for expansion, and immediate concentration should remain within this focus. The director's time commitment, itself, is an important consideration as he assumes the responsibility not only for the co-ordination and operation of an expanded center, but also for the training of tutors.

Another avenue for providing upper level students as tutors is to search for outside funding to pay outstanding seniors an hourly wage. Herein the director assumes another responsibility as he becomes a researcher and a proposal/grant writer. The proper investigations may turn up surprising possibilities. For example, the Veteran's Administration has paid hourly wages to a veteran-tutor working with veterans. Additionally, many universities receive outside funding coming into a Basic Skills Budget or an Educational Opportunities Program Budget. These monies can oftentimes be allocated to the hourly wages of tutors in the center, if particular criteria are fulfilled.

Also, during the time of expansion, there are at least two additional means of providing minimal financial support for the center. Neither of these requires the director to approach an administrator with hand outstretched. Every college has student organizations, including honor societies, fraternities, and sororities, which are eager to undertake a campaign for the support of a university activity. The tutorial center should become the focal point of an on-going fund-raising project. Now the director assumes the role of center advocate and public relations contact with the group in question. He can advise the group of the center's need for funds to support the expansion or ask the group to undertake

a fund-raiser to provide needed supplies, anything from textbooks to Apple computers. As the center expands into a discipline, chemistry for example, and utilizes the chemistry faculty member along with the chemistry major, the director may involve a campus organization, the chemistry club, in the center, requesting the club to provide the necessary basic chemistry texts or simply to conduct a campaign culminating in a gift or donation for the center's use.

If, by this time, the director has any hours left in his day, with the approval of the administration he may consider going outside the immediate university for financial support. Wherever appropriate, the center director may provide service to the community without specific charge but with the acceptance of donations. At Penn State-Behrend, our lab has assisted alumni with job applications, resumes, and other diverse written projects. When the alumnus responds to the annual fund drive for the whole university, we think it's appropriate to remind him of our service and to ask him to designate some part of his gift for the support of the Center.

These methods of eliciting support for the tutorial center are not meant to, nor will they, produce thousands of dollars or even hundreds of dollars in a given year's time. They do, however, remind students, outsiders, and alumni of the center's needs, and they demonstrate to the administration that the director is involved in the financial support of the center.

A word must be offered about the center's director at this point. The moment that a writing lab commits to expanded services, the director's responsibilities escalate. He is now concerned with the integration of additional disciplines, staff training in areas outside his own discipline, additional programs both within and without the university, and he will eventually if not immediately become involved with the budgetary affairs of the center. For these reasons, when there is a commitment to expansion, the director's position must become a full time position WITHIN the center. In many of our institutions, the writing lab co-ordinator is also a half-time English faculty member. While it might be ideal to keep the director in the classroom, the practical and time-consuming tasks involved in expanding a center will certainly argue against the somewhat popular "half-time here, half-time

there" practice. Each director must establish this position if the expansion is to be meaningful and productive.

In conclusion, the suggestions discussed here for the careful and cost-effective expansion of writing labs into academic support centers will hopefully generate additional ideas and methods appropriate to individual schools. With the success of writing labs and with the frequently encountered requests of "can't you provide a tutor for . . .," it is certainly difficult to overlook the need for growth. The careful and cost-effective expansion of the writing lab under the leadership of a concerned director will benefit the education of our students and will contribute to their retention. Ultimately, the expanded center will enhance the overall quality of education in our universities.

Michael Chiteman
The Pennsylvania Univ.

The Writing Instructor is a quarterly publication committed to the field of writing/composition instruction in secondary and higher education. The Editorial Board invites articles of 8-10 double-spaced pages which blend theory and pedagogy to the practical ends of classroom experience. Exercises, brief notes on resources, and announcements are also welcomed. Subscription to the journal is \$12.00 annually for individuals and \$16.00 annually for institutions. We do not bill. Please send material and subscriptions requests to: The Writing Instructor, c/o Freshman Writing Program; University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Ca 90089-0062.

PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF
DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATORS

CALL FOR PAPERS

5th Annual Conference
Harrisburg, Penna.

April 18, 19, 20

Send double spaced manuscript by December 5, to Karen W. Coleman, Academic Support Center, Cedar Crest College, Allentown, PA 18104.

CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

"Reasoning and Higher Education: a Multi-disciplinary Experiential Conference" will be held in Boise, Idaho, February 28 & March 1, 1985. Co-sponsored by the Boise State University Center for the Study of Thinking and the Northern Rockies Consortium of Higher Education (NORCHE), the conference will provide workshops and presentations designed to help higher education faculty promote the development of reasoning in college students. A call for contributed session proposal forms and further information are available from Dewey Dykstra, Center for the Study of Thinking, Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, ID 83725, (208) 385-1934. Proposals for sessions must be received by December 7, 1984.



NOTICE OF VACANCY

Full Time Position: Director of Writing Skills Center - Assistant Professor. Two-thirds time directing and tutoring in Writing Skills Center; one-third time teaching composition (one class per quarter). Training and supervising part-time instructors and graduate and undergraduate student assistants who work in the Writing Skills Center. (The SCSU Writing Skills Center has operated successfully since 1968, serving not only composition classes, but the entire university, offering tutorial help to meet a variety of needs.)

Ph.D. in English, English linguistics or composition, with a strong background in the teaching of composition. Experience in a writing skills center preferred.

Current salary range for Assistant Professor: \$19,048-\$27,719

Send letters of application to James Gottshall, Chair; English Department; St. Cloud University; St. Cloud, MN 56301. Completed application should include vita, transcripts, and three to five recent letters of recommendation. Postmarked deadline for the receipt of all application materials is December 1, 1984. Enclose self-addressed stamped postcard for acknowledgement. SCSU is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer.

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE FOR THE KELLOGG INSTITUTE

The Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators has announced the availability of four "Leaders' Scholarships" for the 1984-85 academic year. The "Leaders' Scholarships" program is designed to recognize national, regional and local leaders in the field of developmental education and learning assistance by providing them with partial fee waivers for attendance at the Kellogg Institute. By making it possible for leaders in the field to attend the Institute at minimal cost, it is also anticipated that the innovative techniques taught at the Institute will be more widely disseminated in developmental and learning assistance programs.

"Leaders' Scholarships" will consist of a \$500 fee waiver for attendance at the 1985 Kellogg Institute. The Institute is scheduled for June 30 to July 26, 1985. During the Institute's summer residency program, participants will receive intensive training in learning styles assessment; individualized instructional techniques; program evaluation design and implementation; reality therapy; academic intervention and retention strategies; computer-assisted instruction and management; time management and program development. Following the four-week training period, participants will return to their home campuses to implement program development projects based on skills and knowledge obtained at the Institute.

"Leaders' Scholarships" will be awarded on a competitive basis to individuals who have held leadership positions in local, regional or national organizations concerned with remedial, developmental and learning assistance activities on college campuses. Guidelines for the scholarship program and applicant materials may be obtained by contacting Dr. Hunter R. Boylan, Director, Kellogg Institute, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608; (704) 262-3057.



CAROLINA ENGLISH TEACHER

Carolina English Teacher publishes articles, reviews, descriptions of teaching techniques and methods, research reports--in short, anything appropriate to an audience interested in the teaching of literature, composition, and reading. We consider submis-

sions from all educational levels, elementary through college.

Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, in MLA style, with notes at the end. Submit three copies and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

Warren and Holly Westcott, editors
Carolina English Teacher
Department of English
Francis Marion College
Florence, S.C. 29501

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Writing labs that work with foreign students are invited to submit proposals for the following conference:

Learning in Many Tongues: Education
and the International Student
Jan. 25-26, 1985

Charlotte, NC: University of
North Carolina at
Charlotte

Audience: Teachers and advisors of
international students, from primary school
through the university, in all disciplines

Deadline for proposals: Dec. 1, 1984

For further information write:

Stan Patten
English Dept.
U. of NC-Charlotte
Charlotte, NC 28223

A READER ASKS . . .

I'd be interested in knowing what others do to deal with dyslectics. I've had several students come in this fall and unload themselves of this message, "I have dyslexia, and I can't spell." Then they stand there; they've put up their defense, and what am I gonna do about it?

"What kind of dyslexia do you have?"

Evidently I'm not dealing with hard-core dyslectics, because each this fall has said, "I don't know. I just know I can't spell because I've got dyslexia."

To which I respond, "Well, there are many kinds of dyslexia. If I knew more about your kind, I might be able to help you--or

to tell you where you can get help. But frankly, you can't be too bad off or you would probably not have made it into college. What's your name and address?" I ask this as a simple start so that I can record identity and perhaps use it later. "And your telephone number?" Writing. "And your social security number?" "Would you write these down for me?" Curiously, this information is recorded without bobble, so far as I can tell. Good memory, at least.

My next move is to ask, "Do you have time? I'll dictate some words to you, and then I'll be able to tell a little better what your problem is." Usually the student has time. I dictate 60 or 80 words, and I watch for such possible problems as hearing loss, lack of word meaning (this is often a problem: a student who doesn't know what a word means and how it is used seldom spells the word correctly), imperfect mastery of phonics (transferring a letter sound to a written letter or combination of letters, can be checked by pronouncing a word sound by sound), written letter confusion (does the writer use short i for short e?), idiosyncratic handwriting, etc.

For those students who apparently are leaning on their declared dyslexia, my next move is to build confidence in their abilities. If one strategy doesn't work, another may. This fall, for example, in my opinion none of the self-declared dyslectics have severe problems. I follow up by asking each student to come and work with me at a time convenient for both of us. Usually a half-hour lesson twice a week gives us an opportunity to refine diagnosis and to devise remedies. If I am unable to meet, I call the student, leave word, or write a letter--depending upon how much lead time I have; I ask the student to do the same for me.


What seems to work for those who will work with me is establishment of a bond of willingness on both sides--willingness to work with the student, willingness to be worked with. My ultimate goal is to make each student who works with me self-confident and independent. The one-on-one process is time consuming, but if continued (I've worked with a couple of students as long as six months before getting results we both desired), it usually works. Once the bond of willingness is established, then we can establish a bond of friendship. It's a kind of ombudsman approach, but cutting through the maze of bureaucratic labels and buffers frequently helps as much as

attacking specific individual problems.

Of course, I do encounter severe dys-lectics. They're another matter; they have difficulties I don't know how to address, so I send them to experts--then I wonder what becomes of them.

How do others deal with such special people?

George Gleason
Southwest Missouri State
Univ.



THE WESTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER

In the fall of 1982, the English department writing lab became the University Writing Center. The purpose of this name change was to symbolize what I hoped would become a new perception of what the center is all about. The old perception, as I saw it, was that the writing lab was a place to send one's most hopeless composition cases for some tutoring in grammar so that one could give them their F's with a clear conscience. The new perception that I had hoped to establish, and that I think I have begun to see emerge, is that of a place where any student at any level can go to talk with someone about writing, a place where interested students might go to get help with their writing.

Philosophy and Objectives

The Writing Center should be a place where a concern for good writing is fostered. It should be an integral part of the University's effort to assure that its graduates are literate. It should be a friendly place where students feel free to come in or call to talk about their problems with writing. Finally, it should be a place where faculty feel free to call or visit to discuss the problems of writing at WIU.

The objectives of the Writing Center are:

1. To assist composition teachers with those students who need more help than the teacher is able to give.
2. To assist teachers in other subjects whose students need help with their writing.
3. To assist all students, graduate and undergraduate, who would like help in improving their writing.

4. To answer questions on grammar, punctuation, and usage for students, faculty, and the public.

5. To assist in the training of our students, graduate and undergraduate, who plan to teach writing.

6. To conduct research on writing and the teaching of writing.

Staff

The Writing Center is staffed primarily by graduate assistants in the Department of English. Temporary instructors are assigned as needed. The director is a member of the permanent staff.

Staff Training

Staff training is the responsibility of the director. During the first two weeks of the semester, there are six one-hour training sessions for new tutors. We start the first session by all (including the director) writing a short paper. I believe that it is important for teachers of writing to write often themselves, and to let their students see them in the process of writing. In subsequent sessions I use xeroxed or mimeographed examples of student themes, and ask the tutors to respond to them. I select papers which have weaknesses in both mechanics and content, but which also have some strengths.

I find that in the first sessions, the tutors almost without exception, concentrate first on mechanical errors. While I think that editing is extremely important in the writing process, and that students must be able to produce error free papers, I do not believe that editing is the place to start in talking about a student's paper. Of course, if an instructor has referred a student and asked the tutor to do specific things, then the tutor will do those things. However, if the student is self-referred, or if the referring instructor does not give specific instructions, we use the following procedure.

The Tutoring Procedure

The first step, before even looking at the paper, is to make the student feel welcome and at ease. Too often, conferences with instructors turn out to be confrontations. Because of the fact that the instructor must assign a grade, and must justify that grade to the student, the session often degenerates into an attack by the instructor and a defense by the student.

Instead of listening to the instructor's criticism with a view to improving his/her writing, the student may stubbornly defend the paper without attempting to see how it might be improved. The advantage that the tutor has is that he or she is not responsible for assigning a grade, and thus can be more readily perceived as being on the student's side. It is important to make the most of this advantage. To this end, the tutor should always begin by finding something to praise in the paper. This is sometimes difficult, but it is important to establish the right atmosphere at the beginning.

The second step is talk about what the paper communicates. Here the tutor can tell the student what he or she gets from the paper and compare it with what the student intended. Together, they can then explore ways in which the paper can be improved--made clearer, more interesting, more complete, more convincing.

Only at this stage do we begin to work on errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. I recommend to my tutors that they buy a copy of Mina Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations and study it carefully.

I have found from my own experience in the writing center that many errors made by basic writers are not due to lack of knowledge of the correct forms, but simply lack of experience in using them. For example, students who leave off verb endings because of dialect interference will frequently know what those endings should be, but have not yet made the use of them habitual. In most cases they can easily do exercises in which they underline the correct forms, but when they get back to their own writing, they don't use them, and they find it hard to edit their own work. They need, as Paul Hornung used to say in the commercial, practice, practice, practice. In the center, we try to encourage them to write as much as possible. In this situation, we often use the kind of exercises used in ESL courses, in which the student copies a text, but changes all past tense verbs to present, and so on.

In dealing with punctuation errors, it is important to find out if the errors result from carelessness or not knowing the conventions, or whether they indicate a lack of understanding of basic sentence structure. For this, I have found it useful to ask the student to read the passage in question aloud. In many cases the student

will punctuate correctly with voice inflections, even though the punctuation may be wrong in the text. I then ask the student to listen to the voice inflections. Usually the student will then be able to put in the proper punctuation. Subsequent papers, of course, will contain some of the same errors, but they grow less frequent. Years of practice are needed to make written punctuation as natural as spoken.

Sometimes it is best to go back to square one with a paper, even after it has been finished, handed in, and torn to pieces by the instructor. One day this semester a girl came in with a paper she had gotten back that clearly had more red ink on it than blue. The assignment had been to write a paper on friendship, using three qualities of a friend, and developing each into a paragraph. She had written about two boys named James and John. Her development consisted of sentences of the pattern, "If X would happen to John, then James would do Y." James and John were totally lifeless, and so was the paper. I asked the writer if James and John were real people. They were not. She had made them up. I encouraged her to talk about a real friend of hers. Then I asked her to write some of it down. We followed a pattern of talk-write for about an hour and a half. At the end of that time, she had about two and a half pages of material, some of which was genuinely interesting. Her problem was that she had never really learned about the first stage of the writing process, invention.

Materials

The writing center contains a large collection of composition texts--rhetorics, readers, and handbooks, as well as several file drawers full of various kinds of tests and exercises. I have serious doubts about the value of many of these "materials." While I haven't yet brought myself to the point of bringing in several large garbage bags and simply emptying the files, I must confess that the thought has crossed my mind. One of the problems that a writing center faces is that it is designed to help the composition faculty, and if the faculty wants methods used that the center staff feel are ineffective, the staff, to some extent at least, must use those methods. Since many faculty are convinced that their students need to do various kinds of grammar exercises, the center keeps such exercises and uses them when requested. After all, I don't really know that these exercises don't do any good, and I'm fairly certain they

don't do any harm, even though an article in College English suggests otherwise.¹ However, I believe that the most valuable materials are good texts, a dictionary, and the student's own writing. These are the materials we make the most use of.

Plans for Next Year

This semester we have been planning two innovations in English 101 (the first course in the composition series) that will involve the writing center. The first is to set up a small number of special sections of English 101 for some of the students who in past years would have been assigned to the non-credit English 011 classes. These students will be required to work in the writing center one hour a week, in addition to attending their regular classes. A second innovation, one which has not yet been approved by the WIU administration, involves establishing a grade of In Progress (IP) for those students who have been in regular attendance and have done all the assigned work, but who have not attained a grade of C or better. The student would then work in the writing center until his/her writing was considered adequate.

These innovations are being tried to assist a fairly substantial number of students who have been admitted to the university, but who do not have anything close to college level writing ability. Many of these students have the ability to make it in college, but they need time to develop writing ability--time that the regular composition sequence does not give them. And they need extra help, the kind of individual attention that the writing center can provide for them.

Another problem that the writing center is already facing, and will be facing in the years to come, is helping students who have failed the University Writing Exam. This exam, given at the beginning of the junior year, is required of all students for graduation. The last time it was given, more than a thousand students took it, and over one hundred did not pass. The center will be devising programs designed to prepare these students to retake the exam.

Finally, we need to continue and increase our efforts at publicity. Despite everything that we have done to make people aware of our services, I still frequently find colleagues in other departments who are unaware either of our existence or of exactly

what it is that we do. We are even now planning a publicity campaign that will include large posters, the student newspaper, the campus TV and radio stations, and the faculty newsletter. We must get the word out.

Richard D. Vick
Western Illinois
University

¹ Thomas Friedmann, "Teaching Error, Nurturing Confusion: Grammar Texts, Tests and Teachers in the Developmental English Class," College English, 45, (April, 1983), 390-399.

THE APPLE IN THE CENTER

Since last year, there has been an Apple in the Center. Specifically, the Reading/Writing Center at Augustana College acquired an Apple II computer with one disk drive and an Epson printer. Since the equipment was an unexpected benefit of a grant to the college, we had very little lead time in which to study the educational uses of a computer; yet in the exciting nine months that have followed, using the computer has become a routine--and very successful--part of our writing program. From our experience, we conclude that word processing on a computer--at every stage of the writing process--serves writers at every level of competence.

From free writing through final proof-reading, writers find the Apple an efficient tool. A writer can type faster on a computer than on a manual or electric typewriter. For example, one need not press a return key at the end of every line. The device takes care of the return, and also eliminates the need to hyphenate a long word at the end of a line--or the need to hesitate wondering if a word will fit at the end of a line. This is both faster and less distracting for the writer. Depending on the individual's typing skills, a zero or first draft on the Apple may be completed much faster than a handwritten draft. Furthermore, typing, spelling, and grammar corrections can be made more quickly and produce a neater manuscript than a corrected typed copy.

Also, a word processor makes it extremely easy to delete words or phrases or to re-

arrange words or phrases in a draft. One can very easily reverse the position of entire paragraphs as well, a terrific aid in first draft writing. Such features encourage the writer to experiment with organization and phrasing without the burden of repeatedly writing out a text.

At any point along the way, the writer can receive a print copy of the text. This copy can be reviewed and marked for revisions at the writer's convenience, and then he or she can return to the Center, load the text from a data disk, quickly make revisions, and, within a few seconds, receive a clean, revised print copy ready to be handed in.

By making every step in the writing process easier and faster, the computer encourages students to write more and to revise more. Freed from much of the manual drudgery of writing, a student may explore alternate phrasing, creative rearrangements, and improved diction.

This freedom can be enjoyed by writers of all levels of experience. The computer is not an elite technology available to only sophisticated writers. It is an invaluable assistance for a freshman struggling with a theme for English 101; it is likewise just as useful for professors writing books. In a single day, the Center's sign-in book documents the use of the computer by a freshman rhetoric student, an English major, a minority student working on a social work paper, a psychology major, who--although he is a senior--still has difficulties with basic grammar, a sociology instructor, an ESL student, and a history professor. Since it brings together such disparate members of the college community, the Apple is indeed at the center of writing on campus.

The status of the computer as the new technology adds a sense of professionalism to the work of even a novice writer, and the maneuverability of text encourages a student's willingness to revise and experiment. All writers--but especially those with chronic writing problems, the discouraged writers--demonstrate increased motivation and satisfaction with their work. Students for whom writing had always been a tedious chore at best, have been willing to revise draft after draft on the computer. And the overall improvement of their texts is clear to them as well as to their instructors.

The Apple in the Center does not elimi-

nate the challenges and frustrations of writing. It is no instant essay machine. But, by reducing so many problems of manuscript manipulation, it frees the writer for the more important and more satisfying tasks of writing: exploring an idea, tailoring a phrase, finding a form.

Beatrice Jacobson
Augustana College



A REVIEW OF
THE ENGLISH LEARNING CENTER

As writing teachers, we can develop an instructional system that works in our lab or classroom because we are excited about it, know the special ingredients necessary to make it work, and embellish it with our unique style. However, if we publish our system, others may find that it does not work as well for them as it did for us because the energy that we invested in the original model and our style of teaching cannot be easily replicated. Unfortunately, The English Learning Center by Milton Hawkins, Marc Nigliazzo, and Virginia Stone (Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1983) is such a book.

According to the authors, The English Learning Center uses mastery learning to help students identify and solve basic writing problems. If you believe that students who learn rules and can identify errors in isolated sentences in a workbook will eliminate these errors in their writing, you may like this book, which covers nineteen common grammar/usage topics such as parts of speech, verbs, pronouns, punctuation, and diction.

The focus of the book is tests, with three types for each topic--diagnostic, trial, and proficiency. Each kind of test has three levels and two forms, and 80% of the book is made up of tests. In addition to tests, each chapter has a brief section of clearly written instructional material, which might be a good review for a tutor, but inadequate for a student with basic writing problems.

Another shortcoming of the book is the complicated system that the authors developed. In an attempt to individualize the

program, they have included an "An Individualized Guide to Study," which outlines the steps students need to follow the program. These instructions become confusing because of the many different routes students can take. Although these instructions probably become more meaningful when followed as the work is done, the whole approach seems mechanical, dry, and unappealing to students who may be reluctant learners in the first place. A computer-assisted program based on this text, with built-in instructions that direct the student through the system is, however, available.

The biggest problem with this text is the attempt to teach students to eliminate errors in their writing by doing isolated exercises when most current research indicates that this approach usually doesn't work. While some students may benefit from this work because they are highly motivated and can think through the relationship of the exercises to their own writing, students could benefit more by actually writing.

Despite these flaws in The English Learning Center, there are some limited uses for it in a writing lab. It could be used for tutors to review specific points in grammar, for those rare students who learn best when left to their own devices, and as a supplement to a program in which students do much writing.

Susan Glassman
Southeastern Massachusetts
University

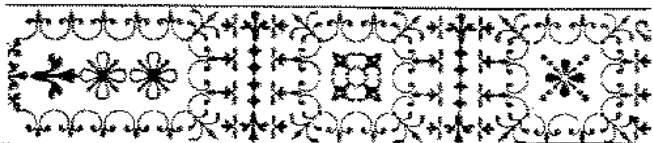
reading and writing skills. In the fall of 1979, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences asked us to set up remedial courses for chronic repeaters and a center where any students could get help in preparing for the exam. Teachers of these courses were full- and part-time experienced composition instructors, for whom the trade-off for smaller classes was a weekly stint at the desk in the Center.

As soon as the doors opened, students from regular freshman and sophomore courses discovered that they could talk to an English teacher not responsible for their grades; thus our system evolved with no extra expense to the department or the college. We already had a group of M.A. candidates who had weekly tutorial appointments with some individual students, under the supervision of an administrative assistant who was about to retire. It was natural for the tutors to be brought into the Center program.

As more and more students from regular courses began to use the Center on a drop-in basis, we asked faculty teaching those courses to spend an hour a week each at the main desk. From an original loyal corps of genuine volunteers, we developed an army system which works well on the whole. Everyone from the lowliest G.T.A. to the department chairman is urged to give one-half hour of time for each lower division course (maximum one hour), and most of them do. Each quarter there are some full professors and four associates as well as all the assistants and instructors on the roster.

Initial objections from some senior faculty were based on work loads as well as underlying resentment at being assigned to lower division courses. These objections are gradually decreasing while perception of the advantages of our system is increasing. We are convinced that both students and faculty benefit.

For the student, the opportunity to discuss his writing with a faculty member who will not grade it serves as a safety valve for personality conflicts and a reinforcement of what his teacher has tried to get across. He is exposed to a wider range of faculty criticism, and he sees that there are some generally agreed standards for good writing.



PEER GROUP TUTORING

At Georgia State the Writing Center is staffed not by student peer tutors but by faculty peers. Although the reasons for our system are historical, the rationale includes some principles that most of us are deeply committed to.

The English Department had an opportunity to start a Center when the Georgia Board of Regents decided to impose restrictions on students who continued through the university system without having passed the state's sophomore-level examination in

TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF WRITING CENTERS
MEETING WITH
CONFERENCE OF COLLEGE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
MARCH 7-9, 1985
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

CALL FOR PAPERS

Papers may be on any aspect of writing center administration or instruction and may be practical or theoretical. Relevant topics include using the writing center in a writing across the curriculum program, using faculty members in the writing center, training tutors, using peer tutors, using computers or word processors in the writing center, or research in the writing center.

Reading time for papers should not exceed fifteen minutes. Four papers will be selected for the program, which will also include a brief business meeting.

Deadline for submission is Thursday, November 15, 1984. Please mail papers to the following address:

Ann Moseley
Director of the Writing Center
East Texas State University
Commerce, Texas 75428
Telephone: (214) 886-5259

For the teachers, the advantages are equally significant. The existence of the Center as a place to send problem spellers or worry warts seems to save each of us more time per week than we devote to the Center. There are still graduate-student tutors for the more desperate cases, but anyone who needs casual or intermittent help may go to the Center from 8 or 9 a.m. till 2 p.m. daily, or from 5 to 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, without tying up his own instructor's time. This arrangement gives all of us an opportunity to observe how our colleagues grade papers, what assignments they give, and what features of composition they emphasize. We learn from each other, and we share responsibility for departmental standards.

The presence of faculty of all ranks at the main desk in our Writing Center affirms that writing is central to our discipline and establishes a united front for an advance toward a program of Writing Across the Curriculum.

Dabney Hart
Georgia State University

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
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