

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in
one-to-one teaching of writing

Volume 15, Number 1

September, 1990

....from the editor...

Hello again. As we all slip into high gear- and the frenzy that defines the beginning of the new academic year- this year's volume of the newsletter promises some good reading. The articles in this issue continue to reflect the diversity of our work: tutoring artists and international students, using computers, expanding services, planning and/or attending conferences, and taking a few moments off to laugh at ourselves. For addicts of David Chapman's satires on writing labs, we're delighted to start the year off with yet another of his gems.

Hello also to an unusually large number of new friends in our newsletter group. The summer has brought a high incidence of those "help-I'm-starting-a-writing-lab" phone calls that so many of us have made or answered at one time or another. Are writing labs in another growth spurt? (Was there ever a lull?)

We look forward to hearing from the newcomers as well as the old hands.

-Muriel Harris, editor

....inside....

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The Writer's Journal and the Artist's Sketchpad

Somewhere around midsemester, Tony ambled into my office. He was five minutes late. Tony was always five minutes late, and always wore the trademarks of his profession. Tony was an art major; he was a painter. He wore the garb of an artist: faded jeans, usually decorated by a forest of rips and patches, a well worn tee-shirt, the obligatory red-rimmed eyes of late hours in the studio, and splotches of oil paint removable only by time. He also wore the expression of someone who was out of his element writing, and didn't mind anyone knowing his disdain for things non-art. He was there to discuss his plan of attack for his latest writing assignment- a discussion I was not looking forward to because I had seen little success with Tony all semester; I had few expectations of making him see the importance of revision in his work, let alone of all the other important tools available to writers.

As usual, Tony hadn't started on the assignment; his excuse was that he was trying to

figure a way around a problem in a painting he was working on. This excuse irritated me because it told me where writing stood on his priority list. However, it was the most important thing Tony told me all semester.

I am a painter, and so I started to talk to Tony about his painting as a way of breaking the ice. In the span of only two or three minutes, Tony radically changed many of my assumptions about teaching written composition. He did this by showing me his sketchbook and not a draft of his English paper. Drawings, not sentences, demonstrated that he understood the composition process maybe even better than I do. The problem that had been hindering Tony's performance all semester was not, as I had thought, his recalcitrance, but rather my failure to make accessible to him the composing methods and writing tools I preach. I was using catchwords and definitions meaningless to Tony, expecting that through repetition he would catch on to the method I was preaching-through repetition he would understand "invention," "revision," "drafting," and their pedagogical cousins. I might as well have been speaking to Tony in German.

As a serious student of the visual arts, Tony was educated in methods of composing. He already knew the theory behind what I had tried repeatedly to present to him in our one-to-one meetings; however, Tony didn't see that he had control over these writing tools. He didn't believe he could wield a pen to the same ends as a paintbrush. I had not helped Tony's impasse because I failed to let my knowledge of composition in visual arts enter into my understanding of written composition. I failed to make my instruction of written composition more effective by using the composing tools of the medium Tony was immersed in, to make writing less alien to him, to let him know he knew how writing was done.

I believe this type of oversight is a general one in composition instruction, and is one that results in much needless frustration for writing instructors and writing tutors. In the writing classroom there is often time for students to come to understand and use the composition tools essential to effective writing. However, the writing center does not usually have the luxury of repeated tutorial sessions with a student. Often there is a one-shot opportunity to get a student to recognize how some part of the

this one chance can have a greater success rate if tutors realize many of these students know how to compose, but these students often do not have a reference base of meaning for many of written composition's to

Tony is typical of the students who come to writing centers for help. More often than not these students' academic interests are not focused on writing. However, students from all over the campus are familiar, like Tony, with some method of composing. The engineer, the musician, and even the athlete know how to use the tools of a particular composition method: The engineer knows the initial idea of a bridge is probably unsafe, but can become a safe passage; the football player knows the big play only works when it has been run through and modified countless times. This familiarity with composition tools- discovery tools and revision for instance-can be used to make a student's introduction into good writing more efficient.'

I changed my tactic with Tony and began to explain writing and its goals by using a vocabulary that was not only familiar to him, but conveyed the same concepts as the writing terms I had used with little success.

Mature painters have developed a discovery process as an initial step in their system of

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is eight to twelve double-spaced typed pages, three to four pages for reviews, and one to two pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose self-addressed envelopes with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g., Aug. 15 for the Oct. issue).

Please send all articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly donations to the editor.

the tools carry different names, they are basically the same. What I call freewriting/brainstorming are methods painters have used for centuries as doodles and thumbnail sketches, methods Tony also used effectively. Both sets of artists are engaged in the same activity: putting pen or brush to paper or canvas in order to discover what lies dormant in their unconscious- what they feel, what they need to express, or what they want to investigate. These artists are involved in a process of initial learning and discovery- the same activity, but employing a different symbol system for a unique medium.

The importance of having a neutral ground on which to explore, accept, reject, or alter ideas is not lost on the painter. Tony knew the use of a journal: and, even though he called his a sketchbook, Tony used his sketchbook as I had hoped he would use his journal for my class. He went there to experiment away from the public eye. Tony eventually embossed "writing sketchbook" on the cover of his writing journal after he saw the similarity in the two vehicles.

While writers are creating effective voices, determining prospective audiences, and testing specific details, the painter is working through his own similar approaches to these problems. Tony determined his equivalents of tone, audience, and voice by experimenting with such elements of the composition as perspective, the lines of vision that create the painter's relation to his audience. Lines of perspective determine the exact relation and the type of interaction that the audience will have with the final product. The painter also decides on the arrangement of the internal elements of a painting, the final results of which will create the artist's tone and voice.

The importance of drafting to the composition process, including revision, has not been ignored by both the writer and the painter,² Both groups draft and redraft repeatedly to insure effective communication takes place among the artist, the audience and the text. I preach the power contained in the revision process for writers. Revision lets them fine-tune and hone their product to its most effective form. Similarly, masterpieces are rarely created on a first trip to the easel. While the presence of revision may seem obvious in the meticulous and tightly structured work of such masters as Leonardo DaVinci, Michaelangelo, Raphael, and

Rembrandt, revision plays an equally important part in the art of more modern painters. The sketchbooks of Van Gogh, Picasso, Homer, Klee, Dali and others are filled with as many drafts of their work in progress as are the journals of their predecessors. Painters and writers realize that "vision" and "re-vision" are essential to the creation of meaningful communication. This was the dilemma Tony was involved in when he came to my office. His sketchbook was filled with versions of the painting in question, none of which yet achieved Tony's goals. He was in the thick of revision.

The affinities between the composition processes of the written and visual arts continue after the completion of the drafting process. After the writer and the painter have restructured their work for the final time, they both continue to make important decisions that affect the level of communication. Polishing and the application of cosmetics are the order of business at this stage of composing. The writer proofs his final draft for the mechanical, typographic, and other errors that might impede communication. The visual artist also makes choices that serve as the final flourish. He chooses matting formats, selects presentation modes- non-glare or standard glass, etc.-making the necessary, but often disregarded, choices that assure that little will distract or impede the painting's audience from entering into an effective dialogue with the final product.

By trusting the validity of an insight, and relying on my knowledge of the way visual artists compose to explain how writers compose, I was able to make progress with Tony. But Tony was only one student. There were other students I worked with who were not artists. but chemists, accountants, biologists, agronomists, with whom I wasn't able to make writing as familiar because I do not know how these disciplines compose. I need to become familiar with as many composing methods existing within the university community as I can. While this task is daunting, it may need to be one goal of writing instructors and writing tutors if writing is to be made as integral a part of the university education as the Writing Across the Curriculum movement advocates. When students realize that they already know quite a bit about how to approach a writing task and that that knowledge comes from the familiar turf of the chemistry department, art department, agriculture department or even football

(cont. on p. 7)

What If We Stopped Writing Drafts and Started Drafting Writers?

The average annual income for most professional athletes hovers around the million dollar mark. Those of us who were told over and over by our parents, "Work hard in school if you want to amount to anything in life," are sometimes outraged by the financial success of athletes who think that "Guatemala" is some-thing to be ordered at a Mexican restaurant. We believe that in the great scheme of things an understanding of physics ought to be worth more than a good curve ball.

Still, for the general public, there's no disputing the relative entertainment value of the Super Bowl versus the College Bowl. It is unlikely that 80,000 people will ever gather together to watch a mathematical genius work out with a calculator, or, to bring the matter closer to home, that admiring throngs will gather around to see an All-Pro Tutor help a struggling student with a paper.

We can only imagine, then, what it would be like in another world and time where contributions to society were given the same status now accorded to grand slams and slam dunks. In the following scenario, the "Write 'n Raiders" are considering their draft selections for the coming year.

THE CAST

Tam "Scratch" Scribman: longtime coach of the Raiders

Alicia "Mucky" Bucksworth: general manager of the Raiders

Marsha Crowe: head scout for the Raiders Erma

Hawk: new scout, assistant to Crowe

[Hawk and Crowe enter the boardroom.] Hawk:
Have you seen the new uniforms?

Crowe: Oh yes, they're gorgeous. I love the mauve scads.

[Scribman and Bucksworth enter.]

Scrib: Ok, let's get started. This has got to be one of the best years for the draft since I've been coaching. Have you looked over the prospects?

Bucks: Yes, we have some terrific scouting reports. I think this is going to be a make-or--break year for our organization. Let's see what we've got.

Crowe: I think we oughta go with this kid from Texas- Tootle Rutherford-in the first-round. Everybody knows they eat, sleep, and breathe writing centers down. in Texas. Her high school writing center never lost a student all of the years she tutored there, and everyone knows the caliber of people coming out of that Texas Writing Program. Nearly all of them are starting for pro writing teams.

Hawk: I would go with Tootle, too, but r don't think she'll be left by the time our pick comes up. Now I've had my eye on a terrific line-editor out of Yale, Alice Fairchild-DuPont. Now I know the Ivy League teams aren't generally competitive with the big schools, but it's always been my philosophy to go with the best available intellect.

Scrib: Wait a minute. I know you girls recognize talent, but we've got to take the team's needs into consideration. We already have some outstanding pencil point-guards. But you know Simpson is close to retirement, and we need somebody who is tough inside. You remember how we got creamed last season when we took on that engineering firm with the legal problems. That new kid, Fenclemeier, thought a tort was some kind of an hors d'oeuvre, and we nearly got laughed right out of the place.

Crowe: Well, if you want class, then you're going to have to trade up. Stella Harris is probably going to skip her post-doe year and enter the draft this spring. If she does, she's almost sure to be the number one pick.

Hawk: I like Stella, too. I mean she just looks like a pro player. The glasses, that intelligent look in her eyes, that friendly smile. And her morn was a Hall of Foulter.

Scrib: You mean she's Mickey's kid?

Crowe: That's the one. You remember her '72 season.

Scrib: Over 400 conferences and a perfect E.R.A.

Crowe: All-Star Tutor for fourteen consecutive seasons.

Sail): I played for the Tablets the year she was with them. I once saw her go four-for-four with a bunch of the toughest basic writers you've ever seen,

Crowe: Yeah, and that was back in the days before the big contracts and the domed writing center, back when people used to tutor just for the love of it.

Scrib: You said it. These kids today, they want everything handed to them on a silver blotter.

Bucks: That's right, Scratch. And that's the problem with Stella. Even if we drafted her, she might be tough to sign. I hear she wants four million per year, plus incentives.

Scrib: Yeah, but just think what that name's worth. We could fill the stadium every Sunday.

Hawk: Not to mention the revenue from post-season play. This girl is a franchise player. I think we would be a legitimate contender for the Championship Write-Offs.

Bucks: You know what it would take to get a number one pick? We would probably have to trade Simpson.

Scrib: I never thought about that. Trade off the Doctor? Remember in '84 when she picked up a rough draft with five minutes to go in a tutorial, ripped it in two, and started brainstorming again? The client was horrified, but they came up with a prize-winning report.

Crowe: Yeah, people still call it the Immaculate Invention.

Scrib: No, we can't let the Doctor go.

Bucks: What's our alternative?

Hawk: I've got an idea, but I don't know if you

girls are ready for it.

Scrib: Let's hear it.

Hawk: Well, I have had my eyes on a recruit out of Ohio for a long time. Does the invention in less than five minutes. Really good grasp of revision strategies. Lettered in the writing center all four years. I see a lot of potential.

Bucks: Sounds too good to be true. Who is she?

Hawk: Well, that's just it. It's a he. His name is Eddie Corbett. I think he's pro material.

Scrib: Listen, Hawk, I'm sure he looks great in the men's writing leagues, but no guy has ever played on a pro team.

Hawk: OK, it was just a thought.

Bucks: So we trade Simpson to get Stella?

Scrib: I guess. But it will be rough breaking the news to the Doctor.

[Hawk and Crowe leave.]

Scrib: I'm worried about Crowe. What in the world is she thinking of - suggesting we hire a man for the big leagues!

Bucks: Yeah. Next thing you know, she'll be wanting a man to coach a writing center.

Scrib: (chuckling) That'll be the day.

David W. Chapman
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, TX

A reader asks....

Are there other institutions besides Lawrence University which have an honor code or code of ethics for tutors in their work with students? Such a program is in effect at Lawrence University's Writing Lab as described in a recent issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter*.

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Expanding Services of the High School Writing Center

Those of us who work in high school writing centers know that the struggle for establishment, recognition, use, and even funding, are on-going efforts, and we often spend much of our time and effort fighting for our very existence. However, I believe that the high school writing center can, and if possible should, offer expanded services which will increase awareness and use of and support for the center by students, staff, and the community. Offering some of these expanded services may help those who are starting centers and those who have existing centers to build further use of and support for their operation. I do not believe that anyone would disagree that the most important key to a successful high school writing center is the quality and dedication of those who work there, but quality and dedication alone are often not enough to generate adequate support. However, expanding the scope and nature of the services offered can increase use and recognition of the services and can build support for our efforts.

While I believe that the direct conference/tutorial work with students is the most important and rewarding work which centers can do, expanded student services can be valuable in increasing student knowledge of, use of, and support for the center. Early in the year, center personnel should visit each class-room to introduce themselves and provide information about the center and its services and invite students to visit. Signs about the center, announcements about center services, and "Tree Coupons" for visits in the center are excellent ways to heighten awareness of the center among students. Throughout the year, conducting mini-clinics about essay exam writing, book report writing, research processes and products, etc. before and after school or in study halls is an excellent way to provide valuable information to students and to further increase awareness of the center and its services. The center should also be the center for all writing contests, and arranging group work sessions for those interested in entering the same contest is an effective activity.

Publishing student works through the

center is also very effective in encouraging students to visit the center and in further heightening awareness of the center and its services. Often times, center personnel can work with the keyboarding instructors and have the keyboarding students print and duplicate the submissions to the center publication. I do not believe that a center publication should be a contest or have restrictions of any kind; the more student writing which is published and shared, the better for students and the center.

Other important student-centered services to increase use of and support for the center include offering study skills information and presentation, introducing word processing through the center, and opening the center a book swap area.

However, the center should not be limited to providing services just to students directly. Many important services and much valuable use and support can be gained by offering assistance to all content area instructors. All instructors should be encouraged to refer or suggest that students use the services of the center, and center personnel should be available to make presentations in all classes about study skills, essay exam writing, re-search processes and products, and other traditional uses of writing. Such in-class work is another excellent way to provide important information to students and staff and is a most effective way to help increase awareness of the center. Center personnel can then work with the staff and students as an additional re-source throughout the course or specific assignment. Center personnel can also work with all content area instructors in developing writing to show/share learning activities, and the center can become a storehouse of such assignments by subject matter, grade level, ability, etc.

Such activities are also important if a school is moving to writing-to-learn. The center can also become the storehouse for collecting and sharing writing-to-learn assignments among all staff members. The value of

the center as a resource center for all staff who wish to explore and use writing in their class-rooms is one of the most important. functions a high school writing center can serve, and it is one of the most effective ways to develop staff use of and support for center efforts.

The center personnel can also work with staff on their own writings for college or publication and can publish a regular newsletter of writings by staff. The publication should encourage and publish a summary of writing activities in classes, reviews of professional materials, opinion pieces, creative works, etc.; literally any writing by staff should be encouraged and shared.

Beyond the direct services to students and staff, the center can gain much important and valuable support by providing services which involve parents. For example, our center sponsors annual "Study Skills Nights" for students and parents. The evening is a series of mini-sessions about study skills, writing strategies, test-taking strategies, ideas for parents to help them help their children in language arts, and presentations by content area instructors who share ideas about study skills, note-taking, and test-taking in the specific courses. We also sponsor evening sessions for students and parents to help them successfully complete college admission essays and scholarship application essays. These evening sessions do require extra time and effort, but in terms of increasing awareness of and support for center efforts, these are among the most successful and important activities which a center can sponsor.

Writing centers should be an integral part of every high school, and center personnel should be recognized and compensated for their work and dedication. However, like many great ideas which are not initially recognized as great ideas, high school writing centers must often work to provide services and to increase awareness of and support for the services they provide. These ideas are some which have been successful for us, and we hope they may inspire others who need to build awareness and support for their efforts. If we can provide additional information, please contact us.

James Upton
Burlington Community High School
Burlington, Iowa

The Writer's Journal

(cont. from p.3)

practice, then writing will be a more applicable and thus a more meaningful task, Learning to recognize and use the similar composition methods existing between writing and the visual arts for instance can lessen part of the writing center's burden. The visual artist and the writer share many of the same creative tools and aids. By knowing where the methods of creative disciplines overlap, the tutor can use the language of the one medium to create a more natural and less threatening understand-ing of the other medium. In this way an effective dialogue is created, and learning is facilitated. Students are aided in their attempts to become better writers, the awareness of the value of writing is increased in the academic community, and the writing center can reduce its frustration level by establishing a medium of communication with part of their clientele more efficient than what was previously used.

Eric H. Hobson
University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Notes

¹The sentiment that the writing instructor can learn much about her composing in her own craft by examining the composition methods of other artists is echoed by Ann Berthoff in "A Curious Triangle and the Double-Entry Notebook: or, How Theory Can Help Us Teach Reading and Writing." The Malang of Akan dig. Ann E. Berthoff. Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook, 1981.

²An excellent discussion of compositional similarities in the visual arts and of how writing instructors can use painters' composing process to provide models around which students can improve their own composition process is Catherine Golden's article "Composition: Writing and the Visual Arts." Journal of Aesthetic Education 20.3 (1986): 59-68.

New Editors for The Writing Center Journal

Jeanette Harris and Joyce Kinkead are pleased to announce that Diana George, Nancy Grimm, and Ed Lotto will be their successors as editors of The Writing Center Jotter ad. The trio will begin as guest editors for the Spring 1991 issue of the journal with the official 3-year term (which is renewable) beginning Fall 1991 with Volume 12. The Spring 1991 issue will still be produced at Utah State University.

Manuscripts in the hands of the current editors will be forwarded to the new editors. Please send four copies of new manuscripts to Nancy Grimm and Diana George at the Department of Humanities, Michigan Tech University, Houghton, MI 49931 (phone: 906-487-2066; BITNET: DGEORGE@MTUSYS5). Inquiries about book reviews should be addressed to Ed Lotto, Learning Center, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA 18015 (phone: 215-758-3097; BITNET: EEL2@LEHIGH). Subscriptions and memberships will be accepted as usual by Joyce Kinkead at Utah State University (Logan, UT 84322-3200) until spring, 1991, when her term as executive secretary expires.

Job Opening

Wright State University, a commuter institution of 17,000 students, is seeking a Writing Across the Curriculum specialist to serve as Director of the university's newly-established Center for Writing. This is a 12-month, non-tenure track, renewable position. The starting date is negotiable.

The Center, an independent unit under the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs, will provide support for a developing writing across the curriculum program as well as house the University Writing Center. The Director will oversee the writing across the curriculum program, develop writing-related opportunities for faculty support and development, conduct workshops for faculty, consult with individual faculty and academic units, publicize writing across the curriculum within the university community, and teach 1-2 courses each year. The Director will also

oversee the activities of the Associate Director of the University Writing Center and will have responsibility for the budget of both Centers.

Candidates must have a Ph.D in an appropriate field, a strong background in composition studies, and substantial experience in writing across the curriculum. Some teaching experience and research in rhetoric, composition, and discipline-specific writing are also required. Preference will be given to candidates with administrative experience.

We will begin reviewing applications on October 10, 1990. Please submit application and resume by that date to: Randy Moore, Chairperson, University Center for Writing Search Committee, Department of Biological Sciences, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio 45435. This position is contingent upon funding. AA/EOE

Call For Proposals

We announce plans for a volume entitled *Writing Ourselves into the Story: Unheard Voices from Composition Studies*, a collection of essays to be edited by Sheryl I. Fontaine and Susan Hunter. This volume will provide an occasion for teachers and researchers who do not feel included in the story of our evolving discipline to voice unheard perspectives. Contributors might address the following broad questions: Are there ways that the pedagogics and research methodologies we find in textbooks, hear about at professional meetings, or read in the journals don't apply to our teaching, our research, or the political situations we're involved in? What problems do we think are most worth writing about that should be included in discussions of composition studies? Please send 1-3 page proposals for essays, stories, and research by November 15, 1990 to Professor Susan Hunter, Humanities and Social Sciences Department, Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, CA 91711-5990. For further information, call Sheryl I. Fontaine (711) 773-3163 or Susan Hunter (714) 621-8022.

Tutors' Column

Tutoring Teaches Tutors Too

Was it an insult or a compliment? There I was, a brilliant student who'd always received A's on her compositions, and my instructor was telling me that I ought to try working in the Writing Center because it would improve my writing. What did he mean by that? I was already an expert in punctuation, grammar, and spelling, wasn't I? His remark piqued my curiosity, and I decided to put his advice to the test. I was confident all the while that the Writing Center was about to get lucky.

"How do you know when to use parentheses and when to use brackets?" "My teacher said I had a problem with comma splices. What are they?" "Do two adjectives before a noun always need a comma between them?" These were just a few of the questions I was bombarded with in the Center, and to my horror I wasn't at all certain of the answers. Like many avid readers, I had an instinct for grammatical usage, but little knowledge regarding the whys and wherefores. So, I learned to reach for the handbook. This is perhaps one of the most valuable lessons tutoring has taught me: No one person knows all the answers, but there are a number of handbooks that do.

Helping students with their papers at the idea-generating and organizational stages was the most frightening thing confronting me when I first began tutoring. Like most beginning tutors, I felt more confident with small editorial details, such as correcting grammar and punctuation. But looking at the whole paper and suggesting organizational changes was intimidating indeed. As my work in the Writing Center continued, I've become comfortable with this type of tutoring, and learning to look at papers this way, searching for the larger picture, has enabled me to view my own work with a new, more critical eye.

Of course, in everyone's writing experience there comes a time when the ideas just

will not flow, when the block is big, or when, as an author, one just cannot see the forest for the trees. When these moments of panic hit, I remember the writing strategies that, as a tutor, I have been aimed with. In the same manner as I would work with a student who is blocked, I sit myself down and encourage myself to brainstorm and later use clustering or issue trees to organize my ideas.

When my attempts at self-tutoring fail, as sometimes they must, I take advantage of my association with my fellow tutors. They have been trained to have a compassionate, yet discriminating eye, and they are familiar with me, my style, and my work. From them I can receive gentle yet critical review. They know when to coddle and when to prod as they help to pull my best work out of me. Being a tutor provides me with my own personalized editorial and encouragement service.

That former instructor certainly was right. What I took at first to be an insult or maybe a left-handed compliment turned out to be the truth. Working in the Writing Center has improved my writing by showing me where to go for answers to questions, by teaching me how to teach myself, and by providing me with an informed and skilled writing support system in the form of my fellow tutors. Since taking that astute advice, I've found out more about what I know and don't know, and how to fix my own worse messes. Like my fellow tutors, I have made the marvelous discovery that in the Writing Center setting, it is the tutor who benefits most.

Marina Hall
Peer Tutor
Weber State College
Ogden, UT

**Calendar
for
Writing Center Associations
(WCAs)**

Oct. 5-6: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Minnesota.

Contact: Judith Kilborn,
English Dept., St. Cloud
State U., St. Cloud, MN
56301.

Oct. 11-13: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Salt Lake City, Utah.

Contact: William O.
Shakespeare, Reading-
Writing Center, 1010A
JKHB, Brigham Young U.,
Provo, Utah 84602.

Oct. 13: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in LaGrande, OR

Contact: Mark Shadle,
Writing Center, Eastern
Oregon State College, La-
Grande, Oregon 97850.

Oct. 26-28: Peer Tutoring in Writing Conference, in University Park, PA

Contact: Ron Maxwell,
English Dept., The Penn
State U., University Park, PA
16802

April 1, 1991: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Highland Heights, KY

Contact: Paul Ellis, Writing
Center, No. Kentucky U.,
Highland Heights, KY 41076

Conferences...Conferences...

**Rocky Mt. Writing Centers
Association Conference**

**Oct. 11-13
Salt Lake City**

**(meeting in conjunction
with RMMLA)**

For Rocky Mt. WCA portion of the conference, contact: William O. Shakespeare, Reading-Writing Center, 1010A JKHB, Brigham Young U., Provo, Utah 84602. For registration information, contact: Charles Davis, RMMLA, Dept. of English, Boise State U., Boise, Idaho 83725.

Call for Papers

**7th Conference on
Computers and Writing**

**May 24-26, 1991
Biloxi, Mississippi**

Send proposals and program inquiries to Rae Schipke, USM Dept. of English, Southern Station, Box 5037, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-5037, 601-266-5495 (Bitnet: SCHIPKE@USMCP6). For registration information, contact Julie Chaplin, USM Division of Lifelong Learning, Southern Station, Box 5056, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-5056, 601-266-4196.

**5th Annual Conference
of the
Midwest College Learning
Center Association**

**Oct. 24-26, 1990
Milwaukee, WI**

"Breaking Barriers to Learning"

Contact Johanna Dvorak, MCLCA Conference
Chair, UW-Milwaukee DLSEO P.O. Box 413,
Milwaukee, WI 53201 (414-229-5672).

**Pacific Coast Writing Centers
Association Conference**

**October 13, 1990
La Grande, Oregon**

**Keynote speaker:
Andrea Lunsford**

For registration information, contact Mark
Shadle, Writing Lab, 234 Loso Hall, Eastern
Oregon State College, La Grande, Oregon
97850 (503-963-2171)

**Call for Papers
13th Annual Conference
of the
East Central Writing Centers Assoc.**

**May 3-4, 1991
Highland Heights, KY**

Please send all proposals, requests for display
space at the Materials Exchange Tables, and
inquiries regarding registration to Paul Ellis,
Writing Center— 230 BEP, Northern Kentucky U.,
Highland Heights, KY 41076. Deadline for pro-
posals: Dec. 15, 1990.

**Scheduler, Record
Keeper, Teacher:
The Computer in the Writing
Program At Dickinson College**

The computer has been crucial to the success of our Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Program at Dickinson College. This program includes a writing component in the freshman seminars, a number of Writing Enriched courses throughout the disciplines, and it will soon include a Writing Certificate (similar to a minor in writing). In this program the computer has been used both administratively and pedagogically to promote collaboration and communication among our various constituents: students, faculty, Writing Center consultants and the administration. Specifically, we depend on the computer for scheduling, for record keeping, and for pedagogical assistance.

**I. The Computer for
Scheduling**

To encourage good writing habits and a more productive composing process, students in the Writing Enriched courses are given evaluative feedback on rough drafts of two essays. The feedback may come from the instructor, consultants in the Writing Center, or peers. Not surprisingly, most instructors rely on the consultants in the Writing Center to provide the feedback, and initially this posed lots of scheduling problems for us. Last semester, we offered 18 WE courses involving a total of 500 students- at a 1900-student campus. We had another 534 appointments with students who came in on their own or were referred to us. Demand for our services was so great that during some weeks our 20 peer consultants were booked for all of their 120 hour-long appointments

Without our computerized Writing Center Appointment Scheduler we would have had frequent appointment conflicts. Developed by one of our student programmers (and obtainable from us on a shareware basis for \$35), it has a number of sophisticated, work-saving features. The program, which provides us with up-to-the-minute appointment information, runs on our VAX-8600 minicomputer (VMS V4.7 computer system) which connects about 80 terminals around campus. Terminals are located in student computer rooms, dormi-

tortes and many faculty and department offices. As students call the Writing Center to make appointments, their names are entered into the Scheduler on the VAX terminal in the Writing Center. Printouts can be made as needed.

At the beginning of every semester, after consultants have chosen the six to eight hours per week they will work in the Writing Center, I use the program to make up "prototype" schedules for each of our working days. These prototypes have only the consultants' names on them and their working hours. They will be used over and over again every week, automatically turned into "working" schedules and given a specific date by the calendar function of the program. Student appointments are entered on the working schedules only.

The main advantage to having the schedule on the computer as opposed to photo-copied forms, for example, is that it can be quickly sent out to faculty using our electronic mail system. Faculty print it out for distribution in class. Students then sign-up for appointments, and the schedule is returned to the Writing Center where the names are entered again by computer. If you aren't likely to send out a schedule over electronic mail, another reason to computerize your schedule might be if your individual tutors frequently change their work hours. As we all know, revising essays, or schedules, on the computer is infinitely easier than retyping and re-photocopying them. You could easily devise a schedule using a typical word processor or templates available in database programs such as Lotus or Quatro.

II. The Computer for Record Keeping

As in most writing centers, our consultants keep track of a great deal of information about every tutoring session. This information is first recorded by hand on 3" x 5" cards. Later it is entered into Datatrive, a database reporting program also on our VAX minicomputer. The entering-on-screen template looks much like the 3" x 5" card. (Again, one could use any number of database programs for this purpose.) The Datatrive program can provide printout totals at any time for the information entered: total number of student visits; student visits by class, date, professor, consultant or department; time and length of visits; the kind of help that was provided, etc. This

program gives us rapid access to much useful information when we need it for budgetary, programmatic or staffing requests and decisions.

III. The Computer for Teaching Writing

Last, but most definitely not least, are the many pedagogical uses we have for our computers. Actually, word processing with spelling checking is the biggest single use we have for the computer. Since we teach writing as a process which involves revision, and revision is so much easier on the computer, students are encouraged to begin using the computer for writing early in their Freshman Seminars. This is possible since we have 100 micro-computers on campus- an assortment of Zenith and Leading Edge IBM compatibles and Macintosh SE's. Additionally, of course, some students own their own computers.

In the Writing Center we have two VAX terminals and three micros, and we offer three types of writing software for student use: invention programs, style checkers, and drill and practice exercises. These programs are advertised to faculty, and many are beginning to encourage their students to take advantage of them. As a pre-writing activity, students may come in to the Writing Center to use Idealog (on loan from the U. of Texas Computer Lab), or Access (developed by Donald Ross at the U. of Minnesota). These programs are quite typical of their genre in that they ask students questions based on Burke's pentad, the tagmemic grid, the journalist's W-questions, Aristotle's topic, etc. Students can get printouts of their answers for launching first drafts. Neither faculty nor student interest in these programs has been particularly strong, however. This is unfortunate because invention programs can be quite helpful in generating pre-draft content. It seems that when students are required to use the programs, they do admit their usefulness. But I have yet to hear of a student coming back to the Writing Center for an unrequired stint with one.

We also have programs known as style checkers in the Writing Center. As we are a two-system campus and have students and faculty on both Macintosh SE's and Zenith IBM compatibles, we use both MacProof and parts of writer's Helper software for this purpose. Both programs allow students to perform a number of analytical tasks on drafts written in

WordPerfect, our most popular word processor. Students obtain the Flesch readability scores for their essays, and have instances of "to be" verbs, "there is/are" constructions, nominalizations, sexist language, and other "weak" constructions pointed out. Problems arise when these are used effectively; students must be able to distinguish these instances.

We have made our own drill and practice exercises in the Writing Center using an authoring system called Teach Write, also by Donald Ross at the U. of Minnesota. We have units on our most common grammar and stylistic problems: pronoun agreement, parallelism, sentence fragments, wordiness, transitions, etc. The units consist of a few textual screens explaining the particular problem, followed by interactive exercises which students can do at their own pace. Students usually do these at the request of faculty or peer consultants who notice that they are weak in certain areas. Of course, if students have a particular aversion to working on the computer, they can be directed to the same type of exercises in a rhetoric or handbook.

A small group of faculty are comfortable with on-screen editing of student essays. Some have students send essays to them over the VAX, add between-line or bracketed comments and suggestions for redrafting, and then send the essays back to the students over the VAX. Other faculty whose students are using micro-computers have the students exchange floppy disks with each other for the same kind of inner-draft commentary and evaluation. Comments and suggestions are inserted into these texts in various ways: between brackets, in all caps, in boldface or using the "Text In" feature of WordPerfect. Many students and faculty, however, remain unconvinced that on-screen evaluating is any more practical, efficient or time-saving than the same procedure with a pen on hard copy. Perhaps our experimental use of MacProof will convince them that it is. One advantage MacProof has over the computer and manual processes is its capacity for easy grammatical commentary. Usage rules for common punctuation and grammar errors are stored in the program. When an editor finds one of these errors in a text, he/she has only to mark the spot by pushing a certain key. When the writer reviews the edited version and sees this notation, he/she pushes a key to discover the error and have the appropriate grammar rule or explanation appear on screen.

A final way we have used the computer in writing classes is with "Electronic Chain Journals." Students are sent a question on the VAX, and they send the question and their response to another student who does the same, chaining the process on to two or three more students. The responses finally make their way back to the instructor who may bring them to class for discussion. Students seem to find this activity interesting and, like other writing-to-learn activities, it seems to deepen their engagement with the subject matter.

These are the main ways we have begun to use the computer in our Writing-Across-the-Curriculum program at Dickinson. Some uses have been more successful than others, but there is no disputing the fact that the computer has taken on a lot of the administrative and pedagogical drudgery of running our Writing Center, I believe that it will continue to do so in more ways than we can even imagine today.

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New from NCTE

Encountering Student Texts: Interpretive Issues in Reading Student Writing. Eds. Bruce Lawson, Susan Steer Ryan, and W. Ross Winterrowd, Urbana, IL: NOTE, 1990. 244 pages, paper-bound. Price: \$ 14.95; NCTE members: \$10.95. (LC 89-49574).

This collection of fourteen essays examines a variety of issues involved in responding to student texts. While the emphasis is on the teacher's role as responder, tutors will find some useful reading here for considering the similarities and differences between the ways they respond and the way teachers respond. Discussions of traditional teacher response and student interpretation of that response will also help tutors define their role in this complex relationship set up when tutors add their voices to the teacher/student dialogue. In addition, several articles examining effects of teacher comments on students will also help tutors gain a better diagnostic perspective on the attitudes and perceptions that students bring to the tutorial.

"Help! How Do I Tutor the International Student?"

Tutors in a writing center often have special problems when confronted with the task of tutoring international students. To identify these problems and consider what can be done to help alleviate these concerns, I distributed a questionnaire to the tutors at Clarion University of Pennsylvania with the instructions that they were to answer as truth-fully as possible with answers reflecting their own beliefs, not what they think they are supposed to believe. To encourage truthfulness, respondents were asked not to identify themselves in any way. Fourteen tutors responded..

The first two questions asked the tutors to identify the major problems they face when tutoring international students and to decide which problem is most menacing. As expected, the major problem was identified as the language barrier. It is not surprising that each tutor listed this as a problem, but what was not expected was that several responses revealed that tutors often take more than their share of the blame for the problem. Tutors said that they have to learn to speak slowly and distinctly, not to use slang, idiomatic expressions, and fragmented sentences. Since the tutors are aware that all of these factors must consciously attended to, it is not surprising that the sight of an international student approaching them for tutoring would cause them to panic.

Another area identified as a problem was one of expectations. Often international students expect rules for everything and be-come upset with the tutor who cannot give a simple answer to the quirks of the English language. One student said that the tutor is expected to be an all-knowing creature. capable of solving any problem." Others felt that often the international student simply wants an editor. Both of these expectations cause problems for the tutor because rule-giving and mere editing do not solve long-term problems.

Related to the problem of the expectations of international tutees, tutors expressed a feeling of inadequacy in regard to the help that

they give. For example, tutors expressed concern over not knowing where to begin when they are presented with a paper riddled with errors. Even when errors are dealt with, the tutors fear that the tutees will be overwhelmed and discouraged and indicated that they feel unsure about how to make the international student more relaxed and comfortable during the tutoring session. A desire for training in interpersonal relationships was expressed by several respondents.

Adding to the feeling of inadequacy, tutors also sense that international students do not have as much confidence in them as they do in their professors. This was given as a reason why many international students hesitate to take the advice of the tutors, and as a reason why the international student be-comes upset when the tutor cannot give a rule that solves every grammatical problem. One student responded that he had been asked the following questions: "How many books do you have published?" and "How many classes do you teach?" These responses indicate that credentials are often important to the international student and may be responsible for some of the tutors' feelings of inadequacy.

Even though the tutors felt somewhat inadequate in their international tutoring sessions, the next question which asked the tutors to indicate how they know if the tutee is understanding what is being said reveals that the tutors do have good techniques that they use to insure understanding. For example, body language was cited as a way to judge comprehension. One student said, "I make or take more time to judge by the student's facial expressions whether he/she knows what I'm talking about. I don't let them just nod their way through a conference." Others said that they ask the student to repeat the advice or whatever has just been discussed. From the repetition, the tutor then decides if the tutee has understood. Another method that was suggested was to immediately have the student apply the technique or suggestion, thereby allowing the tutor to determine if understand-ing has taken place, From these responses, the

tutors seem to have effective techniques already in place for determining their effectiveness, and I suspect that these methods are used in all tutoring sessions, no matter whether the student is international or American.

When asked if they tutor the international student differently from other students, all but three of the fourteen answered yes. Tutors indicated that they ask for more feedback from international students, repeat themselves more frequently, and take more time. Conscious attention is given to using better English, to eliminating slang and idiomatic expressions, and to making the tutees feel at ease. One tutor said that he was more apt to "engage in conversation which involves topics other than those of the paper in order to get the student more at ease."

With all the problems associated with tutoring the international student, it was assumed that tutors might simply avoid the task if possible. The tutors honestly answered that they do avoid this type of tutoring because it is tedious and frustrating. Another one said that he did avoid a session at one particular time with one particular student. Overall, other respondents said that these tutoring sessions do take more time and require more patience, but one referred to it as a "wonderful experience."

I suspected that the time required for tutoring international students would be greater than the time for American students. All but two of the fourteen responded that more time was needed. The two responding negatively said that the time factor is not worthy of notice; instead, the emphasis should be on the needs of the student. Others responded that usually these sessions last at least an hour or more when attention is given to making sure that the student really understands the advice and suggestions that are given.

Although tutors indicated that they were often at a loss in knowing where to begin when tutoring the international, the answer to the question of what to do with an essay that has good content but is full of surface errors indicates that all but one said that they would focus on only a few errors at a time. One indicated that surface errors are often the only factor the international students want to

discuss; for them, "content is often secondary." One student said that the attention given to surface errors depends upon the class for which the paper has been written. (The student did not identify which classes are given the most attention.) Others suggested that they definitely stress content and then worry about surface errors. The general consensus of opinion was that to work with every error can become overwhelming and depressing for the tutee. The responses indicate that Clarion's tutors are sensitive to the needs and feelings of the students they are working with.

The final questions asked the students to offer future tutors advice on tutoring international students and to suggest topics that should be covered in a training session. One tutor summed up what several others said by offering this advice: "Be patient: don't be intimidated- you will learn much from this experience as well." Others suggested that tutors should be instructed on what to do with students who simply want a "quick fix" for their papers, and one was concerned about what to do with the tutee who wants to become "an English scholar in one sitting." One student pointed out that tutors should be encouraged not to take the easy way out and simply correct all the errors; instead, the tutor should try to help the tutee understand why the errors are errors. One sensitive to the frustration that is often a part of this type of tutoring advised future tutors to simply do their best and not to worry about not knowing everything.

The responses to questions in this questionnaire could be used to develop a training session specific to the needs of Writing Center tutors at any school because the tutors identify the problems that they feel exist. In conjunction with the specific needs they identify, the training should definitely include a discussion of how tutoring internationals is similar to the tutoring of any student as well as a discussion of the differences that can be expected. Patience is a part of any tutoring experience, but more patience may be required when the language barrier exists. The conscious effort that has to be made in speaking slowly and distinctly can be tedious and result in frazzled nerves. Perhaps an open discussion of what to expect with contributions from experienced tutors would help to prepare the new tutors for the experience. One student suggested that making an effort to put one's

self in the international student's place will encourage the new tutor to be more sympathetic and patient.

To prepare the new tutors for this tutoring experience, several papers written by international students could be provided to them, permitting them to see the typical kinds of errors that are made. By discussing the papers with other tutors, as a group they can decide on approaches to take in dealing with errors. Together they should be able to decide on which errors they feel are most detrimental to communication of ideas and from this decide upon which errors need to be focussed on first. Since we can't make "English scholars" out of the international students in one sitting, tutors should be advised to encourage these tutees to set up regular visits to the Writing Center. Doing this will help the tutor to limit the length of the visits; thereby often avoiding frustration that comes with long, tedious sessions.

Another issue that should be addressed is that tutors should not expect too much from themselves. One tutor suggested that tutors

should be "encouraged to believe that they are competent people and that they are expected to do their best, that is, a good job, not a perfect job." Tutors should be advised to expect some international students to be intimidating and demanding their desire to have everything perfect in their writing, and tutors should be encouraged to maintain the position of helper, not simply editor because the tedium of just editing a paper with many errors can be very unrewarding. If tutors can focus on only a few areas and do this over a period of time, they can feel a sense of accomplishment rather than failure.

Overall, the training of tutors for work with international students is not vastly different from training for work with any student, but preparing the tutor for the differences should help to eliminate some of the frustration that is a part of this type of tutoring.

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