

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 21, Number 7
writing

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of
March, 1997

...FROM THE EDITOR...

The *Writing Lab Newsletter's* goal (as you can see at the top of this page) is to promote the exchange of voices and ideas, and as I prepared this issue of the newsletter, I thought about all this conversation we engage in. In this issue, we have the voices of tutors, directors and other specialists in writing centers, as well as that of the NWCA President. And there are notices for conferences where the conversation will continue—at regional writing center associations, at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and at the NWCA meeting.

In this extended conversation, we also have one voice, Michael A. Pemberton's, that has remained a constant part of the discussion, asking us to explore a variety of ethical issues. This month, when he sent his column by e-mail, I was startled to see the subject line: Ethics Column #36. Yes, Michael has been thinking and exploring ethical issues, problems, and concerns for 36 columns. I hope you'll join me in a round of applause (and appreciation) for his sustained scholarship.

I hope you'll also join in the conversation at the many conferences coming up in the next few months where we can do some face-to-face talking as well.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Peer tutors: Coaches, benevolent dictators, models, and a barrage of pedagogy

As new tutors, we are inundated with advice. Most of it is friendly; some of it is even helpful. Since so many of the articles seem compelling and persuasive, we are faced with a bit of a dilemma. Which of the articles is correct? If we ask aloud, the response is always frustratingly the same: there is no "right" or "wrong" answer. Therefore, we as tutors must decide for ourselves how to weed out the good advice from the bad. We must learn to make use of the many available resources and decide what works best for us. Eventually, we will have to move past the black-and-white view of tutoring which marks our first experiences and adopt a more relativistic point-of-view.

Moving into this "there is no right or wrong answer" philosophy can be a little scary because with it comes the responsibility for whatever decision we make. Once we have made the transi-

tion, however, we should not be so quick to forget our initial hesitation and frustration. We are constantly reminded to remain firm in our resolve to relinquish responsibility for the session and for student papers, and we are consistently warned about how difficult this will be for us. What is too often overlooked is how difficult the same realization—that there is no right and wrong answer and yet we remain responsible for our own success—can be for our tutees. We need to bear this in mind because as tutors, our primary

goal is to help students with the transition from right-or-wrong, dualistic thinking to a more relativistic stance so that they can learn how to operate in this mode with some degree of confidence. We must help them see that although there is no right-or-wrong approach, there *are* some practical methods for assessing which approaches might be “more right” than others. Only then can they confidently seek help for the practical problems which will enable them to follow-up with those choices. It is one thing, after all, to purport to maintain the integrity of individual writing styles by not interfering with those styles; it is quite another to refuse tutees the benefit of your knowledge and practical experience in the name of “non-interference.” So, since we cannot make their choices for them, we should show them how to come up with alternatives, evaluate them, and then choose between them on their own. To this end, we must stop presenting ourselves as either traditional Coaches or Benevolent Dictators and instead learn to model the process of evaluating choices for the tutee.

The traditional Coach analogy is problematic for several reasons, beginning with the implied definition of what a Coach actually does: he is in charge of the game plan, makes strategic decisions and tactical choices, and orders players around based on his assessment of their strengths and weaknesses. For us, the problem arises with the realization that this idea of Coach is diametrically opposed to our tutoring philosophy of relinquishing responsibility. The inevitable result is that we first go through a lot of trouble to present ourselves as helpful and friendly Coaches and then, for no apparent reason to the tutee, withhold any straightforward assistance and throw the responsibility for the outcome of the game back onto the shoulders of the “player.” What has happened, of course, is that we have realized that this is really supposed to be the tutee’s

game and not ours. Unfortunately, the student, who has not had the benefit of the same realization, comes to an entirely different conclusion. The student who has asked about the best strategy for paragraphing, for example, can hardly then be faulted for regarding the Coach who has inexplicably withheld the answer from him as either mean or inept.

We are also taught that the traditional Coach persona is the ideal because it goes beyond the adversarial “student/authority” relationship. But how far does it really go? There always remains the implicit assumption that the Coach is some sort of authority. Even Cheryl Geisler, herself an avid Coach advocate, admits that “while she is not the sole authority, [the Coach] does have a contingent claim on knowledge, to insider information, to ‘tips’ and ‘procedures’ that the already-expert may be unable or unwilling to share” (111). In the eyes of both tutor and tutee, the Coach remains the expert who knows best, who knows what the teacher wants, and who knows how students can give it to him. It would be an exceptional tutee indeed who, given this frame of mind, could then keep from relying on his Coach for direction with his assignments. Certainly if writing were a clear-cut endeavor, if all essay requirements standard, stylistic preferences codified, and writing processes as formulaic as algebra theory, this would not be a problem. We could then just pull out the correct solution and apply it to the student’s assignment. Writing is varied and complex, however, and preferences and objectives differ even between teachers in the same department. It thus becomes not only arrogant but irresponsible for us to hold ourselves out as the experts to tutees who are so clearly scrambling for an authority to tell them what to do. Since, with few exceptions, we cannot know what the teacher will consider “right” or “wrong,” we must become relativists if only by default. We must rid ourselves of the Coach mentality, or at least shift

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its focus somewhat. We must move from being The Coach Who Will Help You Write Your Papers the Right Way to The Coach Who Will Help You Evaluate Your Options So That You Can Write The Paper Which Will Work Best For You.

Because this latter approach can be trying and time-consuming, however, it is tempting for us to take an easier way out: the Benevolent Dictator approach. For example, there may be at least ten ways to write an introduction, and any one of them may be technically correct. Yet only one or two may be truly effective or even appropriate for the student's essay. It is impossible in thirty minutes to introduce each format and then guide the student through an analysis of each one given his assignment, his own ability, his paper topic, etc. It is a lot easier to just suggest the appropriate (or easiest) alternative for the student. Sometimes, it also seems kinder. We have the best of intentions. We sense that it is wrong to glibly announce that "there are no absolutes" and then provide them with no way to cope. We all want to be helpful, and immediate, Band-Aid help is better than no help at all. Often, we assure ourselves that we are giving students confidence by suggesting they do something "easy"; other times we make choices for them and then merely explain the rationale for our advice to students so they can see why we suggested what we did. Yet giving them something "easy" to do, while certainly appropriate in some specific instances, does not generally build the kind of confidence that comes from learning how to handle something more challenging. Usually we don't even bother to explain what students *can* do well, so they often have no idea why we felt confident even suggesting what we did. These *ex post facto* explanations do nothing to show students how to make those kinds of choices in the first place. If we do not explain that there are many alternatives to choose from and take them carefully through at least two of those choices, how can

they learn to evaluate those choices independently for their next assignments? How will they even know what choices are available to them? As Beverly Clark observes, "perhaps the hardest thing for a tutor . . . to learn is that . . . he is not a dictator. The tutor . . . must learn restraint [and] help the tutee to correct and improve herself" (110). Not surprisingly, the tutee often has the same trouble in giving up the idea of Dictator, especially such a benevolent one.

Clearly both the traditional Coach and the Benevolent Dictator analogies are inadequate because they do not help the student in his transition to relativistic thinking. We will often go to extremes to break tutees of the dualistic, black and white thinking which marks their first visits to the Writing Center. Yet too often we are not taught how to provide tutees with any real practical way in which to learn to deal with the unfamiliar, multiplistic way of thinking. The sensible idea of relinquishing responsibility thus becomes nonsensical and even cruel when it is not followed up with explanation or justification. If we are so preoccupied with the first part of our job that we neglect the latter, the results can be disastrous.

Often the tutorial begins to feel wrong or silly to both tutor and tutee. For the tutee, the session can start to resemble anything from a nightmarish "who's on first" routine (Why do I need a conclusion? What do you think? I don't know, why do I? Well, what do you think? What do *you* think? and so on) to the more frightening scenario of the sadistic lifeguard grinning wildly as he waves the life-preserver back and forth over the head of the drowning swimmer. Sometimes a student just freezes up, paralyzed with the realization that there is no one right answer, and becomes unwilling to participate in the tutorial at all. Other students wrongly conclude—until they get their first essay back—that since nothing is inherently right or wrong, anything

goes. Others will simply agree with everything you suggest, no matter how ridiculous, because they are unable to see the value of or necessity for their own ideas. Still others figure it is just another hoop to jump through in order to pass a class and will wait amiably and patiently for twenty-five minutes for you to give them the payoff at the close of the session. As Chris Anson explains, "students [who are] just making the transition into the multiplicity of relativism often believe that the teacher knows the 'correct' way to write an essay but is craftily withholding this wisdom for the sake of pedagogy" (335). Others, "fearing that they won't find the answer in this game of rhetorical hide-and-seek, may cling desperately to what is tangible . . . the teacher's procedural guidelines" (335). It is significant that Anson's comments regarding procedural guidelines also apply to such things as voice, tone, and even subject matter, depending on the level of uncertainty felt by the student. Particularly sad and unnecessary is when, as Anson describes, students "try to guess what the teacher 'expects' them to do, without knowledge of any underlying reason for doing it" (336).

Thus, to prevent the student's feeling that college has somehow turned into some cruel cosmic joke, we must guide his transition to multiplistic thinking and help him to function comfortably within it. The first step in this process is to pay close attention to the tutee *as an individual*. We have the privilege and the luxury of spending some very personal time with our tutees, and we should take advantage of it to understand the tutee's current frame of reference. In order for him to make progress, the tutee as well as the tutor must understand where the tutee currently is "at." First of all, we should be aware that there are many reasons why a tutee is reluctant to accept a more relativistic way of thinking. It is uncomfortable and frightening to realize there are no absolute answers. Even in this age of pluralism and political correctness, there are serious practical

consequences (including not passing a course) to making some unwise choices. For this reason, even some of the most intelligent and hard-working students can be persistent and admirably creative about pressing us for those snappy insider tips. Furthermore, some hesitation is obviously a function of age and/or life experience. Many cultures, too, do not embrace our American ideal of so-called independent thinking and irreverence; students with a cultural background which values obedience and conformity may feel overwhelmed with newfound freedom in general and the initiative which it requires, let alone jump at the idea of removing the guarantees to success in college. For Americans, college is the traditional transition time from dualism to relativism, yet even among freshmen there is no way of predicting what stage a student is in.

As Anson illustrates in his very informative article, “Response Styles and Ways of Knowing,” the student in transition from dualistic to relativistic thinking often travels through several predictable stages. While it is certainly interesting to become familiar with the theory behind these stages, it is more important to just pay attention to the tutee, and to realize that he might be coming from an entirely different place or philosophy than we are (or ever were). Asking open-ended questions, using silence, or narrating our own experience encourages the student to describe his own ideas about writing. Personal judgments and points-of-view should be set aside as much as possible, and yet we are all products of our experiences and perceptions: an admission of this to your tutee can go a long way toward diffusing the impact of prejudices. Comments such as “This is how I think, but you or your teacher might think differently. Let’s look at the assignment and try to think through what might be workable for you” and “From what you’ve told me this type of argument paper might feel uncom-

fortable at first, but let’s try and come up with some ways to make it easier for you” are not only perfectly acceptable, but desirable. They demonstrate respect for the tutee’s position, admit to differences in teacher expectation, and relate confidence that his uneasiness can be overcome.

A forthright admission up front that both tutor and tutee will be working to learn how to come up with a variety of ways to fulfill any given assignment and ways to assess which of those would be better gives the tutee some direction and sense of purpose. By reviewing his assignment sheet, teacher examples, and previous notations, we can see how the tutee and his teacher felt about his previous work and help him to determine the direction he needs to take now. This type of approach works for developmental and grad students alike: whatever stage the tutee is in, we can help him go a little bit further. These types of assurances can be made quite explicitly. They will help the tutee feel more confident that not only are tutors trying to be of help, but we are bothering to find out how we can best be of help *to him*. If we treat our tutees with respect, they will be more willing to trust us with their concerns. The key to success is in learning and being sensitive to concerns and attitudes of our tutees and then taking them through their decision making process from there.

Admittedly, assessing what stage our tutees are in can sometimes be difficult. A student, for example, can be generally relativistic, yet fall into a more black-and-white thought pattern with a subject or essay form with which she is unfamiliar. In the chapter “Getting Started” in her book *Talking About Writing*, Clark reminds us of the necessity of being sensitive to and learning about the unique point of view of our tutees. She cautions new tutors that “first, you need to get to know the student. Even with one-shot drop-in tu-

toring, it’s important to spend time this way” (111). While Clark here is referring to just making the student feel comfortable, this strategy is also imperative if we are to make any progress at all in our modeling of relativistic thinking. I would go so far as to include not making *any* assumptions about the tutee at all, including that she knows what she has done well on her paper. Some poor students are not even given the luxury of perceiving the problem before a teacher or tutor has jumped in and solved it for them, but others are bewildered by praise over something they don’t really understand or have stumbled on by accident or instinct. This type of “praise” can be intimidating as well as unexpected: how can students repeat or improve on what they have done well if they have not really understood it in the first place? How likely is it that they will volunteer the information when they are not even sure what they have done right? By not making assumptions, we are forced to learn from students why they have made the choices in the writing of a rough draft, and we will be able to discuss this with students with regard to future drafts and other assignments.

Once we begin to pay close attention to our tutees and to encourage the expression of their concerns and opinions, we are then ready to show them how to function in a more relativistic mode. As tutors, we—not the teacher nor the text—are in a unique position to model multiplistic thinking in a practical way because we have so much one-on-one time with students whom we do not have to grade. So, after we have confirmed that there is no guaranteed way to get an “A,” we should show our students some commonsense ways to better their chances. First, we must teach our tutees to ask questions. It is their responsibility to make sure they understand assignments and terms such as “tone,” “voice,” and “audience,” and they cannot do well if they do not un-

derstand what they are supposed to be doing. We must not just tell them—we must make a point of asking them these questions directly so that they can gain experience talking about these subjects. (They can begin to “own” them.) Point a student to a writing center, his texts or his teacher for clarification. Then, by asking open-ended questions, we must find out how the student plans to approach the assignment. We can encourage her to articulate out loud the reasons for her approach. Has she always done it this way? Did her teacher recommend it? Model the process of evaluating the approach: if she includes a summary in her conclusion, how will this strengthen or weaken the paper? If a student uses a conversational tone, what effect will this have on readers? We must help students come up with alternative ideas. In what other ways could they conclude their papers? How might these new approaches change the finished work? Will the student still be fulfilling the assignment? By modeling in this way, we show our students that having more than one way to write a paper is not necessarily a bad thing: with it comes flexibility and creativity.

More importantly, modeling can help our students to feel more in control. Evaluating alternatives turns out to depend largely on common sense, something which is not so foreign to most tutees. Once they learn how to come up with different ideas and manipulate them for various assignments, they will not feel so overwhelmed nor be so dependent on others. By positing some hypothetical scenarios during a session, we can help students learn to solicit feedback on what the consequences of their decisions might be without risk of a bad grade. By incorporating this type of modeling into every tutorial, we also help keep ourselves out of students’ work. By asking questions—What do you want to work on today? Is there anything in particu-

lar I should be listening for as I listen to your paper? How did you feel about your paper when it was done?—we are consistently reinforcing that the control of the session is in their hands. Some students will respond comfortably to questions; others will not. We cannot be discouraged. The main point of the questions is to remind tutees that they are supposed to be in charge, that our time is at their disposal, and that we respect them and will wait for them to articulate their points-of-view. We must do them the courtesy of explaining why we are asking so many questions or remaining silent so much of the time. As we model alternatives for our tutees, we should explain what we are doing so that they can learn to do it for themselves.

Ideally, students should be learning

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to evaluate the suggestions that they have learned how to solicit. Since realistically even soliciting suggestions is not always easily—or even eagerly—accomplished by tutees, it is even more important that we learn how to give this confidence and reassurance through modeling. We can encourage them to be creative or even silly with their initial ideas to help initially free them up from a dualistic thought pattern and expose them to new writing methods which might be more comfortable for them. Later, alternatives can be narrowed down and chosen from. The tutee can learn to listen to his or her own “ear.” Because we have the time to explain and explore in a highly flexible and personalized manner, we can give students the benefit of the Coach’s expertise and experience without making decisions for them. We then need not play Benevolent

Dictator and offer them an easy way out because it will give them “confidence.”

Thomas Newkirk may be correct when he observes that “the teacher must balance two opposing mandates: on the one hand to respond to the student, to evaluate, to suggest possible revisions and writing strategies; and on the other to encourage the student to take the initiative, to make decisions, to take control of the paper” and that “there is no neat way to reconcile these mandates” (318). For the teacher, perhaps this is true. But it does not hold true for the tutor. We *can* reconcile these mandates by guiding the tutee through at least some of those intimidating possibilities. We can show them what they are doing well so that they can consider their own abilities in formulating their next strategy.

Discussions of audience can help the student consider that others might not have the same view and that even teachers can be dualistic thinkers themselves. As Anson observes, “what a teacher says to [and how he grades!] a student is saturated with the teacher’s values, beliefs, and models of learning” (354). All of this information is necessary for the student who must decide how to write a paper which is to be evaluated by someone else and who must learn to differentiate between one authority’s point-of-view and gospel truth. Through modeling how to make choices and discussing how those choices might be received, we are not just leaving students to assume responsibility for their own work: we are helping them gain *real* confidence in handling this responsibility.

Finally, we must remember that one of the most powerful—and too often actively avoided—ways to model relativism *and* help students assume their responsibility is to reveal our own weak spots as tutors. Explanations

which don't explain, clarifications which aren't clear, analogies which are clever but meaningless to the tutee—these problems can come up at any time during any session. These rough spots are our best opportunities to demonstrate some real-life modeling and the only time during a tutorial in which the tutee can witness, and participate in, a real-life dramatization of the “authority” struggling to convey an idea without the sure answer or easy explanation ready at hand. If we are trying to find the best possible answer or explanation to give to a tutee, why not think aloud so that the tutee can witness first-hand someone trying to come up with different approaches and evaluate them? These real-life lessons convey more than any clever speech or stock teaching trick can ever do, especially if we let the student in on our struggle. By welcoming our missteps as a natural part of the tutoring process, we demonstrate to our tutees the same confidence to get stuck, to keep trying to think of alternatives, and to risk, that we expect of them.

Clearly, it is not enough that tutors know who is supposed to be in control of the writing: the tutee must know it as well. Moreover, she must learn how to move from the more dualistic form of thinking to a more relativistic stance. It is the control and care with which this shift is accomplished which should be the primary concern of the tutor. If we are modeling for the student how this is done, we are giving the student a method or technique to hold on to when she becomes uncertain or overwhelmed. We are providing her the tools to navigate her own way. In that way, she can assume responsibility for her writing and her own personal success without her confidence being undermined or feeling abandoned and left out in the cold. Only then can the tutee learn how to assume that control in a positive, productive way and write the paper she wants to write.

Dana King
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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

- March 1: New England Writing Centers Association, in Providence, RI
Contact: Meg Carroll, Writing Center, Rhode Island College, Providence, RI 02908. E-mail: mcarroll@grog.ric.edu
English, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, PA 17815. Phone: 717-389-4736; e-mail: triley@bloomu.edu
- March 21: CUNY Writing Centers Association, in Brooklyn, NY
Contact: Gretchen Haynes, Writing Center, Library 318, Queensborough Community College, Bayside, NY 11364-1497. Fax: 718-428-0802; phone: 718-281-5001.
- April 3-5: Texas Association of Writing Centers, in South Padre, TX
Contact: Lady Falls Brown, 213 Dept. of English, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 79409-3091; e-mail: ykflb@ttacs.ttu.edu
- April 10-12: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Baton Rouge, LA
Contact: Judith G. Caprio: phone: 504-388-4077; e-mail: jcaprio@unix1.sncc.lsu.edu
- April 11: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Bloomsburg, PA
Contact: Terry Riley, Dept. of
- April 18-19: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Pittsburgh, PA
Contact: Margaret Marshall, Dept. of English, Cathedral of Learning, U. of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Phone: 412-624-6555; e-mail: marshall+@pitt.edu
- April 18-20: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Augusta, GA
Contact: Karin Sisk, Augusta College, Writing Center, Dept. of Languages, Literature, and Communications, Augusta, Georgia 30904-2200. Fax: 706-737-1773; phone: 706-737-1402 or 737-1500; e-mail: ksisk@ac.edu
- Sept. 17-20: National Writing Centers Association/Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Park City, UT
Contact: Penny C. Bird, English Dept., Brigham Young U., Box 26280, Provo, UT 84602-6280. Fax: 801-378-4720; phone: 801-378-5471; e-mail: penny_bird@byu.edu

Down and Dirty

(cont. from page 7)

- Center, the Reading Center, and so on.
- More training should be provided for our tutors.
 - Handouts should be displayed prominently in the hallway outside the Writing Center or in a kiosk

inside the door.

Brilliant or definitive? Of course not. But the total time elapsed in the exercise? Ten minutes. And the results were transmitted to the members of our faculty oversight committee, as well as the tutor training subcommittee to incorporate as components of their short- and long-range planning efforts.

Steve Whitney

Down and dirty assessment

Assessment need not always be formal and scientific. Insightful feedback can be obtained from tutors at any time through simple exercises inserted as mind fresheners during a more structured tutor training activity.

The English Department's Writing Center at Los Angeles Valley College (Van Nuys, CA) was initiated in June, 1993 by generous grant from a private foundation, the Alliance for the Advancement of Education. The foundation pledged itself to contribute approximately \$210,000 per year for a five year period. At the midway point, it seemed appropriate to invite the tutors to discuss our strengths and weaknesses.

We were in the midst of our two-day training session conducted at the beginning of each semester when everyone's mental energy seemed to tap out simultaneously. Time for a breather. "Okay," I said. "Let's take a moment to help out a neighbor." I named a nearby community college, and hypothesized they were about to create a writing center of their own. "They called me this week and asked me for recommendations. Based on our experiences of the past two and a half years, what should they absolutely do, and what areas of our program might they improve?"

From the perspective of our tutors, an ideal writing center should include the following:

- Adequate space is a must. We are housed in approximately sixteen hundred square feet, eight hundred apiece for the tutoring center and the computer center.
- Reference materials for consultation by the tutors and students are critical (including dictionaries, thesauri, ESL dictionaries, com-

puter tutorial software, and so on).

- Friendly, service-oriented tutors and computer lab monitors should be recruited, hired, and trained.
- Handouts should be prepared and duplicated in quantity on grammar topics, the writing process, ESL issues, computer software programs, and so on.
- Sufficient hours of accessibility should be maintained to meet the needs of the students, including evenings and weekends.
- Enough staff should be hired to be flexible in providing coverage for one another when emergencies arise.
- An open door policy should be maintained that encourages communication up and down the organizational ladder. When problems or conflicts occur in a writing center, everyone should be well acquainted with the procedure to resolve them quickly before they fester or escalate.
- Provide an ambiance that encourages students to come in and feel comfortable (lighting, carpeting, furniture, drapes).
- Maintain a non-threatening environment (including room arrangement, signage and staff attitudes) for the students.
- One of the most important elements is creative leadership on the part of the department chair, the faculty oversight committee, the writing center manager and the day-to-day supervisors.
- Strive for participative decision-making that invites opinions from English Department faculty, writing center managers, tutors and computer lab monitors, student users, as well as the faculty and staff of the college as a whole.

Areas in which another writing center should be encouraged to improve

upon what we are doing included the following:

- Communications between the tutors and the teachers should be increased. Tutors would like to know the specific requirements of the individual teachers over and above the generic demands of each course. On the other hand the teachers should have a clearer picture of what the writing center can and cannot do.
- Teachers should place copies of their syllabus, course outlines, and individual writing assignments in the Writing Center for access by the tutors.
- Teachers and tutors need to develop shared expectations for what can be accomplished when students come to the writing center. The tutors are *not* proofreaders, and not every single problem can be corrected in a paper within a single twenty- to thirty-minute conference.
- More publicity and outreach should be developed to contact students in classes outside the English Department. The word has still not gotten around campus that students writing papers for other departments are welcome to use our services.
- A wall map of the world should be posted in the Writing Center, and we could place a pin in each location or country of origin to reflect the international flavor of our clientele.
- Parking, better parking, closer and safer parking should be provided for the tutors, particularly at night and on weekends.
- Student support services should be centralized. At present, students shuttle from building to building as they visit the Writing Center, the Computer Center, Learning

(continued on page 6)

NWCA News from Joan Mullin, President

The focus of the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the New England Writing Centers Association is “Politics, Ethics, and Survival.” In a world of deconstruction, social construction and reconstruction of curricula, it would be difficult to argue that a writing center can be a-political or somehow objective, removed from the workings of the institution in which it operates. Yet many of our arguments have centered (pun intended) on how we operate on the margins, how we are somehow immune from the political concerns of other academic units, how we work with real students while others describe and talk to their versions of students—to a constructed student. In the last several years, we have seen all of these assumed writing center polarities come under question. Two recent situations exemplify the timeliness of NEWCA’s conference theme: this column’s February *WLN* call for a discussion of writing center accreditation, and a recent discussion on WCenter with the subject title: “What’s in a Name?”

The recent discussion over whether writing centers should create their own accrediting team seems to some like a sell-out to institutional practices from which we wish to remove ourselves. One claim that has been forwarded to me argues that by giving in to such institutional assessments, we are giving them power, acknowledging methods of evaluation which our philosophy and practice do not support. Another respondent pointed out that if we don’t create our own criteria, others’ measurements will be forced upon us; it is better to create an evaluation tool that we control than to have one created for us by those who don’t know what it is we actually do. Finally, a colleague e-mailed that to some, assessment is just frightening, no matter who is at the other end doing the evaluation. This director of a successful writing center

notes that most of us who facilitate our operation must tutor, train tutors, complete record keeping and paper work, teach, serve on school or college committees, deal with advising and/or parents; there is little time to design and collect data that relates to assessment. And so we assume we are doing a good job, we hope we are doing a good job, but fear whether the data will be able to bear out what we believe to be true.

Whether we like it or not though, how we evaluate ourselves or how we are evaluated (the political and ethical) has much to do with whether we survive in an academic era whose key words are “retention,” “enrollment management,” “accountability,” and “outcomes assessment.” We may know we are providing students with the means to succeed in high school or college, but if we cannot tangibly demonstrate our accomplishments, our centers will not survive the continuing budget and resource cuts. Right now, I face being compared to an academic services lab on a sister campus that boasts of churning three students per hour through their tutorials. The center has the numbers to show that they are effective in terms of efficiency. However, on our campus, “retention” ranks slightly higher as a priority than “numbers.”

Using these follow-up data collected from tutees and their instructors (questionnaires, phone interviews, tracking of grades), I am able to make retention claims the other lab lacks: students and faculty who use our Center attest to the long range positive effects that transfer to other writing contexts. By using the political currency afforded by the term “retention,” we will be able to continue what I would call ethical tutoring. In order to survive, however, I had to demonstrate that the assessment instru-

ments being favored (numbers) did not necessarily prove the desired outcome (retention) was achieved. Using our own assessments, we could demonstrate a closer link between our way of tutoring and student success, between our objectives and the administration’s.

The second case that shows the importance of NEWCA’s conference theme involves Roberta Buck, from Western Washington, who asked colleagues on WCenter what they call their centers. She pointed out that the term “writing center” refers to a place not a program which, in her case, encompasses general education courses, writing fellows and writing in the disciplines. Several colleagues replied that their communities were satisfied with the “Writing Center” or “University Writing Center” label because, as I think is true on our campus, the name has come to mean all those “processes.” Alternative suggestions included “The Writing Place,” “Academic Resource Center,” “Writing Lab,” “The Writer’s Center,” “Writing Support Services,” “The Re-Writing Center,” (thanks, Bob Barnett) and, simply, “Bill” or “Sandra” (courtesy of Carl Glover). On every campus, each one of those names has a political and ethical implication that affects a writing center’s survival.

For example, anything hinting of remediation in our state is now under fire. For a writing center, that would mean avoiding terms like “academic support,” but even the term “writing center” may still smack of remediation to members of our State Board or legislature. While I’m pushing for links that would allow us to call ourselves something like the “Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence” (even though I don’t like the binary), Pat at KU pointed out that because their writing center served only faculty, moneys

(continued on page 16)

TUTORS' COLUMN

Respect: Ground rule #1 for the writing conference

"He that respects not, is not respected." —G. Herbert

Dr. Gustav Brodel, distinguished researcher and heavy metal rock guitarist, presents to the scientific world his theory that within every light wave exists a small population of undetectable and useless light creatures—that are born, reproduce, and die within a nanosecond—called Shinetians. Because his research cannot be falsified (the Shinetians are completely undetectable), it is immediately accepted by the scientific world. Pittsburgh Steeler linebacker, Bob Gruel, picks up a fumble, pulls out his 9 mm Beretta from his waistband, and fires into the chests of several players trying to prevent his fifty-yard scamper to the end zone for a Steeler touchdown.

What seems wrong with the aforementioned events? What is missing? The ground rules. Dr. Brodel neglected to follow the fundamental assumptions of science that all theories must follow from inductive reasoning and be capable of falsification. Linebacker Bob Gruel violated a basic rule in the National Football League that use of weapons is unnecessary roughness.

Common to any well-functioning system, game, or discipline is a set of basic beliefs or ground rules that hold it together, rules that are so fundamental to the given enterprise that everything would collapse into chaos in their absence. These ground rules have such a significant role in defining the enterprise and guaranteeing its desired results that they must *always* be followed. Respect—for the student, for the tutor, and for writing—functions as the most basic and fundamental ground

rule of the writing conference. Without respect, meaningful discussion and instruction in the writing conference become as difficult to attain as a touchdown in a football game with automatic weapons.

The first necessary condition for an atmosphere of respect to exist in the writing conference is that the tutors must respect the writers. Tutors must have respect for student writers as intelligent and capable individuals. Many tutors believe in respect. In fact, they may demand it of their students. A tutor who creates an atmosphere of respect for the student also allows for feelings of trust and acceptance to enter the tutor/student relationship. This opens up the discussion, allowing more meaningful dialogue and a higher quality of instruction. An atmosphere of respect will also remind the tutor to preserve students' authorship of their papers. If we respect the intelligence and creative ability of writers, we should always seek to maintain their ownership of the paper. Moreover, if we respect writers' uniqueness and individuality, we should encourage them to use their talents in unique and individual ways, not in our ways.

Another component of tutor respect for the student is that the tutor should believe that he/she can truly benefit from the writing conference experience with the student. I know a tutor who will not complete a writing conference until he feels that he has gained an insight or helpful hint from the discussion. He says that oftentimes it is a new way of describing an object or event that he has described a thousand times before. For example, he once came across a metaphorical description

of a summer sunset over the ocean as a fading Chinese smile. When he asked for a more detailed explanation of the relationship, the writer, who had lived in Asia, filled the next five minutes with experiences and perceptions that brought her to such a comparison. If tutors feel that they can improve their own writing skills through meeting with the student, then the conference is transformed into a worthwhile enterprise in which both the tutor and the writer have goals they want to attain.

The second necessary condition for an atmosphere of respect in the writing conference is that students must have respect for tutors. Without it, the writing conference breaks down. While optimally, the writing conference should be considered a meeting of equals, the student must not forget that the tutor's suggestions probably result from a great deal of training and experience, and should not be rejected out of hand. The following excerpt shows the difficulties of a conference in which the student, Emmitt, does not respect the tutor, Amy:

Amy: While I like what you're telling me about the relationship between Sid and Nancy, I would much rather have you show me.

Emmitt: I just thought it's kind of stupid to go through all of that stuff just to let the reader know that in spite of his violent behavior, Sid really loved Nancy. I mean all that does, really, is bog down the paper.

Amy: That's true. Too much might interrupt the flow of the story, but, as a reader, I really want to get a feel for what their relationship was like.

Emmitt: Well, you're not the only reader! Aren't you going to check my grammar or spelling or something?

The student must possess a certain sense of empathy for the tutor's difficult job of aiding writers in revising, editing, and correcting their work. There must be a willingness on the part of the student to dispense with ego long enough to dispassionately and objectively listen to the advice and response given by the tutor. An unteachable writer is usually a poor one. The student must realize that the tutor (no matter how bad) should have something to give, and that it is in his/her best interest to listen.

Unfortunately, there is no quick and easy way for the tutor to guarantee a student's respect. Oftentimes a tutor's efforts to encourage mutual respect turns into a situation much like the first conversation mentioned above, where the tutor tries to intimidate or bully the student to create respect. Tutors must simply try to lead by example. A respectful tutor usually has respectful students.

The final condition for an atmosphere of respect in the writing conference is that the tutor and the student writer must respect writing. If there is a deep respect for the art of writing, then there is usually a desire on the part of both the tutor and the student writer to improve.

A desire to improve their own writing is an important characteristic of successful writing tutors. If tutors remain static and satisfied with their own writing abilities, the students suffer. Tutors who cannot push themselves to higher levels of written expression will most certainly experience difficulty motivating their students to do so. A dynamic and unsatisfied tutor is the tutor who benefits students most. In the following dialogue between Latrell (tutor) and Gini we see the possible effects on a student from a writing con-

ference with a static and satisfied tutor:

Latrell: Your paper is fine. Just clear up the grammatical mistakes and hand it in.

Gini: Really? I don't feel like it's ready yet.

Latrell: Sure it's ready! It gets the job done. You fulfilled the assignment. Why worry?

Gini: I just thought that this part at the end seemed kinda awkward. Maybe I should. . .

Latrell: What? You wanna be a Hemingway or something? Listen. You're a pretty good writer. The great writers were born with the gift. You reach a point where you realize that you've gone as far as you can go without starting to waste time improving things that nobody cares about anyway.

The student must also consider good writing a significant intellectual value. Without it, the conference is a failure. A student can receive the best instruction and suggestions possible, but without the desire to improve his/her own writing the writing conference is of no help. Writers who share this respect for writing are usually more teachable, more open with their goals as writers, and more enjoyable to work with. The following excerpt demonstrates the dynamic and meaningful discussions that can take place between a tutor (Amanda) and student (Jen) who have this respect for writing:

Jen: You know, I have a bunch of questions I want to ask you before we get started. Do you mind?

Amanda: No.

Jen: Ever since I started college I've wanted to improve my character dialogue. You know, make it more real and believable. When I started writing this short story, my dialogue seemed weird and awkward. Any suggestions?

Amanda: I've got the same problem. What I've been trying to do is imitate the dialogue of a writer whose characters always seem so believable and natural.

Jen: Who's that?

Amanda: Bobbi Ann Mason. What I do is I re-read her books, paying more attention to the way she does the dialogue than with the story itself. Then, I just spend some time each morning trying to imitate her style.

Jen: That's a good idea. I've always liked Mark Twain. Maybe I'll. . .

Tutors must find creative ways to cultivate and nurture students' respect for writing. One thing that has worked for me is that I try to demonstrate my love and respect for writing by sharing passages from my favorite books, or lines from my favorite poems—encouraging them to do likewise. It surprised me how this simple method oftentimes sets a tone of respect for writing throughout the conference. Another possible method that I am dying to try is to show students the power and satisfaction of writing by sharing significant writing experiences. Let your creativity and love for writing transform the writing conference. A deep respect for good writing cannot help but be infectious.

As tutors, we need to respect student writers as intelligent and capable individuals by valuing their experiences and writing. We must try to benefit from the writing conference. While we cannot ensure students' respect for tutors, we can still foster an atmosphere of mutual probity in the writing conference by cultivating in students an admiration for writing. A profound respect for writing is oftentimes powerful enough to break the barriers preventing mutual respect.

Just as science and football have basic rules that define them, so, too, do successful writing conferences all seem to have one common element that holds everything together—respect. With it, the writing conference

WRITING CENTER ETHICS

Administrative contexts and ethics, Part II

In last month's column, I began to articulate what, to me, seem to be some of the critical institutional, situational, and pedagogical contexts within which writing centers work, and to begin to tease out some of the ways in which these contexts shape our ethics. The *Institutional Site* (college, high school, etc.) and *Institutional Positioning* (in terms of where the writing center lies in the chain-of-command) were identified as significant determiners of ethical policy, and from time to time the latter context can be manipulated to provide writing centers with a greater degree of institutional autonomy and, thereby, control over their own ethics.

In some circumstances, writing centers have chosen (or been forced) to relocate themselves administratively as a way of protecting their interests and budgets, and quite often this seems to entail moving out of English departments and into other institutional domains. At Illinois State, the writing center has become a part of the Center for Learning Assistance under the Vice-President for Minority Affairs; at Texas Christian University, the writing center is under the Associate Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs; and at Missouri State University, then-writing center director Eric Hobson shifted the center out of the English department to the Office of the President of Academic Affairs. Hobson did so, he says, so that the writing center "wouldn't be perceived as serving one particular group" (Sherwood 8), but the decision is also likely to have a significant impact on the ethics he (or his present successor in the position) might construct for the center. Being

located, administratively, at the same level as a department should—at least in theory—provide the center with a greater degree of institutional insularity and autonomy, if not necessarily power.

A decision about what to do in a circumstance like the situation described last month—when a department head strongly urged special consideration for an unruly, but well-connected, student—may also be closely tied to another important administrative factor linked to writing center ethics: the *Director's Status*. A writing center director who is a tenured member of the faculty (or who has similar job protections) is in a much better position to stand firm by his or her ethical decisions as, except in extremely odd or unusual circumstances, conflict will probably lead to lingering unpleasantness and, perhaps, reduced funding, but not to the loss of his/her job. (The possible loss of tutor jobs is another story.) Untenured writing center directors, directors whose position is in a non-tenure faculty line, and directors whose appointments are based on a renewable annual contract are on much shakier ground when they wish to take a firm ethical stand. In these circumstances, maintaining goodwill becomes a matter of personal and professional survival, not merely a simple statement of principle. (And according to David Healy's 1994 survey of writing center directors, a majority of directors—56%—are not tenure line faculty, and 31% do not hold a faculty appointment at all [31].)

A writing center's *Relation to Other*

Academic Programs is another feature of its administrative context that influences ethics. Is the writing center autonomous, or is it only a part of a larger "Learning Center?" Does it offer courses of its own for which a tutoring component is central, or is it purely a drop-in tutorial service? Is it a "service unit" with responsibilities to all departments across campus, is it a "departmental adjunct" with obligations only to the students enrolled the department that funds it (typically an English department), or is it a "remedial" service with a duty to serve only at-risk or underprepared students? In some respects, these questions are tied to the context of *Institutional Positioning* described earlier, but they actually have less to do with how the writing center is located in the administrative framework of their institutions than they do with which constituencies the writing center is meant to serve and how those constituencies conflate with other academic/teaching units. How does this sort of positioning affect ethics? In the most basic way, it determines which students have a "right" to use the writing center, which tutors are the "most qualified" to work there, and which teaching strategies are deemed the "most appropriate" to use with students from particular classes.

By the same token, a writing center's *Relation to Other Writing Programs* can play a role in the construction of its basic policies and ethics. Writing centers may have a wide variety of responsibilities and institutional relationships to writing programs administered by other campus units. A sampling of such writing programs might include

first-year composition, English as a Second Language, basic skills courses, business and technical/professional writing, creative writing, and writing across the curriculum. The particular role that writing centers negotiate with each of these programs can clearly vary a great deal (Waldo). Some programs may want writing center personnel to work closely with them, providing detailed information about specific assignments and common problems and expecting reports from tutors on the details of conferences (as is the case at Boise State University [Leahy "Writing Assistants"] and the University of Virginia, Knoxville [Wallace]). Other programs may be content with a general "hands-off" policy, letting the writing center tutors provide whatever help they think best for individual students and assignments. And even other programs may want to impose strict guidelines about what they do NOT want tutors to discuss with students—such as the evaluation of resource materials, the construction of workable theses, or in some cases, anything other than basic grammar and format information. (In some extreme cases, writing programs—and other departmental courses—have specifically *forbidden* their students to visit the writing center for help with their papers (Hayward; Sullivan; Dossin; Masiello and Hayward). In such circumstances, how should writing center personnel respond if one of these students comes to the center for help regardless? Once again, a decision about what constitutes an ethical response to this situation will no doubt be determined by many factors, not just the wishes of an individual department or instructor.)

The mechanics of student *Visitation Policies* represent another aspect of a writing center's general administrative context, one that has fairly clear implications for at least one dimension of writing center ethics: who can use the center and how they can use it. On the one hand, visitation policies can impact a writing center's potential client

base. Can center tutors meet with all students across campus? Only certain students? Only students enrolled in particular classes? With graduate students? With faculty? With campus support staff? With members of the local community? Institutional policies and regulations about the eligibility of academic and non-academic groups to make use of campus services will likely dictate some of the decisions writing center directors must make about who can meet with tutors, but gray areas exist where directors must exercise their own ethical judgments.

On the other hand, visitation policies also touch on the institutional configuration of a writing center and its overall instructional mission. In some writing centers, appointments are made on a completely voluntary drop-in basis. Students are encouraged to come to the writing center of their own volition, to make appointments with tutors at their convenience, and to work on whichever writing project they wish at any stage of the writing process. In other writing centers, such as at Long Beach City College, students literally take writing "courses" from tutors, receiving assignments, meeting with the same tutor on a regular pre-scheduled basis, and conferencing about specific topics at specific stages of the writing process. Between these two extremes are many variations that appear in different forms at different institutions. Students may, under some circumstances, be required to see tutors in the writing center by instructors (Dinitz and Howe). Under other circumstances, requiring students to visit may be prohibited by writing center rules. The ethics of visitation policy within each academic institution may themselves be subject to question and revision from time to time, or they may be accepted as a given framework within which ethical standards are devised.

Just as institutional regulations will shape visitation policies in important ways, they will also shape the *Hiring Practices* that a writing center must

follow. Who gets to work in the center, how much are they paid, and what is their status in the campus community? Tutors may be full-time or part-time, undergraduate students or graduate students, faculty members or members of the outside community, academic professionals or academic staff, contracted employees or temporary adjuncts. Institutional requirements and long-standing policies will determine, in part, who a writing center director can consider for tutorial positions and who he/she cannot. And departmental politics may also come into play if, for example, the director wishes to ensure that a variety of undergraduate majors are represented among the tutorial staff, or if an influential faculty member strongly recommends one of his or her students for a writing center position. When making decisions about who to hire as a tutor, directors must often weigh a variety of factors in the balance, many of which may point to different outcomes (Benson). The person who is "most qualified," for instance, may not be the one who best furthers writing center interests in the larger picture. Is it better to hire yet another well-regarded and highly recommended English major on your staff (when better than half your staff is composed of English majors already), or is it better to take a chance on the anthropology major whose writing sample looks pretty good and whom you feel would work well with students? In 1987, Jay Yarmove argued strongly for a "cosmopolitan" writing center, one staffed with tutors "who are masters of a particular content area as well as of the principles of writing" (8). The expansion of WAC programs and the continuing debate about the need for tutors to have disciplinary expertise (Hubbuck; Pemberton) may persuade some center directors that the anthropology student would be "better" to have on staff than the English student.

And as a final pair of general administrative contexts worth mentioning, the level of *Operational Support* and

the *Physical Location* of the writing center are important as well. As I mentioned earlier, a writing center's funding is often quite tenuous and constantly in danger of being pared from budgets in lean times. One of a center's most significant operating contexts, then, is the amount of money it has available to keep itself going. Available funds, as might be expected, will impact nearly all aspects of a writing center's operation, from whom and how many people it can hire to whether or not it can keep a coffee machine perking in the office while it is open for business. Secretarial support, travel funds, subscriptions to professional publications, computers, and even photocopy privileges are only possible if money can be found to provide them; all too often, however, that money is earmarked for other, supposedly more important, academic goals (Amato).

The physical location of the writing center—be it in an English building or a campus library or a “refurbished” broom closet—will play a role in who “owns” the space and what sort of student traffic is likely to discover it and make use of its services. Similarly,

the amount of physical space available to a writing center will also influence how many tutors can be working at the same time, how they will be arranged in their work-spaces, and what other resources—reference files, reference texts, computers, supplies, offices, etc.—can be made available to students or tutors.

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“The Grand Buffet”: 1997 South Carolina Writing Center Association Meeting

Association Meeting

The South Carolina Writing Center Association (SCWCA) began its ninth year by holding its annual meeting in Charleston, SC, on January 25, 1997. Representing seventeen universities and colleges from across the state, approximately fifty writing center directors and peer tutors came together at the cooking school of Johnson and Wales University. As befits the host school, the theme of the conference

was “The Grand Buffet”; indeed, directors and consultants alike presented “nourishing” information in a smorgasbord of sessions, according to SCWCA President Christine Helms.

The hallmark of the SCWCA is its ever popular “What Works for Me” panel, where lab directors share how they have solved various problems. This year the session focused on accountability (for both tutors and students), publicity, and sources for computer software. Because of the conference's theme of “The Grand Buffet,” the directors and tutors ended

Wallace, Ray. “The Writing Center's Role in the Writing Across the Curriculum Program: Theory and Practice.” *Writing Center Journal* 8.2 (Spring/Summer 1988): 43-48.

the meeting by listening to a metaphoric discussion of how “Food is Communication,” presented by Robert Lukya, Chair of the Arts and Sciences Department at Johnson and Wales. Showing a clip from the Oscar-winning film *Babette's Feast*, Mr. Lukey described how food relays messages.

The SCWCA will meet next year in Charleston, SC, under the guidance of President Christine Helms (Johnson and Wales University). For further information on the 1998 meeting, contact Tom Waldrep, Writing Center, MUSC, 171 Ashley Avenue, Charleston, SC 29425.

Building blocks make strong centers

For thirty years, tutors in the writing center at St. Louis Community College-Meramec have been helping students improve their writing skills. For the last twelve years as the faculty director, I've been looking for ways to help the tutors develop their own skills.

Our tutors at Meramec are all professionals with teaching or business experience, so they bring a wide variety of skills to their work. Their first responsibility and greatest love is working with students, of course, yet it seemed a shame not to use these other talents. How could I encourage them to use these other talents by taking on more responsibilities in the Center without giving them raises or bonuses? Would I be on the receiving end of their resentment if I asked them to do more than tutor? These are the questions I kept considering as I thought about how we could run the College Writing Center (CWC) more effectively.

As director, I wanted to keep the Writing Center staff happy, but I also wanted to use their many abilities to benefit the Center. In the past, I had tried to manage the CWC through participation. Tutors regularly provided me with insights and advice as I made decisions about our daily working conditions and planned for the future, but I had not assigned major responsibilities to others. I knew it would be good to do so because it would strengthen the Center. As the tutors worked with other College departments such as Community Relations, Printing, Counseling, and Human Resources, they would develop a global view so they would understand both the possibilities and limitations of change. And certainly, students would benefit from working with a knowledgeable staff

enthusiastic about tutoring.

So I decided to share the daily responsibilities of the Center with the tutors. I wanted to alter the rigid structure of the director's role, figuring that if more of the staff had input into running the Center, learning and performance would improve. Little did I know then that my decision would alter, in turn, the structure of the Writing Center, and in so doing, test an alternative systems theory from Peter Senge. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge states that institutions have to alter rigid structures to improve performance. According to Senge, "Structure produces behavior, and changing underlying structures can produce different patterns of behavior" (53). When I asked for advice, the tutors gave it willingly—but they still looked for me to make the final decisions. If I wanted the tutors to take genuine responsibility in areas other than their tutoring, I had to change the system so they could.

I knew that the right structure creates trust and that trust allows growth. Thus, I felt I should simply reconfigure the structure—rethink the paradigm—in order to grow. Trust would take care of itself, I reasoned, because our tutors are professionals who tend to stay. Each of three part-timers and one full-timer has more than twelve years with us; our other two full-timers and five part-timers range in tenure from a new hire to a five-year staff member. The newly hired staff need about two years to feel comfortable with our many activities and offerings, but once they have learned the job well, they need regular challenges to continue growing. Asking them to take on some additional responsibility would provide that

challenge.

First, I made a list of the Center's non-tutoring jobs. Then, I looked at the kinds of characteristics needed to succeed in each job. After spending hours thinking about it, I came up with this list:

Training: writes training videos; writes and updates training manual

- Needs people who break tasks into component parts, explain clearly, understand what is and is not important, are systematic.

Information: writes weekly newsletters, communicates with faculty both formally and informally

- Needs people who are curious about people and events, see multiple sides of the same problem, convey information clearly, understand what is and is not important.

Organization: evaluates handouts, creates system to revise dated handouts, follows up on revisions, monitors printing, distribution and master files

- Needs people who show initiative, provide creative solutions to problems, are persistent, lead others.

Evaluation: writes student survey, compiles and analyzes data

- Needs people who know appropriate questions, analyze data fairly, follow through, share information concisely.

Support for ESL Students: helps ESL students, writes weekly tips for faculty and staff, confers with staff about ESL solutions

- Needs people who appreciate other cultures, are willing to take risks, see beneath the surface, are

resourceful.

Support for Computer Lab: aids students, monitors computer lab

- Needs people who enjoy machinery, investigate, can translate technical language into everyday language, like to solve problems.

Graphics: creates signs, creates inviting environment, creates logo, designs material for record keeping

- Needs people who display imagination, express mission through graphics and design, find visual solutions to problems, persist until satisfied.

After I finished the list, I thought carefully about the staff members and who had which skills. Sometimes the match between task and tutor appeared obvious, but often it was not. For instance, the ESL specialist needed training in the theory and praxis of teaching English as a Second Language; we

were fortunate to have someone with those skills, so I knew she could write weekly training tips for the rest of us. We also have a staff member with an unusual organizational ability—give her a chaotic mess and she will not only create order but also create a system to maintain that order; she was a natural for the organizational tasks.

I worried that the staff would think I was sloughing off my responsibilities on them. I also worried that they would resent my asking them to do more work on top of tutoring which, as we all know, can be exhausting. But they were enthusiastic and eager to take on new jobs. Because we have a walk-in center, we have slow periods, and the staff wanted to make that time count. Also, they were excited intellectually about learning new things.

Since I've shared jobs with the tutoring staff, we have seen an explosion of energy. The weekly newsletters (now

that I'm not writing them) have had a greater variety of news, our 100 + handouts have been reorganized with many of them totally revised, we have written a new training video, we have a new and more informative evaluation form for students, our ESL staffer has written weekly ESL tips which have gone from our Center throughout the College, we have new tip sheets for students new to computers, and we have easier-to-use forms for record keeping.

These days, I often smile when I think of my former worries about shared responsibility. Sometimes, I find myself quoting Senge. Motivation and learning are not heightened by jazzy incentives and staff development programs. ~~Sometimes, they can only be~~ achieved by shaking up the structure.

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**Idaho State University
Academic Skills Center Director of Reading Program**

Applications will be reviewed beginning March 1, 1997; position open until filled.

Date of Employment: Fall Semester, 1997

Salary: Commensurate with experience

Position Description: DIRECTOR READING PROGRAM, nine-month position in Academic Skills Center, Division of Student Affairs. This is a new position. The Director will develop, provide, and evaluate a reading program for college students with a full range of reading services: 1) develop and teach credit and non-credit courses and workshops; 2) establish a Reading Lab for computer assisted diagnosis and instruction; 3) provide individual diagnosis and instruction when appropriate; 4) recruit, train, supervise reading tutors and/or adjunct instructors.

Minimum Qualifications: Master's degree in reading or literacy, or closely related field. Experience teaching reading at post secondary level preferred; secondary experience considered. Must demonstrate excellent instructional, communication, administrative, and supervisory skills. Experience with computer assisted instruction and instruction for adults with learning disabilities desired.

Send letter of application, resume, one-page position paper on the role of a university reading program, all transcripts, and names of three references to Ken Prolo, Director of Human Resources, Box 8107, Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID 83209. EOE/AA Employer.

NWCA News

(cont. from page 8)

could not be used for "another" writing center for students. By changing their name to "Writing Consulting: Faculty Resources," they are now in a position to receive funding for "Writing Consulting: Student Resources." Such moves are political, but, I would argue, in order to survive, our actions need to be political. Whether taking such a stance is ethical or not underscores the need to reflect on our own constructed assumptions about who we are, what we do, and why we do it.

Let's hope that some articles, ideas and links along with writing the issues for all of us will come from the New England website, developed and maintained by Bruce Pegg, is an excellent resource for writing centers:

<http://www2.colgate.edu/diw/NWCA.html>

Call for Papers

The Writing Program Administrator as Researcher: Inquiry in Action and Reflection

tion

We invite abstracts for a proposed collection focusing on aspects and prospects of research in Writing Program Administration: what it is, who does it, how it is done, what are its purposes, how is it similar to or different from other research in rhetoric and composition studies. Possible areas of focus include, but are not limited to: 1) ethical, political, and methodological issues for research situated in writing programs; 2) distinctive characteristics of research in specific kinds of writing programs, e.g., writing centers, WAC programs, professional writing programs, first-year composition programs; 3) definitions or descriptions of a specific type of research in writing

program administration, e.g., action research, group inquiry, historical work; 4) ways in which WPA research informs other academic contexts and professional communities.

Please send 500-word abstracts and brief descriptions of the author's work in writing program administration, including institutional contexts, by July 1, 1997. Drafts of selected papers will be due November 1, 1997. Send abstracts to Shirley K. Rose and Irwin Weiser, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356. Address inquiries or questions to either Shirley Rose (telephone: 765-494-3742; e-mail: roses@purdue.edu) or Irwin Weiser (telephone: 765-496-2205; e-mail: iweiser@purdue.edu).

THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

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