



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

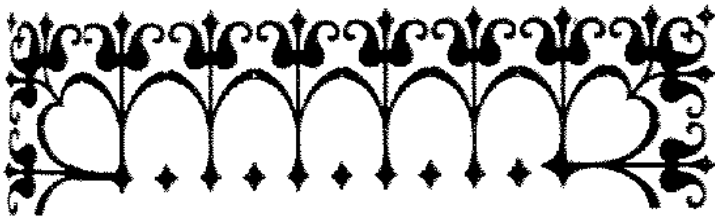
Member of the NWCA:NCTE Assembly
Information Exchange Agreement

Vol. IX, No. 6 (February, 1985)

When assembling the articles for this month's issue of the newsletter, I realized that they offer an interesting collective discussion of what writing labs are and are not, defining our purpose, our place in the curriculum, our responsibilities, and our status. In the midst of an overly busy semester or quarter, this kind of perspective may be particularly welcome.

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

Muriel Harris, editor
Writing Lab Newsletter
Dept. of English
Purdue University
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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 \$13.50 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.

INTEGRATING THE WRITING CENTER INTO THE CURRICULUM

Traditionally, writing centers have held somewhat peripheral positions in higher education because writing is often perceived as a peripheral issue. Unfortunately, the structure of most writing programs and writing centers implies to students, and others, that writing is something one does in addition to the work one undertakes in an area of real substance. Many of our writing centers suggest, implicitly, that writing is a tool one must learn to use in order to communicate what one has already mastered. We know, however, that writing is far more than a tool for communication. It is also an effective way of learning. The very process of writing about our world is, as Kenneth Burke once suggested, the developing of a strategy for dealing with a situation, and by developing the strategy we come closer to knowing the world we describe. Donald Murray, in A Writer Teaches Writing,¹ quotes a number of authors who make similar claims about writing. Paul Robinson, in a short article published a couple of years ago in the New Republic, concludes that at the heart of writing "lies the enormously gratifying dialectic of self, other and humanity."² These, and many other writers, suggest that writing is a way of interacting with our world, a way of understanding our relationship to it, and a way of coming to a clearer understanding of ourselves.

This emphasis on writing as a way of learning as well as on writing as a way of communicating should be one of the primary thrusts of our writing centers. Briefly put, it is perhaps the greatest and most challenging problem of all. The difficulty that many of us have is that our writing centers are often structured to serve only

as M*A*S*H* units designed to patch up writing weaknesses so that students can return to the front lines to pass their classes. Writing centers are treated by many faculty and are run by many directors as though the only real responsibility the writing center has is to bring students up to a level of writing that will allow them to get on with the work in their major department. We can and should do more than this, but in order to do more we need to take steps to integrate our writing centers more completely into the curricula of the institutions at which we work. We need to tie the writing center to the students' education, not only to insure our own survival, but also to improve the quality of the time we spend with our students.

I would like to describe briefly the Writing Center in the School of Interdisciplinary Studies at Miami University of Ohio in order to illustrate some of the ways in which we link our center to our curriculum. Not all of the methods we use can be used by every school and program, but I am going to try to stay general enough so that I can suggest, at the conclusion, some of the areas in which writing centers might direct more of their attention in the future.

Because our center is so closely linked to our curriculum, it is necessary for me to begin by describing the larger context in which our Writing Center exists. The School of Interdisciplinary Studies (Western College Program) at Miami University is a four year, residential college in which students take a series of twelve core courses, in the natural sciences, social systems and humanities, design their own majors and complete a year-long senior project. Even though our students have as their base one part and division of Miami, they take courses, particularly when they are completing their majors, from throughout the university. Miami currently has an enrollment of approximately fifteen thousand students. In our program we have only about two hundred seventy-five students, and this is one of the tremendous advantages we have over centers that serve hundreds, or even thousands, of students.

The major reason we are able to remain linked to the curriculum and to serve as a central focus for students and faculty alike, is our size. Our size helps us in a number of obvious ways--students establish

good rapport with tutors, we do not have mounds of paperwork, and the five tutors who work together each year develop a good support network among themselves. Because we are small we have a prime location: our two rooms--all we really need in terms of space--are in the same building that also serves as a residence hall for two hundred students, holds our classrooms and divisional library and has office space for all of the faculty who teach in the Western College Program. The proximity of our Writing Center to all of these facilities does a great deal to tell students that writing is at the "center" of what they do. In addition, we are accessible. Most of the students who make use of our center are the freshmen and sophomores who live on the two upper floors of our building, and they find it very easy to drop in for help. They do not need to worry about walking alone across campus after dark, and are free to come in more than once during an evening. This gives our tutors the opportunity to help students for a brief time, send them away with a specific task, and yet, still see them later in the same evening. We have found that when tutors do this, they take pressure off themselves and students alike; neither feels as though every problem must be solved in one session. In addition, this procedure suggests to students that writing is a process, not a magical act for which there is one right answer.

Our location has also been good for our faculty members because they too see the Writing Center in operation, and see that the tutors do indeed work very hard. They drop in themselves, occasionally, not for help, but to talk with tutors, and from these conversations tutors and faculty alike learn a great deal about writing and the problems students have. The physical location of our Writing Center has been one of the factors that has contributed to the success that it has had. If I were designing a writing center for a school or a program that did not have one, I would do all I could to see that the center was located in an important spot. If I directed a writing center that looked like an add-on, I would try to move.

My job as director of the Western College Program Writing Center, by definition, accounts for one-third of my job. This too is a result of our size because our center is not large enough to require

one person full time. The other two-thirds of my time I am a teaching member of the faculty, primarily in the humanities but also occasionally in the social systems area. The teaching side of my job is an enormous asset to my job as Writing Center Director. Because I teach I have access to students in both of my roles and to all of the freshmen who enter the program. As a result, the freshmen tend not to perceive the Writing Center as a nebulous office floating somewhere outside of the curriculum but as solidly connected to the program. As the fall term progresses, I can keep my eye on students who are having trouble and steer them to help. I even go so far as to suggest to individual students that they seek out a particular tutor who works well with certain kinds of problems.

Because I am a teaching member of the faculty, I also play a part in curriculum decisions and this is perhaps the greatest advantage to being both a director and a teacher. When we, as a faculty, sit down every term to review each other's syllabi and to make suggestions about assignments, readings and so forth, I have the opportunity to make suggestions and comments about writing assignments. I also get to see what everyone on the faculty is planning to assign, in terms of writing, and can use that knowledge later on to help tutors develop more effective techniques for dealing with various kinds of assignments. I have found that almost all of our faculty are very receptive to comments I do make, and all of them, whether they teach in the humanities or the natural sciences, really want to improve their teaching of writing. I might add that in the year before I was hired, the faculty in this program unanimously passed a resolution which stated that a commitment to the teaching of writing was a divisional priority and that the teaching of writing would take place in every course in the curriculum.

One of the ways in which I have been able to build strong links between the curriculum and the writing center has been to work closely with faculty in helping them to develop strategies for using the writing center effectively. For example, tutors are participating in a freshman course this term in which students have been asked to write a research paper. The tutors discuss writing as inquiry and lead students to discover questions which result

in significant research. In addition, the tutors meet with the instructors of the course to talk about the kinds of problems they feel are important, and I discuss with tutors general strategies for helping students write strong research papers. I have also helped faculty increase their effectiveness as teachers of writing by leading an inservice workshop in which I focussed on grading techniques. Later this year, or early next, I will run another workshop in order to talk about writing effective assignments.

We have, at other times used different ways of bringing together the writing instruction that goes on in the classroom and in the center. I have asked tutors to develop lesson plans centered on a certain area of interest in writing--for example, how one develops a topic--and have had the tutors present their ideas to students in classes.

On a more general level, I am currently in the process of helping to develop and refine a comprehensive, coordinated four-year writing program for all of our students. I would find it difficult to undertake such a task if I were not teaching at the same time that I am directing a center and working with student tutors. I have a much greater effect because I can speak to faculty as another faculty member at the same time I can speak as the director of the Writing Center and therefore as one who may be more cognizant of the problems and levels of development that writers must work through. In addition, I can do more to see that the goals of the Writing Center coincide, or, at least overlap, with the goals of the faculty. Thus, whether we meet to discuss larger issues of curriculum or to look at individual syllabi, I can speak directly to the issue of writing in our program. What all this means is that I have very close contact with faculty and this makes my job as a director of a writing center much easier.

Based on my experience and the success and support our Writing Center has received, I would recommend that writing centers be tied as closely as possible to the curriculum and that this be achieved by having writing center directors teach, by choosing prime locations and by staying small. As I have already admitted, we are a very small program, and these goals are perhaps more attainable for programs like

ours. However, I think these goals should be considerations for those who are in the process of setting up writing centers or writing-across-the-curriculum programs anywhere. One model for medium-sized state schools, for example, would be to establish small, residence-based writing centers in dorms or quads for freshmen and sophomores and then small centers in individual departments or groups of departments for students who have chosen major areas of concentration. The residence-based centers could be coordinated from one central point, operated by graduate students and staffed with undergraduate peer tutors. Such centers would be accessible, and effective. The directors of the centers within departments could also be faculty members and the staffing model could also involve graduate and undergraduate students. Centers such as these would do a great deal to link the writing in the classroom to the writing in the writing centers. They would establish a structure that would allow for a healthy and vigorous exchange between writing center directors and faculty. This model, although not appropriate everywhere, is just one example of ways in which we might achieve some of the goals I have already mentioned.

In any event, tying the writing center to the curriculum makes for a stronger center and a stronger curriculum. We should do everything we can to establish these ties and to help spread the notion that writing is indeed central to the learning process.

Geoffrey W. Chase
Miami University

¹Donald M. Murray, A Writer Teaches Writing (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), pp. 231-245.

²Paul Robinson, "Why Write?", New Republic, March 31, 1979, pp. 21-23.

There will be two special interest meetings for writing lab personnel at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, in Minneapolis:

1. The Special Interest Group for directors will meet on Friday, March 22, 5:30-6:30 p.m.
2. The Writing Centers Special Interest session, entitled "The Other C: Composition, Communication, and Computers in the Writing Center," will be held on Friday, March 22, 3:30-5:00p.m. During this session there will be a Materials Exchange Table. For this exchange, please bring copies of exercises, handouts, publicity materials, tutor training materials, information on grammar hotlines, etc. For information on materials exchange, contact:

Jeanne Simpson
Writing Center
301 Coleman
Eastern Illinois
University
Charleston, Illinois 61920
(217-581-5929)

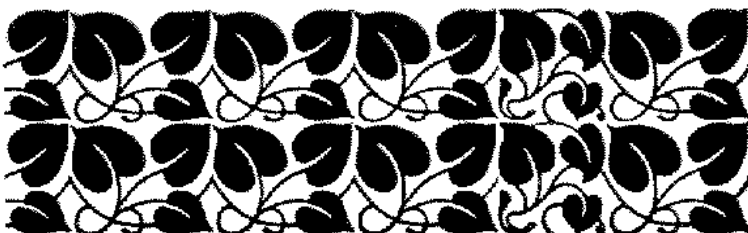


DEFINING THE STATUS OF WRITING CENTER TUTORS

The tutors in the Writing Center at Eastern Illinois University are master's level graduate students. Besides tutoring, their assistantship duties call for them to teach one or more sections of our developmental English course. This combination of duties is rather like Topsy in Uncle Tom's Cabin--it just grew. Now that we have it, however, we find ourselves in a good news/bad news situation.

The good news of course is that we have a source of staffing for the Writing Center that is comfortable with the demands of writing. Our tutors are relatively experienced writers, even if they are sometimes short of experience as teachers.

The bad news isn't entirely bad. We have to train these graduate assistants in the



methods and philosophy of teaching writing and more specifically in the methods and ethics of tutoring. An English major, as you know, is not necessarily a writing teacher. Quite aside from having to train our tutors so they can keep the Writing Center afloat, we see our job as training future colleagues--writing teachers. In fact, that is one stated mission of the Writing Center.

We face some problems in fulfilling this mission, however. The first problem is asking more of already overburdened graduate students. We have to demand a lot of time from the graduate assistants so that they can do the reading, reporting, discussing, rehearsing, and problem-solving our training program requires. Even so, evaluations collected from graduate students who finish the program unanimously approve of the training program. The demands on their time seem not to bother graduate assistants who are eager to define their professional goals.

In this program, we have problem-of-the-week sessions in which a tutor describes a hairy problem that actually occurred, asking the staff to discuss possible approaches and to evaluate the tutor's response. Sometimes I develop a hypothetical problem instead. We also ask the tutors to do reading in books on writing pedagogy and in professional journals and to give summary reports on these readings during staff meetings. The content of the readings is applied to the problem-of-the-week whenever possible.

Quite aside from giving tutors a theoretical basis for teaching composition, these readings make the assistants familiar with the professional journals and sources English teachers should know. They learn what kinds of things appear in CCC, English Journal, Writing Lab Newsletter, and Research in the Teaching of English. For most, this training program is the graduate students' first acquaintance with these journals. Their formal classes are mostly about literary analysis; our program is their chief opportunity to develop some knowledge of teaching writing before Ph.D. assistantship programs and English departments require them to go into a composition classroom and teach on their own.

We have found that our tutor-training program is the only place where our graduate students receive any instruction in professional ethics and demands. For example,

one graduate student conducted a study of the relationships between ACT scores, attendance, and pass rates in the developmental English course. The results of her study were presented to several department and university committees. The process of presenting the report revealed to her and to the other graduate students the hierarchy of committees in the university, something that they had only dimly perceived before and that they never considered as affecting them presently or in the future. It also revealed the other professional activities of English teachers besides classroom teaching. So simple a thing as paperwork in the Writing Center accomplishes the same thing--tutors learn the importance of good record-keeping, reporting, evaluating, and the management of their professional activities.

I have mentioned tutoring ethics. We spend lots of time on the tutors' obligations to students, to faculty, to themselves. Graduate assistants have an ambiguous position: they are both students and teachers, so that their loyalties are often mixed. We therefore spell out precisely how they are to work with faculty. The Writing Center's relationship with faculty is a central issue in the Center's survival. Therefore it is important to define the relationship for tutors as carefully as possible. That part is relatively easy. But it is less easy to define and control the faculty side of that relationship.

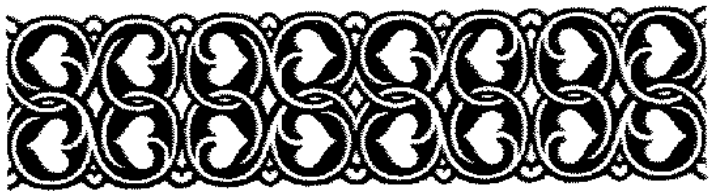
The most important strategy in encouraging good faculty relations is to earn faculty respect. Good tutoring is only one way of doing so. Another method we have used successfully is to invite faculty to our staff meetings. There, they see graduate assistants grappling with the same professional issues they face themselves. More to the point, however, they see tutors becoming colleagues worth respecting--reading professionally, preparing teaching materials, participating in a meeting not unlike committee or faculty meetings. We ask tutors to take turns presiding over meetings, to take minutes and distribute copies, to conduct discussions and take positions on various issues.

Outside of staff meetings and supervisory work, we do one other thing to encourage the professional development of our staff. We take them along to conferences. Sometimes little or no money is directly available for these students' travel expenses. We get

around that problem by giving rides and finding roommates. Most professional organizations offer student memberships. We can sometimes get funds to buy meals for students. We've found that while it is nice to take graduate students to conferences like 4C's, it is often easier and less expensive to take them to smaller, regional conferences. The effect is the same--students get to see another aspect of the profession, partake of the enthusiasm conference-attending can generate, and begin to develop the professional network of friends and colleagues we all need. From these conferences job opportunities often develop. We've begun encouraging our graduate students to submit proposals to smaller conferences as a way of "breaking in," getting a publication record, and thereby earning more respect from the faculty. Participating in professional conferences also often helps graduate students focus more clearly on what areas of specialization appeal to them. The result is not just better tutoring; it is happier staff.

Encouraging professional development in these ways is an important strategy in making the Writing Center a successful enterprise. Tutoring improves as tutors acquire a theoretical base for their work, and faculty respect for the Writing Center increases as tutors begin to behave as teaching colleagues.

Jeanne Simpson
Eastern Illinois
University



A READER RESPONDS...

WRITING CENTER PROMOTION--"THE HARD-SELL"

I just read with interest and empathy the letter from Richard Hankins in the December '84 Writing Lab Newsletter. Good staff, plenty of space, publicity--and no customers. I know just how he feels. The first year of operation our writing center saw fewer than 40 students per quarter. We knew we had a good product and that the students needed it, but our attempts at pro-

motion just weren't pulling in the hordes we had expected. Back at the drawing table, we decided that our promotion style (flyers, radio announcements, etc.) was too soft. We'd have to go for the "hard-sell."

I spent my second year as Writing Center Supervisor playing traveling salesman. I roamed door-to-door talking to professors about the Center and about ways to coordinate our program with their writing assignments. After some initial philosophical discussion of the fact that a lot of outside-the-classroom course work isn't exactly "optional," e.g., studying for exams, library research, etc., several professors agreed to require their students to visit the Center with at least one writing project; the results were quite positive for all parties concerned. The professors enjoyed reading "cleaner" papers, the tutors were happy to be busy, and the students appreciated finding out about the Writing Center and the painless help it offered. Many of these students returned voluntarily with subsequent papers.

At the beginning of each quarter when Center traffic is particularly slow, the tutors also put on their sales hats. Besides talking to professors about the Writing Center, the tutors arrange to give brief classroom presentations to explain the Center's services and advise the students that the staff is familiar with the particular writing assignments for those classes. They also let the students know that their professors will be notified of their visits to the Center, which seems to provide added impetus for the students to come in.

Now in our third year of operation, the Writing Center staff still stalks the halls in search of potential client pools, but it's getting easier all the time. More and more the professors and students are seeking us out, which is how we had envisioned things in the first place! During the Fall Quarter this year we set a new record of 172 student visits--which we think is excellent from a student body numbering only 1300.

I'd like to suggest to Mr. Hankins and any other frustrated people launching a new writing lab that they stop worrying and start walking! From my experience, it really works!

Deborah Curtis
Rose-Hulman Institute
of Technology

AN INTER-OFFICE MEMO

(The following is a memo I recently distributed to my colleagues at The University of Southern Mississippi. It did not, to my surprise and dismay, stir up the controversy that I'd expected; I'm afraid that many of them did not even read it. But I did get some interested and some concerned responses, as well as a few jibes about the Writing Lab as est seminar, etc.)

TO: English Department Faculty
FROM: Maureen Ryan, Director of the Writing Lab & Developmental Writing
SUBJECT: The Writing Lab
DATE: September 13, 1984

Last Friday, at this year's first departmental meeting, I alluded to my concern about the perceptions--or misperceptions--that some of you have about the Writing Lab. The beginning of the academic year and my increasing familiarity with the Lab and the department seem sufficient reasons for me to offer now a position paper of sorts, a statement about how I perceive the Writing Lab and its function.

To some extent it is easier to talk about what the Lab is not than about what it is. The Lab, as I define it, is not exclusively or even primarily a skills center, a fix-it shop, or a dumping ground for students whose problems with writing overwhelm them and their teachers. It is not a grammar and usage remediation center where students complete endless exercises on punctuation and subject-verb agreement in a desperate attempt to eliminate these errors from their writing. It is not a last-ditch effort to arrest twelve or more years of failure in academic writing. Despite its name (and if the existence of our Center for Writers did not almost guarantee confusion, I would have argued long ago for re-naming the Lab), the Writing Lab does not exist to remediate anything.

What the Writing Lab does do is attempt

to foster students' development as writers. As Stephen M. North writes in "The Idea of a Writing Center" in the September, 1984 issue of College English, "Our job is to produce better writers, not better writing." We who work in the Writing Lab intervene at various stages in the student's writing process (with the emphasis on PROCESS) and more often in the early stages--asking questions, helping the writer decide on an organizational scheme--than in the proofreading stage; we focus less on the correction of textual errors than on the fundamental, and, I would argue, more important, concerns of content, organization, development, and audience. We take advantage of more time and more direct contact with individual students to reinforce your classroom instruction.

This approach implies a commitment to instruction that is student-centered, a recognition that writers do not develop at the same pace and cannot be expected, even in a given class, to be at the same place at the same time. And it presupposes that the writer is motivated and interested in his or her own writing. We can, I'm afraid, do little to help the student who has to be physically or psychologically pushed into the Lab, which is not to say that we don't try and often succeed in motivating apparently reluctant students.

Of course I am aware that our students must learn to write not only clearly and cogently but correctly, that many of our students have serious problems with writing, and that the Writing Lab can and should help them to learn to write standard American academic English. Grammar and usage are important and must be taught, but not before or exclusive of more pressing aspects of writing like coherence and fluency. In the Lab we do indeed teach students about commas and spelling, within the context of their own writing and only after they have mastered more fundamental concepts.

The Lab tutors and I promise you that we will not write your students' papers for them (this despite regular requests that we "read it over and see if it's correct"); neither will we comment on your grades, assignments, or your abilities as a teacher. We will not proofread or edit students' papers; to ask us to do so is to underestimate our abilities and the value of the services we provide. We will, once students have papers satisfactorily developed, teach them to edit and proofread for themselves.

We ask you to send us your students who are interested in their writing, not merely those at whose early essays you throw up your hands in frustration and disbelief.

We invite you to visit the Lab, where you will find students writing, tutors writing and responding to student writing, and, occasionally, a workbook open to semi-colon exercises. Ask your students who come to the Lab what they do there and how they feel about us. And certainly respond to this statement, to me directly or in writing. We are all working toward the same goal, and we can better serve students when we communicate with their classroom instructors.



CMSU'S MOST VALUABLE LAB RESOURCE

Retention is of particular concern at our school, so we in the Central Missouri State University Writing Lab treat the first few weeks of the semester as critical because of the many potential blows to fragile freshman egos. For this reason, we feel that the single most important step we can take with the entering lab student is to make sure he or she understands--and this doesn't sound particularly earthshaking or scholarly--the clause. This understanding reduces the "frag's" and "cs's," for each one of which our English Department faculty tends to lower a student's grade by one letter. As a result of this policy, we have scores of students entering the Lab, often panicked, dutifully carrying referral slips and diagnostic papers. We find that the more serious difficulties--as far as grades are concerned--can be cleared up relatively rapidly by studying the clause.

Our material on the clause has been carefully developed and redeveloped over a period of years. It is, in fact, in a constant state of revision and flux because we continue to listen carefully to student reaction and to watch the eyes!

The "handout" (which is not merely handed out) has the following virtues:

1. It allows us to ease away from the students' papers--which are apt to be bloodied to an extensive degree--and to focus on impersonal material which gives them time to relax and get their minds off the recent tutorial.

2. The handout covertly introduces the student to the comfortable Lab routine and familiarizes the student with the non-judgmental approach, after he or she has just been judged and made uncomfortable.
3. The instructor or tutor is free to superimpose his or her own style and to insert comments, dialogue, and questions as appropriate.
4. While much flexibility is permitted, the student is protected by a specific structure, regardless of tutor competence or tutor mood.
5. The material respects student time and schedules with numerous checkpoints for breaking away or re-entry. (Some students have not allotted enough time for their visit.)
6. The material provides background for sentence combining, for the study of the four sentence types, and for practice in sentence variety, as needed.
7. Content is appropriate for students on any academic level, in any discipline.
8. The information provides a framework for referral to the student's own paper at any point, giving him or her a feeling of mastery over material which, just a short time before, was the source of misery.
9. Even excellent student writers can benefit from a quick review of these concepts, and after a bit of brushing up can tackle a more difficult version, if desired.

I hope I haven't built up this particular item too much. We fully realize that many other concerns need to be addressed, but at this crucial first meeting, we are primarily attempting to heal the wounds, to show the student that someone cares, and to create a foundation on which future progress can be made with more meaning-essential aspects of the student's writing.

If you would like a copy of our handout on clauses, please send a self-addressed envelope with \$.37 return postage to Ginger Young, Writing Laboratory Supervisor, Educational Development Center, Central Missouri State University, Warrensburg, MO 64093.

Tutor's Corner

BETTER TUTORING THROUGH PEER TUTOR INTERACTION

The Writing Center at the University of Vermont is a unique program in that its set-up provides for close interaction among its tutors and, as a result, better, more effective tutoring. This setup and consequent interaction is a result of a course, English 95/96, which meets once a week for two hours, is taught by the director, and is attended by all the peer tutors.

During the latter part of the Spring semester, prospective tutors apply to the program and are then selected by the director based on their demonstration of good writing skills and by recommendation of English teachers. In the fall, English 95 begins as a peer tutor training seminar. In this seminar the tutors are exposed to the experiences of other peer tutors and the techniques of tutoring used by other peer tutors through selected readings, mock tutoring sessions, and review of the basics of writing and the writing process. The reviewing of the basics of writing and the writing process is stressed since the Center's main objective is not to proofread papers and hand them back corrected but instead to help the tutees become better writers. This training period takes place during the first seven weeks of the semester and at the end of this time the Writing Center is opened to provide free tutoring to all UVM students.

In addition to tutoring and attending the class, the tutors also participate in one of three committees. The Administration Committee deals with the overall administrative duties of the Center. The Advertising and Communications Committee is responsible for advertising the Center by poster, letters to professors, and teaching assistants, and by campus newspaper and radio. The Speaker Committee arranges talks to be given by writers on writing-related topics.

After the initial training period of English 95 and once tutoring has begun, the class, while maintaining its function as a "normal" English class, becomes more of a discussion period during which the tutors and the director discuss matters that have to do with the Center. These range anywhere from tutoring experiences to ways in which

more students will be attracted to and thereby make use of the Center. Committees also meet and discuss matters. English 96, while similar to English 95, is even more of a discussion period. Obviously the training period is over and peer tutors have gotten to know each other. By this time tutors have had many of their own tutoring experiences and find that by getting together and talking about them, many helpful ideas and methods can be shared. In some way each peer tutor acquires useful information which consequently leads to better tutoring.

The overall result of this interaction is a feeling of unity among the tutors, creating a friendly, positive atmosphere at the Center which is beneficial in a peer tutoring program. The setup of the English 95/96-- Writing Center program causes a great deal of interaction to occur among the tutors which consequently leads to more effective tutoring.

Mike Weglarz
Peer Tutor
University of Vermont



TENTH ANNUAL
RHETORIC SEMINAR
**Current Theories
Of
Teaching Composition**

PURDUE UNIVERSITY
June 3-14, 1985

EDWARD P.J. CORBETT
JANET EMIG
LINDA FLOWER
JAMES KINNEAVY

JANICE M. LAUER
LOUIS MILIC
GENE MONTAGUE
FRANK O'HARE
WALTER J. ONG, S.J.

LOUISE PHELPS
D. GORDON ROHMAN
ROSS WINTEROWD
RICHARD E. YOUNG

FOR MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT THE SEMINAR:
Janice M. Lauer
Rhetoric Seminar
Purdue University
Department of English
West Lafayette, IN 47907
(317) 484-3740



This survey was first reported to the special section for Writing Laboratory Directors at the College Conference on Composition and Communication in March 1983. The purpose of our survey was to determine what agreement, if any, existed among directors (or coordinators) of writing labs and centers about the scope of their responsibilities. Specifically, we set out to find what it is writing lab directors are expected to do, would like to do, and actually do do. Of the 1000-plus subscribers to the Writing Lab Newsletter to whom we sent questionnaires, 298 responded to our 6-section form.

We asked lab directors to specify what their rank or status was at the time of the survey. Some respondents indicated recent changes in status. The categories in Section I asked respondents what department, division, or agency they were attached to if they were not English department members. Most frequently mentioned were administration and student support services such as separate learning centers or branches of academic services. We do think the higher percentage of English faculty is an encouraging sign, for it may show English departments' commitment to writing/reading/skills lab programs. Notice also the comparable percentage of full-time staff assigned to lab direction.

Program Direction -- How is your program managed and what is your status? (Reported by percent of 298 respondents)

67% English faculty member
14 Other faculty member
19 Non-faculty

32% Tenure-track
68 Non-tenure-track

61% Full-time
17 Part-time
22 No response

26% Assistant Professor
11 Associate Professor
4 Full Professor
37 Instructor/Lecturer
22 Other
(administrator, intern in clinical psychology, study skills specialist, etc.)

Section II (What is the term, range and source of your salary?) intended to determine if writing lab directors are receiving professional treatment in terms of salary and to find out where financial support is coming from--partly to determine if source of salary funding reflects departmental or divisional commitment. An encouraging note is the number of respondents earning over \$15,000 (32%) and over \$20,000 (31%), figures surely tied to the number of full-time, tenure-track faculty who serve as lab directors.

51% of the respondents are on nine-month contracts, 32% on 12-month and 15% on half-time. 48% of the salaries are paid by English departments and 41% by other sources including federal funds and colleges of education.

In Section III, we surveyed directors' responsibilities. While the need to advertise lab services and "sell programs" to faculty, deans, students, and the public is great, one essential concern in developing an expert staff--training tutors--is, in our view, far down on the list. Other duties and responsibilities the directors mentioned, in descending order of frequency were: advertising lab services, handling public relations, evaluating lab services, scheduling, developing lab exercises and handouts, teaching other courses, recruiting tutors, training peer tutors, tutoring.

In addition, directors perform a number of "other" duties. Among those included were: running spelling workshops, preparing materials for use in writing labs, sponsoring activities for returning adults, directing learning center programs, developing curriculum and courses, creating and supervising computer-assisted instruction, college placement testing, developing outreach activities, acting as a resource for faculty guest lectures, serving on university committees, doing graduate research, proficiency testing for graduation, maintaining equipment, editing staff writing, guest lecturing to other classes, writing reports for administration, and writing special projects funding sources.

In Section IV (Work load: how much time do you spend as director?), "teaching other classes" was mentioned by the respondents as a significant factor; they spend about half their time devoted to duties in the lab program. Many received no released time at all. Fourteen percent, however, reported no teaching load. The statistics follow:

Work LoadDo you get released time?

7%	0-9 hrs/wk	28%	None
4	10-14 hrs/wk	37	One course
24	15-19 hrs/wk	16	Two courses
28	20-29 hrs/wk	5	Three courses
24	30-40 hrs/wk	14	No teaching load
13	over 40 hrs/wk		

In Section V we selected six categories to describe changes that would improve a lab director's position. Higher salary was listed by 44% of our respondents and, therefore, was seen as the most needed improvement. More released time, a tenure-track position, the creation of an assistant director, and lower class load were mentioned by 20-23% of the respondents as important changes. Some of the most interesting responses appeared in the open-ended "other" category, including recognition/autonomy/status, more tutors, greater awareness of the importance of writing, funding, equipment and books, clerical help, better facilities, a full-time directorship, exposure for the lab and its work. Generally, respondents seek a situation that will allow a lab to enjoy recognition and freedom to do the job it was designed to do: help students become better writers. Reports of misunderstanding and lack of appreciation were frequent, but several respondents commended the support of their administrations and English departments.

Outlining the characteristics of an ideal directorial situation, respondents were eminently practical. The most frequently mentioned necessities are listed here: time, autonomy, research and travel, an adequate budget, permanence, connection with English department, bigger staff, prestige, space/better facilities, less tutoring by the director, faculty volunteers, freedom for teaching duties and expanded hours.

The last section of the questionnaire demanded a lengthy response, asking the following: Does your understanding of your function and responsibilities as writing lab director differ from the perception other faculty or administrators have of your post? The following list includes responses given five or more times and has been edited for succinctness:

- Others see lab as catch-all for problem students.
- No.
- Others don't realize how much work it is. Not a "soft" administrative job.
- Others see lab as fix-it shop, error

clinic, grammar lab.

- Others think lab is only to help composition instructors.
- Others view lab as a low-status, low-priority operation.
- Others see lab as release from office hours responsibilities for faculty.
- Not a tutor, but an administrative position. Others see me as a glorified tutor.
- Faculty don't cooperate.
- Administrative interference.
- Others expect me to be present too many hours.
- Others don't understand writing is more than grammar and punctuation.
- Others see me as a proofreader.

CONCLUSION

It is easy enough to interpret a bleak view of writing lab directors' functions from these data: faculty and administration see the writing lab as a remedial clinic, the director as grammar paramedic, and the service a substitute for office hours. There is, however, evidence in this study that lab directors are respected professionals doing important work and that the study of writing is a vital part of a university education. We hope to do additional work in order to determine what progress has been made in improving the status of lab directors. Certainly, the network of writing lab associations that is developing is one important step in that direction.

We recognize and thank those who helped prepare and distribute this survey and report, for without their help we would not have succeeded. Danny Rendleman, former colleague at the University of Michigan - Flint, suggested ideas and questions for the questionnaire. Fran Frazier, UM - Flint English department secretary, designed and typed the questionnaire and report and, assisted by student helpers Michelle Whalen and Albert Salid, made their distribution possible. Thanks also to Joyce Kinkead for giving us a spot on the CCC program to make our preliminary report and to Muriel Harris for the Writing Lab Newsletter mailing list as well as her good wishes.

Copies of the Survey are available from Patricia Murray, English department, DePaul University, 2323 West Seminary Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60614.

Patricia Y. Murray
DePaul University
and
Linda Bannister
Loyola Marymount
University

CALL FOR PROGRAM PROPOSALS

The third annual conference of the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association will be hosted by Boise State University on June 15, 1985. The conference, though mainly for writing center directors and tutors, also attracts a general audience of educators interested in the teaching of writing, both in college and in high school. The principal speaker will be Donald M. Murray of the University of New Hampshire, author of Write to Learn and A Writer Teaches Writing.

The conference schedule will allow for both 20-minute and one-hour sessions. Informal talks and demonstrations are preferred, but proposals for papers are also welcome. Suggested topics include: tutoring methods; tutor training; ways to get a writing center started; ways to make a writing center survive (and thrive); and the role of the writing center in the English department, the school, and the community.

When submitting a proposal, please include: (1) name, position, and institution; (2) title of presentation; (3) a one-paragraph description, including purpose, method of presenting the material, and content. Send proposals and inquiries to Richard Leahy, RMWCA Conference Chair,

English Department, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho 83725. Deadline for proposals is April 1, 1985.




CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The National Writing Centers Association, which is an NCTE Assembly, is calling for nominations to its executive board. NWCA will elect 3 representatives to serve 3-year terms on the board. At least one of the elected representatives should be from the secondary school, and another should be from the two-year college.

Please send your nominations and a brief professional biography to:

Joyce Kinhead, Executive Secretary
National Writing Centers Association
Dept. of English, UMC 32
Utah State University
Logan, UT 84322

Duties of elected representatives include attendance at the board meetings which take place at NCTE and CCCC. Results of the balloting will be announced during the spring.



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
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