

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 23, Number 8

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing April, 1999

...FROM THE EDITOR...

This is indeed a month of activity: winding down (of the academic year), unpacking (from conferences past), and/or gearing up (for conferences still to come). To add to all that movement, this month's newsletter does some turning back—to first principles and basic practices.

Joan Hawthorne examines a question that continues to concern us about directive tutoring. In answer to yet another perennial quest, to demonstrate how effective tutoring is, Stephen Newmann shares his yearly report that portrays tutorial effectiveness in terms of grades students receive. Michael Pemberton probes the ethical questions involved in responding to student papers with controversial content. And Tom Grau and Kellie White remind us that a little humility as we tutor is still a good thing. These authors offer us fuel for topics we will surely continue to discuss at the forthcoming Northeast Writing Centers Conference and then the National Writing Centers Association conference, both coming up soon (see the Conference Calendar, page 7, if you need details). For those planning to attend these conferences, travel safely. Have a great time—and enjoy some great conversation.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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"We don't proofread here": Re-visioning the writing center to better meet student needs

During a recent Midwest Writing Centers Association conference, I found myself noting a curious contradiction. In presentations, speakers seemed to assume that all conference attendees shared a commitment to a particular model of writing center pedagogy, a model which is often ascribed to Stephen North although Jeff Brooks more fully articulates the pedagogy in his essay on "Minimalist Tutoring." The unspoken understanding in these sessions was that tutoring is about improving the writer, not the writing; practice must follow from that premise. If our focus is on the writer, so the logic goes, directive tutoring is out. If our goal is not to improve the writing itself, editing and proofreading are inappropriate.

But informal, one-to-one conversations during the conference seemed to carry a contradictory subtext. "Of course the paper is important," was the contrasting message. "Writing center tutors work on editing and proofread-

ing because those are important issues to teachers and students alike. Sometimes we use directive tutoring because sometimes it's the best strategy to use." In only one session did I hear these conflicts explicitly mentioned. And yet the issues at stake are bedrock for writing center directors and tutors. They address questions of who we are and how we practice. Their implications are both ethical and practical, and their impact extends to virtually every conference held within writing center doors.

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. If possible, please send a 3 and 1/4 in. disk with the file, along with the hard copy. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

Several years ago I began thinking about the difference between improving the writer and improving the writing. My interest was originally prompted by a small, "practice" project on observational research I conducted in a writing center. I watched and listened as the writing center director tutored perhaps a dozen individual students, and I rarely heard her "tell" a student what to do. Directive tutoring, she told me, was not part of her center's pedagogy—a pedagogy shaped by her familiarity with oft-cited articles like those by North and Brooks. But I noticed during my observations that her questions were usually chosen with a purpose in mind. She asked questions to help students notice and identify issues of concern that she saw in the writing. How was that different than a more openly directive style of teaching/tutoring/consulting that might allow the tutor to overtly point out a problem with organization, or to offer a potential correction of a grammatical problem?

But it was my own experience as a writing center director that really sharpened my focus on questions of tutoring pedagogy and ethics. When I became director of the University of North Dakota Writing Center, I had no immediate agenda for change. Only one writing center practice stood out in my mind as a significant concern—the habitual response to students who began a request for an appointment by asking for someone to "proofread" the paper. The Writing center staff, like many tutors elsewhere, were encouraged to handle those requests with a polite but simple response that went something like this: "Well, we don't proofread here. But we could look at your paper together if you like." I flinched every time I heard that language. Students, I thought, focused on the first and negative message: "No." Furthermore, I believed that students often asked for proofreading because they lacked the vocabulary and/or experience to know what they really needed or the kind of help they

wanted. And if they truly wanted to work on proofreading, I thought, tutors could at least make sure students learned something about self-editing. A friend or roommate, on the other hand, was likely to simply pencil in changes (many of which might in fact be incorrect).

So I asked our consultants to change that piece of their practice. Instead of saying "We don't proofread," consultants were asked to respond to those requests by saying something like "We'd be happy to take a look at your paper with you." In the course of the session itself, a fuller discussion about the student's needs and the limits of writing center practice could be negotiated. Over the next few months, this small change in language became the impetus for several conversations about the purpose of the writing center itself. I found myself asking questions like these during our staff meetings: What do we do in the writing center? What do our choices about what we do mean for us? What do our words about what we do convey to students? Who gets advantaged or disadvantaged by the choices we make? Who do we really serve? Of course, we were not the only writing center staff wrestling with such problematic issues. I found there was no shortage of reading material, much of it very current, to share with my tutors.

We began with the Clark and Healy piece, "Are Writing Centers Ethical?" where we found a challenge to the idea that the non-interventionist tutor is always (or perhaps even usually) the most helpful to students. A proactive new writing center ethic, they asserted, must "move beyond Stephen North's oft-quoted dictum that '[o]ur job is to produce better writers, not better writing'" (43). My next contribution to our discussion was based on a conference presentation by Nancy Grimm. As part of a call for a shift from a modernist to a post-modernist perspective on tutoring, Grimm challenged conference attendees to consider who is advantaged

and who is disadvantaged by standard tutoring practices. That consideration seemed applicable to our questions about how much directivity is appropriate and how much editing can fairly be done within the collaborative structure of a writing center conference.

As my focus on these questions sharpened, I found more and more materials available to help me think about my own assumptions and those of the writing center establishment. We read the Shamon and Burns essay, which pleaded for a broader notion of appropriate writing center practice—broad enough to include both directive and non-directive practices. We found Angela Petit's article, which argued that rigid theoretical notions of what the writing center does are unnecessarily restrictive to all of us, not least to those tutors who must depend on them (rather than years of teaching and conferencing experiences) for guidance in shaping their own practice. We re-read Andrea Lunsford's early article about the three basic pedagogical stances in writing centers, and found that her criticisms of "storehouse" and "garret" centers lent further credence to our concerns about how to draw boundaries that appropriately circumscribe good writing center practice.

We returned as well to Stephen North's writing, since he is so often cited as the person responsible for anti-fix-it shop, anti-proofreading, anti-directive pedagogies. A close reading convinced me that North offered a broad vision of tutoring pedagogy. Writing centers, North argued in an essay written for English department faculty, should be "student-centered," and tutors should "begin where the writers are, not where we told them to be" (442). Tutoring strategies can include "the classical discipline of imitation;" tutor and student can "both write. . . . We can ask writers to compose aloud while we listen, or we can compose aloud, and the writer can watch and listen" (443). In sum, I concluded that narrow interpretations of North's de-

scription of writing center pedagogies have over-simplified the case.

As the center director, I found myself looking too at tutor training materials. Manuals by Leigh Ryan and Irene Clark seemed to suggest to new tutors (by omission, if nothing else) that directive tutoring was a generally inappropriate practice. Recommended strategies instead included "active listening, facilitating by responding as a reader, silence and wait time to allow a student time to think" (Ryan, 17). Taking a somewhat broader perspective, Clark acknowledged that editing and proofreading have a place in the writing process, and suggested that tutors might help students in that phase of the process by identifying patterns of error, teaching grammatical terminology, and recommending strategies for effective proofreading.

While puzzling over how to apply all of this in our own writing center, we talked about the similarities and differences between writing center conferences and teacher-student conferences. There, too, issues of authority and expertise are complicated, which is perhaps why so many students and teachers feel some frustration with the whole process. We concluded that conferencing is indeed complex, and that simplified answers—work on the paper, not the student—are unlikely to provide an adequate or appropriate framework for the variety of situations we encounter in the writing center. And the complexity of our ethical choices becomes clear when we look at even a few of the situations that confront us every semester.

Writing center cases: Notes from the semester

Many of us encountered a young woman from Russia, a business graduate student who frequented the center this semester. Natalia (as I'll call her) is in one sense a wonderful student to work with. She's a skilled writer who brings in clear, lucid prose—papers that are readable even to tutors who

come from non-business backgrounds. Her ideas are well-organized and fully-developed. Natalia's concern is editing. Like so many ESL students, Natalia wants to "sound like an American" to readers. In truth, her writing is better than acceptable, but Natalia is a perfectionist. She is often able to identify potential errors, but, she explains, it's much more difficult to know which of several possible alternatives is "right" given a specific syntax. Is time spent with Natalia an appropriate use of writing center resources?

Many of the difficult choices we face have nothing to do with second language issues. Over about a two-week period this fall, our writing center staff saw close to 100 students from a finance class. Two teachers had chosen to offer extra-credit points to students who brought their papers to the writing center prior to turning them in. As finance students began streaming through the writing center doors, I went to the teachers to find out their rationale for the bonus points. Both teachers saw writing as an important skill for students in their discipline, and they wanted to communicate that emphasis to business undergrads. They hoped to encourage students to work on their writing in advance, so that students would develop good work habits and (ideally) learn to self-correct many of their errors in both form and content. Through offering the bonus points, these teachers told me, they thought that some of the badly-constructed, poorly-thought-out, last minute papers that students commonly write might be avoided.

As we dealt with the 100 junior level finance students, we realized our own academic limitations only too clearly. We were unable to bring topic expertise to the conference. If students had missed important implications or reduced complex ideas to simplified (or even inaccurate) generalizations, we didn't know about it. In other words, we couldn't tell a good idea from a bad one. On the other hand, we found that

we could encourage students to work toward clarity, and to think about what they were saying and how they were presenting the information. But in many cases, the most helpful comments we could make and the most useful questions we could ask were about editing and proofreading issues. When we negotiated agendas with students, editing concerns were usually among the issues that students hoped to discuss. After the papers were due and we had time to clear our heads (and discuss the whole process at a staff meeting), we found ourselves asking difficult questions. What was the best possible use of writing center time for those students? Was it appropriate for us to see them at all, given that the primary motivation most of them had for visiting the writing center was bonus points?

Of course, tutors in our writing center also see many students with more traditional writing needs. During the past couple of months, I occasionally worked with Jason, a Comp I student who was disappointed with his college grades in writing. Formerly an A-B student, he visited the writing center because his first two college comp grades were in the C-D range. Although he brought in complete drafts, each of which represented several hours of work and multiple early drafts, we dealt with idea development, thesis, and organization. I worked with him by using questions that allowed him to figure out what he wanted to say, and more questions that asked him to figure out how that related to what he had already done and what he might want to do next. The sessions with Jason were classic writing center work. They raised no troublesome concerns about inadvertently crossing the boundaries of what is reasonable, appropriate, and ethical in terms of writing center pedagogy.

Sessions like those with Jason are satisfying and comfortably unproblematic, but they represent only

one portion of our writing center work. Tutors need to be prepared to see someone like Jason, but they also need to be prepared—and to expect—to see students like Natalia or those in the finance classes. Especially when undergraduate tutors work in the center, it is critical to develop a training program that adequately prepares tutors for the full range of students they are likely to encounter.

Training tutors for writing center work

In preparation for my most recent tutor training workshop, I developed a handout to help us think about how we work in the writing center. On one side (see Figure 1), I included Ryan's three categories of techniques for working

with students—active listening, reader response, and silence/wait time (17). During training sessions and role plays, I emphasized the importance of those techniques and made sure that each new tutor was comfortable using them. That side of the handout described conventional wisdom about how to work in the writing center.

On the other side of the handout (see Figure 2) I added a fourth category of strategies, "Directive tutoring." I went on to provide some detail about what directive tutoring might look like and how it might be used productively in a tutoring session. Then I listed key questions and issues that I suggested we needed to think about in conjunction with directive strategies. We

Tutor Techniques / Strategies at Your Disposal

Active Listening:

- validate via "I hear you saying"
- paraphrase to double-check understanding and show attentiveness
- question to encourage more thinking, greater comprehensiveness:
 - OPEN* questions for rapport building, generating more background information
 - CLOSED* questions for gathering specific information
- "I statements" to demonstrate reader reaction, need for more information
- body language to show interest, friendliness, approval

Genuine Reader Reaction:

- "I statements" regarding your expectations, understanding, reactions
- requests for more information ("Why did you say this?")
- requests for clarity ("What do you mean here?")
- questions to probe purpose, generate depth ("So what?")
- questions to generate new perspectives, develop new connections among ideas ("How are these ideas related?")
- questions to generate follow-through ("What next?" or "What would that mean?")

Silence and Wait Time:

- the pause that forces the student to think something through for him/herself
- if more wait time feels counter-productive, rephrase the question and still leave the move up to the student
- give the student more than a few seconds of think time by stepping away from the table
- provide the student with still more think time by giving a small writing or listing task and coming back to look at it in 2-5 minutes

Figure 1. (Adapted from Ryan, *The Bedford Guide*, pp. 17-23)

Directive Tutoring: What Can It Look Like?

- Providing (requested or not) a correction
- Providing a word or a sample sentence
- Directly answering a question about the student's writing
- Providing a variety of sample options that might work
- Modeling the writerly habit of brainstorming options and thinking them through to determine how each might shape the paper
- Showing the connection between precise language and meaning by offering sample wordings and demonstrating how meaning shifts
- Engaging in a back-and-forth discussion with the student where both of you generate ideas, meaning, ideas for organization
- For further discussion:
 - ✓How do you know when directive tutoring is appropriate?
 - ✓Helping students through even very minor editorial issues can be extremely slow and inefficient (and can feel patronizing) if directiveness is strictly avoided.
 - ✓The questions we ask and the agenda-setting we do can steer students in a particular direction. Is it non-directive simply because it's in the form of a question?
 - ✓Writing center conferences are negotiated events between the student and the consultant. There is no "right answer" or "best conference" to use as a guide. If students leave the conference (a) with a slightly better paper, (b) as a slightly better writer, and (c) feeling comfortable with the center and likely to return so you can continue the work that was begun, you've had a "good enough" conference.

Figure 2.

talked specifically about editing and proofreading, since it is frequently in conjunction with those issues that tutors feel student expectations for directivity most strongly. But we also discussed complications of easy definitions, for example, questions that become directive in their pointedness, or approaches to proofreading that leave primary responsibility in the hands of the student.

As we concluded our discussion of issues raised through the handout, I told them quite frankly that I work on

editing and proofreading side-by-side with students, when that's what they feel they need most. I admitted that I am no purist, automatically rejecting tutoring strategies as directive. I also told them I expected them to rely heavily on Ryan's three suggested strategies for most of their writing center work and to decide for themselves how to deal with the complicating issues raised by our discussion of writing center taboos. And I promised them they wouldn't have to find their way through this thicket by themselves. As long as I find the questions

so troubling, I said, they could expect we would continue to discuss these issues in our regular staff meetings.

This flexible approach is consistent with the overall structure of writing center sessions, as I imagine them myself and describe them for new tutors. Every session can be imagined to consist of four activities. First we develop rapport, usually through introductions and simple conversation about the course or assignment. Second, we negotiate an agenda for the 30-minute conference. During this stage, student and tutor usually negotiate fairly openly. "What brings you to the writing center?" the tutor may ask. Students might respond by saying they just want a "second opinion" or someone to "proofread" the paper. Tutors may follow up by saying something like, "What kinds of issues would you like to look at in this paper?" or "We could begin by talking about the paper as a whole and go from there, or we could focus on specific concerns that you see in the paper. What's your sense of how we could make this time most helpful to you?" In the third stage, after the student and tutor reach a consensus about agenda, attention turns to work on the paper itself. Finally, during the last few minutes of the session, tutors pull back from the paper to bring some sort of closure to the work: "OK, where do you go from here?" they may ask, or "Are you comfortable knowing what you need to do next? Is there anything else we should look at while you're here?"

Throughout stages one, two, and four, it is typical (in most writing centers, I daresay) to find student and tutor engaged in active and collaborative discussion. It seems unreasonable, then, to expect that the give and take, the mutuality, of the collaborative process should be cut off during the heart of the conference itself. A more flexible approach to writing center conferencing, guided by caution over tutor role but not unduly restricted by narrow rules about what happens in

writing center sessions, is how I choose to shape my work and how I present that work to new tutors.

The growing commitment in our writing center to flexibility is further reinforced by our recognition that the choices we make about tutoring are not value-neutral (Grimm). Some of our students come from backgrounds of comparative privilege, and these students may be well placed to succeed in college-level writing no matter what pedagogical philosophy we adopt. Their family and educational backgrounds, their peer networks, their sense of entitlement to voice are among the strengths that can help them in college. Where we draw our policy lines will not make a major difference to their success as writers.

But writing center tutors see other kinds of students too. Students come here because they have no one else who can serve as a reliable second pair of eyes when proofreading important papers. Students come because they are first generation college students, with no assumption of privilege, no sense of entitlement to a voice, and no automatic entree to the language of academia. Students look to the writing center for help because they are Native Americans or immigrant Americans, because their backgrounds are emphatically working class or welfare class, because a painful degree of shyness makes it hard for them to make friends and develop support systems among their peers. When we set writing center policies and develop an ethic to tutor by, we need to make sure our policies and ethics also take these students' needs into account.

Conclusion

So where has this discussion taken us as a writing center staff? For starters, I guess, it has made us less comfortable with our practice and less sure about what is and isn't appropriate, what is and isn't ethical. We started with small changes in how we talk about our work with students, but, proving yet again that language is meaning, we've un-

covered huge questions about how we actually want to do that work.

We have been forced to deal with the reality that language can get in the way of doing. Differences in meaning can actually impede our work if we allow "proofreading" to serve as code for the most negative kind of writing center practice. But the changes in language caused us to work harder to define for ourselves what we really will and won't do in practice. We do spend more time on lower-order concerns, if that's part of the student's own agenda, than we did when we began sessions by announcing that we don't do proofreading. Sometimes that makes us feel like we are turning into proofreaders. But we keep reminding ourselves that it is possible to work on proofreading issues without proofreading for the student. Students can be taught to proofread for themselves, just as they're taught to develop their own ideas and support their own theses. It's frustrating work, hardly as rewarding as deep discussions about ideas, but sometimes exactly what the student needs.

We've agreed it's not good enough to work only on improving the student: students won't use the writing center a second time if they believe their papers are no better after they've gone to the trouble of scheduling a conference. On the other hand, the student's own paper is an absolutely ideal venue for working on improving the student as writer. Nothing is more motivating than the student's own work, soon to be turned in for a grade, as part of an application to professional school, or maybe as a thesis or dissertation. Our ultimate goal of focusing on the writer rather than the writing is in no danger of changing, although the product in front of us is more forthrightly recognized as the tool we use during the session itself.

I have been pleased to learn that my instincts about students were right. Contrary to the negative student image sometimes bandied about among those who deal with student writing, most of our students really aren't looking for

someone to proofread their work, and they really do want to become better writers. I recently worked with a young man who began our session by announcing that he had come to the writing center to get someone to proofread his paper. "What particularly concerns you about it?" I asked. He responded with a long explanation about the ideas he meant to include in the paper but which didn't seem clearly enough developed. He may have said "proofreading," but he meant something far more substantive.

I'm satisfied for now with the balance I've struck during tutor training and in our work in the center. I know new tutors would sometimes like clearer guidelines for right and wrong, just as the students who visit our writing center would often like clear answers about how to improve their papers. The fuzzier approach, though, is probably better. When we conduct directive sessions, we've learned to think about it but not to feel bad about it. When we spend a session focused on minor proofreading details, we've acknowledged that we may be meeting genuine needs perceived by both faculty and students. We've moved outside of a safety zone, outside of a comfort zone. But the move, we think, is an important step toward the critical goal of meeting students at the point of need. We're not always comfortable, but we're learning to live with it.

Joan Hawthorne
University of North Dakota
Grand Forks, ND

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One-year Position University of Portland (OR)

While I am on sabbatical, this position will fill key duties of my normal load: primarily writing center operations, training of WAC/WID-based writing assistants, and the teaching of first-year composition. Candidates should have linguistics, comp/rhetoric background as well as writing center experience. The salary is for ABD or PhD candidates.

Salary: \$28,000 (with key benefits like health added) 20 August 1999—May 2000

Duties: Fall Semester

- Writing Center Operations
- Teach ENG417 linguistics-comp/rhetoric based training seminar for WA nominees from across the field;
- Teach two FYC classes

Duties: Spring Semester

- Continue Writing Center Operations
- Teach three FYC

Contact:

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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

April 10: Northeast Writing Centers Association, in Lewiston, ME

Contact: Theresa Ammirati, Dean of Freshmen, Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Avenue, New London, CT 06320. E-mail: tpamm@conncoll.edu.

April 15-18: National Writing Centers Association, in Bloomington, IN

Contact: Ray Smith, Campus Writing Program, Franklin 008, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405; phone: 812-855-4928; e-mail: nwca99@indiana.edu; <http://www.indiana.edu/~nwca99>.

October 14-16: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Sante Fe, NM

Contact: Jane Nelson, Director; University of Wyoming Writing Center; Coe Library; Laramie, WY 82072. E-mail: jnelson@uwyo.edu; fax: 307-766-4822

October 28-29: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Springfield, MO

Contact: Allison Witz, Hawley Academic Resource Center, Simpson College, 701 North C Street, Indianola, IA 50125; phone: 515-961-1524; fax: 515-961-1363; e-mail: witz@storm.simpson.edu

November 5-6: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in San Bernardino, CA

Contact: Carol Peterson Haviland, English Dept., California State University, San Bernardino, 5500 Univ. Pkwy., San Bernardino, CA 92407; phone: 909- 880 5833; fax: 909-880-7086; cph@csusb.edu

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Call for Proposals

October 29-31, 1999

University Park, PA

"Unmasking Writing: A Collaborative Process"

We emphasize tutor-led, active workshops, roundtables, and discussions panels. The conference seeks to explore issues of collaboration and trust in our writing centers, as well as to investigate any dimension of peer tutoring. For information: Julie Story, Conference Director, Center for Excellence in Writing, 206 Boucke Building, University Park, PA 16802, phone: (814) 865-0259, fax: (814) 863-7285, or e-mail jas12@psu.edu. For online information, visit <http://www.chss.iup.edu/wc/ncptw>. Deadline: April 14, 1999; Notification: May 10, 1999.

Demonstrating effectiveness

Many writing center directors have to struggle to convince their administrations to approve basic budget requests, much less regular expansion of their services. At Stephen F. Austin State University, the Academic Assistance and Resource Center (AARC) has received a high level of support from the administration, and our success at assessing our tutoring programs probably explains that support. Academic Tutoring consists primarily of four tutoring programs that make up the AARC, with the writing center (writing program at SFA) as one of the four programs. Each program has a full-time director who hires and trains the tutors and who proposes and manages the budget. We have a beautiful and spacious area in the library, which is centrally located and very much used by the campus population. We have a budget that allows us to hire peer tutors sufficient to meet our needs and to pay those tutors better than most

How do we demonstrate our effectiveness?

Last summer I was asked to produce the assessment for the writing program here for the previous spring semester. Although I had not been the director of the writing program that term, I had access to the information necessary to produce that report and welcomed the opportunity to do so because it would give me a chance to learn how it was done. My “reward” for my effort was even greater than I’d expected. I learned how to produce such a report, but I also saw in very graphic terms just how effective the program had been and was able to compare the semester during which I had run the writing program with previous semesters. Apparently, I had been quite successful in my first term as director.

Here’s what we do to produce the report that has impressed our administration enough to garner for us the fund-

At the end of the term I have access to university computer files that have the grades of students listed by student and by course. I also have access to each student’s SAT and/or ACT scores. Until this semester we used QuatroPro to produce our report. This term we began using Microsoft Excel. There doesn’t seem to be a lot of difference between the two. Once the program is set up with formulae, all we have to do is enter the data and print the results. Most of our writing clients come from the Core writing course—Eng. 131-132 (freshman comp). I get a list from the university computer of every student in that course along with each student’s SAT/ACT score and grade in the course. I separate out the students in the course who used the Writing Program Tutoring and am then able to compare the SAT/ACT scores and course grades of each group. Usually what this comparison shows us is that the students who use the tutoring

Course	Mean AARC grade	Mean Non-AARC grade	Mean AARC SAT	Mean Non-AARC SAT
Engl. 131 (Fall 97)	2.3	2.4	454	489
Engl. 132 (Spr. 98)	2.5	2.5	448	490
1997-98	2.4	2.4	451	489

student workers on this campus. Moreover, our requests for additional funding to allow us to expand our tutoring services have met with approval time and again.

Why have we been so fortunate?

I believe our ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of our program—especially in terms of helping students to be successful in their courses—accounts for the high level of support we receive from our administration.

ing and support we enjoy. First, we collect data on every client who visits the AARC. When students come in for tutoring we get the following information which we keep in our files: Name, Sex, Date of Birth, Social Security Number, Year in College, Major, Race, Address and Phone Number, the Course Name, and Number and Name of Professor. We track the visits each student makes and keep records on any cancellations or “no-shows” for each.

have SAT/ACT scores that are significantly lower than those who do not use tutoring. Nonetheless, significantly fewer of the students who use the writing tutors receive unsuccessful grades (D’s, F’s & W’s) than do students who do not use the tutoring. Also, there are usually significantly more students who earn C’s and B’s among those who use the tutoring than among those who do not. The number of students who earn A’s is sometimes about equal and sometimes higher for students who

do not use writing tutoring. We suspect that the A students are less likely to come in to the tutoring center than are others. We suspect, too, that many of those students who used tutoring and earned B's would have otherwise probably earned C's and that many who

earned C's would otherwise have earned D's. There are usually very few students who use the tutoring who earn F's. We believe that those who were likely to earn F's were able to pull their grades up to D's and C's by taking advantage of the tutoring here. Ex-

cel and QuatroPro easily produce these results in graphs that make the comparisons stand out clearly.

Stephen Newmann
Stephen F. Austin University
Nacogdoches, TX

Ed. note: The author provided the data generated in his report, but lack of space prevents the inclusion of the tables generated by his Excel pro-

gram. However, his accompanying report Observations, which are relevant to demonstrating the effectiveness of the tutoring, are included here:

Observations:

1. AARC Engl. 131 clients' mean SAT Verbal Score was 35 points lower than for non-clients. SAT Verbal Scores for Engl. 132 AARC clients was 44 points lower than for non-clients from that course. The AARC group for both courses was weaker in verbal skills than their non-client peers.
2. Despite their lower SAT scores, AARC clients mean grade was the same as for non-AARC students in both classes. Higher percentages of AARC clients received B and C grades than did their non-AARC counterparts during the Fall term, and in the Spring term the greater percentages of AARC clients earned

not only B and C grades but a smaller percentage of the AARC clients earned D's and none of the AARC clients failed the course. The lower SAT's and smaller percentages of A's suggests that the Writing Program helped less able students who were willing to work harder to perform as well as their peers.

3. This year the grade distribution for Engl. 131 was nearly the same as for Engl. 132 for both AARC clients and non-clients. It appears that the Writing Program was equally helpful to students in both classes.

Midwest Writing Centers Association

Call for Proposals
October 28-29, 1999
Springfield, Missouri
"Anticipating the Future, Exploring the Past: Reflexivity in the Writing Center"
Keynote speaker: Eric Crump

Proposals should be submitted on the MWCA Fall 1999 Conference Proposal form. Contact Allison Witz, Hawley Academic Resource Center, Simpson College, 701 North C Street, Indianola, IA 50125; phone: 515-961-1524; fax: 515-961-1363; e-mail: witz@storm.simpson.edu. Proposals must be postmarked by May 1, 1999.

Reminder. . . .Reminder. . . .Reminder. . . .Reminder

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WRITING CENTER ETHICS

The ethics of content: Rhetorical issues in writing center conferences

Students not only bring agendas, emotions, expectations, and classroom contexts to conferences; they also bring their papers. Student texts are the centerpiece of tutorial conferences. They are both the focus of attention and the topic of conversation. They embody a wide range of rhetorical views, issues, and perspectives, and writing center tutorials can address student texts at many different levels during the course of a conference. The diverse nature of papers that are likely to come into the writing center poses interesting problems for tutors. If students are bringing in papers for courses in political science, biology, English, anthropology, electrical engineering, and the like, then a tutor's expertise in each of these areas—in terms of content-area knowledge—is likely to vary widely. Sometimes tutors will be able to comment on content issues; other times they will not. To what extent should a tutor be responsible for knowing content and/or discipline-specific discourse conventions in a field before conferencing with a student? Completely? Some? Not at all? Alternatively, should the focus of writing center tutorials be on *generic* rhetorical issues which are unspecialized and applicable to nearly all domains of academic discourse? These are questions I have raised before, both here and in other venues. Answers to these questions will influence how tutors are trained for their positions as well as how students are scheduled for their appointments in the center.

But disciplinarity is not the only ethical issue raised by some student texts. Every once in a while, the topics of the papers themselves can cause problems

for tutors, either because they are strikingly inappropriate for academic coursework, politically volatile, patently offensive, or personally sensitive. Virtually all tutors who work in a writing center will, at some time during their employment, encounter a student paper whose thesis or tone offends them. Perhaps it will be a student who writes in support of institutionalized racism, or one who argues for the natural superiority of the female sex, or even one who praises the prosecutorial tactics of Kenneth Starr. Different tutors will have different buttons. But what should tutors do, ethically, when confronted with a paper expressing a point of view radically opposed to their own? Should they grit their teeth and help the student support the thesis as best they can? Should they take on the role of devil's advocate and challenge the student's thesis whenever and wherever possible under the guise of "helping the student to consider possible counterarguments"? Or should tutors opt out of the conference altogether, saying, "As much as I'd like to help you with your writing, you're taking a position that I strongly disagree with. I think you'd be better off working with someone else."

How sensitive are tutors allowed to be with papers and students? How supportive are they required to be when conferencing on papers that disturb them? How responsible are they for guiding students away from inappropriate topics, tones, or stances and toward more mainstream, "acceptable," academic discourse? In my own writing center, I have a good deal of faith in the sensibilities and flexible attitudes of my tutors. They are reason-

able, responsible people who are willing to be flexible about their own political convictions and accommodate alternative points of view. This is not to say, however, that there are not a few "abrasive" conferences from time to time, but most of my tutors' venom and venting is saved for TA meetings where they can share their experiences with a safe, empathetic audience. My one and only policy in this regard, the only one I've felt a need to state explicitly, is this: "You don't have to take crap from anybody." Though this policy is applied most often to aggressive students, it also applies more broadly to any circumstances in which the tutors feel distinctly uncomfortable—for any reason—in their tutorial conferences. In the section that follows and in my next few columns, I will try to identify a few of the troublesome rhetorical issues and positions that appear with some regularity in student conferences and that have also been the subject of some discussion in professional writing center literature.

Papers about politics

Human beings are political animals. This does not mean that we necessarily align ourselves with the platforms and principles of an organized political party, but we are all more or less invested in issues that have political consequences and political implications: abortion, civil rights, equal rights, taxes, etc. Student writers, too, have political opinions, and though those opinions are many times naive or unsophisticated, students often choose to express them in the papers they write for their classes. Often, these opinions appear in the "controversial issue" or "research" papers students are required

to write for their first year composition courses, but they are just as likely to show up in papers about *Beowulf*, an impending trade war with Japan, or the mating habits of the “Killer Bee.”

Papers on political topics present interesting ethical challenges for tutors because a tutor’s own political views may very well affect the shape and tone of a tutorial conference, no matter which side of the issue the tutor happens to be on. If tutors disagree strongly with the opinions being expressed in a paper, they may take a harder, more argumentative stance in the conference than they would under more “normal” circumstances with papers that contain less politically-charged content. They might challenge assumptions, question sources, raise counter-arguments, dispute conclusions, and demand additional evidence. Conversely, if tutors happen to agree with the opinions being argued in the paper, they might let assumptions go unchallenged, let sources go unquestioned, let counter-arguments go unraised, etc. In some respects, these variations in tutorial style are unsurprising. In forming and justifying our own opinions about controversial political issues, we tend to be less critical of evidence that supports our personal prejudices and preferences, more critical of evidence that supports alternative perspectives. That’s only natural and human. But the question on the table then becomes, “Is such a ‘natural’ variation in tutorial style ethically acceptable in a writing center context?”

I would never encourage my tutors to lie about their political beliefs to a student, but I might suggest that they be conscious of how those beliefs are affecting their pedagogy in tutorials and make adjustments accordingly. If tutors feel that they are morally and ethically incapable of helping a student to support a political stance they strongly disagree with, then they should probably tell the student up front and suggest that he or she get help from a tutor who would be more sympathetic.

Though ethically commendable in some regards, such an inflexible political stance may place the tutor in conflict with some of the other ethical contexts that undergird the writing center’s operation: the institutional mission, the expectations for tutors, the pedagogical philosophy, and so on. On a case-by-case basis, then, writing center directors may have to decide whether the ethical stances taken by the tutors—on the grounds of their political convictions—are incompatible with the writing center’s instructional goals, and then decide whether or not those tutors should remain on the payroll.

Offensive papers

Offensive papers are a related breed of student text, and they present similar ethical problems for tutors and writing centers. What constitutes a truly offensive paper will vary somewhat from tutor to tutor and circumstance to circumstance, but they can generally be characterized as papers with a high degree of shock value. They may profess extreme political views, display amazing levels of prejudice or intolerance, be written in an angry or violent tone, or contain content that is disturbingly graphic or sexually explicit. It may strike many of us as extremely odd that the students who write such papers would ever consider them appropriate for an academic audience, let alone appropriate for consultation in the writing center. But these students are often quite sincere about the beliefs they happen to be expressing, and they also tend to be quite naive about the conventions of academic discourse or the expectations of an audience other than the one which shares their views.

Ethical tutor response to offensive papers is particularly problematic as well, and it may well be impossible to establish a general writing center policy that can cover all possible circumstances. Different papers may affect different tutors more or less strongly, and some tutors may be more willing to work with—and educate—the offending students than others. A female tutor reading a paper which ad-

vocates a “Lorena Bobbitt” solution to all cases of date rape may find it easier to work with the student writer than would a male tutor. In the same way, a white tutor with family roots in the deep South might be more comfortable helping a student who writes favorably about the KKK than would a black tutor from the same area. As with obscenity, offensiveness is frequently in the eye of the beholder.

David Rothgery, however, objects to the notion (which he links to the anti-foundationalist philosophies of Bakhtin and Derrida) that offensiveness should be viewed as a socially-constructed and historically situated phenomenon independent of possible relations to “Transcendent Truths.” Calling for a “necessary directionality” in teacher or tutor responses to racist, sexist, or homophobic student papers, he says:

I take issue with those who believe we can buy into a universe of “situational ethics” or “usable” truths—that is, until we are willing to grant there is nothing to be gained in striving toward “fundamental” or “transcendent” principles which such papers violate in promoting cruel behavior towards humankind and the other creatures which populate the earth. Burning epileptics at the stake, abusing children, promoting by willful neglect the extinction of an animal species—such acts don’t properly merit some gradation of ethical value relative to a particular culture or period of time

The question I pose is this: Has contemporary theory, with its insights into the “situatedness” of our existence and perspectives, left us with any sense of a valid—indeed, a necessary, “we-can-no-longer-go-back-to-that”—directionality by way of shared ideas? Can we indeed go back to treating women as objects, African-Americans as possessions, homosexuals as freaks, epileptics as devils. (243-44)

Rothgery, then, advocates the posi-

tion that all writing teachers, tutors included, should adopt inflexible ethical stances when confronted by certain kinds of offensive papers, and respond in ways that are meant to change or at least redirect student opinions. Some writing center tutors may, however, feel that that sort of control exerted in a tutorial conference violates the ethical principle that students should own their own texts and have a right to their own voices and points of view.

Student attitudes also affect how tutors might choose to handle offensive student papers. If a tutor expresses some shock about the content or tone of a paper that a student brings in, then

the student's response to that shock will give some indication of how amenable he or she is likely to be to constructive criticism. Should the student evince surprise that the paper could be construed as offensive, or should the student appear genuinely ignorant of the discourse conventions common to academic genres, then the tutor might find it easier to put aside whatever moral or ethical indignation she feels and dedicate the conference to a discussion of those conventions. On the other hand, should the student rigidly adhere to his or her thesis and resist any suggestions that the tone is inappropriate for academic work, then tutors might justifiably decide that their

ethical right not to be offended outweighs their ethical responsibility to work with students on a diverse assortment of possible topics and rhetorical stances.

Michael A. Pemberton
University of Illinois
Urbana, Illinois

Work Cited

Rothgery, David. "So What Do We Do Now?": Necessary Directionality as the Writing Teacher's Response to Racist, Sexist, Homophobic Papers." *College Composition and Communication* 44.2 (May 1993): 241-247.

The word is dead

(continued from p. 14)

don't quite grasp the meaning of. The result is that they use words that don't make complete sense. The meaning of "the five hundred dollar word" may just be a fraction away from the meaning that the student is trying to get across. However, instead of clarifying the paper for the reader, these words muddle the meaning and make the paper difficult to read and extremely boring.

It would be nice if we were all born with the eloquent vocabulary of Abraham Lincoln or Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Unfortunately we're not. When I was a little girl, my mother used to tell me, "Don't try so hard to grow up before your time!" This age-old truth also applies to good writing. Broad vocabularies are impressive, but they come a little at a time. Young writers need to be taught that bigger is not always better. If a high school senior is using the vocabulary of a college professor, the paper could seem superficial—especially if the vocabulary is used incorrectly; however, if the same senior uses a thesaurus to help find words that s/he is already familiar with, the result is often a clearly written paper with a fresh, unaffected voice. A thesaurus

can be a writer's best friend, but it can also be a writer's worst enemy.

Finally, the biggest misconception that writers have is that to revise is to admit failure. Many students mistakenly believe that to be a good writer, they must get it right the first time. They believe that once the final word is on paper, the story, the research project, the poem has come to the end of its life. The way a paper exists upon its first appearance from the laser printer is the way it is destined to exist forever. Re-writing is somehow perceived as cheating. It is classified in the same group as changing a test answer after one has already handed in the test. If the paper doesn't come out perfect the first time, some students are sure it never will.

One of the greatest challenges faced by a Rhetoric Associate is convincing one's students that nothing could be farther from the truth. If a student "comes to a rewrite, feeling it is punishment for failure . . . [s/he] will not produce a series of improving drafts" (Murray 46). Students need to understand that the first appearance out of the laser printer is not the end but the beginning. The littering of paper

snow balls, the cross-outs, the doodling on a blank piece of paper are all a part of pre-write, not re-write. Confusion of these two processes is extremely dangerous to a writer's progression.

Revision should not be viewed as the inevitable result of a terrible paper. Nor should it be accepted as proof in a student's mind that s/he is incapable of writing. Rather, it should be viewed as an opportunity to create a gem. A first draft is like a rough diamond. It is easy to see the potential for greatness. However, it is through the process of cutting and polishing that the true beauty of the piece is found. In the words of Emily Dickinson:

A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say,
I say it just
Begins to live
That day.

Kellie White
Peer Tutor
Utah State University
Logan, UT

Work Cited

Murray, Donald. *The Craft of Revision*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace, 1995.

TUTORS' COLUMN

The privilege of tutoring

"Thank you for making my paper the best piece of writing I ever wrote."

"You're the greatest. Without your help I would still have a mess for a paper."

"I cannot thank you enough for your help, inspiration, and knowledge of the English language. My paper is sure to be an A+ thanks to you!"

These are statements I assumed I would receive after tirelessly working as a peer tutor in the writing center on the campus of Metropolitan State College of Denver for a semester. To be appreciated for my talent is what I started to expect after each paper I worked on. That is until I witnessed a display which stripped me of my arrogance and showed me what a great privilege it is to be a tutor.

One Monday, I was able to observe one of my fellow student tutors at work. Kristi was bright-eyed and very alert in dealing with her last student as I came in the center. I was too far out of earshot, and the place was bustling with many sessions making it difficult to overhear her conversation. However, it was obvious from her facial expressions that she was enjoying this session. I thought, "She's a natural at this tutoring business, isn't she," and

decided to spend a few moments watching her technique.

Until my first appointment arrived, I watched her and was very impressed with her composure and demeanor as she interacted with this student. She seemed calm and completely focused on the material at hand, which is a trial in itself considering the frantic buzzing in the writing center that day. She had a smile on her face at all times, and she glowed with enthusiasm for her work. I was impressed with this display of professionalism.

My observation was cut short as my first appointment arrived. However because of the overcrowded room, I had to ask Kristi if it would be all right to sit at the table with her and Joe, her tutee. She said it would be okay because she had to leave soon. For the few minutes I sat with her, even as I went through the preliminary introductions with the student who came to see me, I could not help but notice her tutoring skills. She would intently gaze at Joe, nodding to indicate she was interested in what he was saying. She never once looked at his paper while he was speaking, but instead used her fine-tuned listening skills to decipher what the writer needed. The pointed questions Kristi asked helped Joe find the answers without her direct help. Fi-

nally, her encouraging words helped Joe feel good about the piece he had revised in her presence.

However, the utterance which particularly caught my attention was when she had to leave the session because she was late for class. She said, "I have to go, but it was nice working with you for this short time. Thank you for trusting me with your paper. I hope you come back again and work with me."

"Thank you to the student?" I thought as I noticed her smile which was very inviting. I related to inviting students back to revisit the writing center whenever needed because I always ended my sessions with such an invitation. Yet the idea of thanking the students for letting me work with them on their papers never crossed my mind. Kristi's show of appreciation brought back to me the awesome privilege it is to be a writing tutor because we, as tutors, have the possibility of seeing others' work develop and mature. I am grateful to Kristi for her enthusiasm, her smile, and her demeanor. But most of all her words of thankfulness opened my eyes once again to the awesome task I have in the tutoring session and the need to respond humbly to this task.

Tom Grau
Metropolitan State College of Denver
Denver, CO

The word is dead

It was a woolen day in late autumn. An icy mist sidled stealthily around my feet, creeping up my legs and winding its way around my body until it slipped through the opening, left by the missing button at the top of my coat, to bite my neck. The clouds weighed

heavily on my head and shoulders and suffocated the sound of my footsteps as I walked towards my 7:30 a.m. conference. When I first offered a 7:30 conference on Monday morning, I never actually believed someone would sign up at that time. No doubt

the culprit was some over-zealous freshman eager for brownie points.

I shivered and pulled my coat closer around my neck as I thought about the student's paper, read for the third time the night before. It was long-winded,

chatty and boring. Michael had used twenty or thirty words with five or more syllables. He sounded like a cheap lawyer who was more concerned with how his arguments sounded than with how effective they were. To top it all off, his thoughts were impossible to follow. I wanted to save Michael from his bad habits, but all too clearly I remembered my attitude the first time I ever worked with a Rhetoric Associate. I knew I was a good writer; what could this person who was not even a professor, but merely a fellow student teach me? I remembered how difficult it was to take the criticism that I was about to give to someone else. Of course, I had learned some excellent techniques from that experience, but that didn't make it any easier to swallow the suggestions. If Michael was anything like I had been, this was not going to be the most pleasant consultation. Having concluded my RA pep-talk, I allowed the chilly air to gel my judgments of Michael to semi-solid.

As I opened the door to the English building the hot air collided with my state of misty chill prickling my skin and flaming the cold rose in my cheeks and nose. Already I was anticipating the cup of hot chocolate and cozy chair that I would flee to when this ordeal had ended.

I entered the conference room and sat down shuffling my already organized papers and waiting for my student to arrive.

“Hi, I'm Michael. Are you Kellie?”

At this announcement, I looked up and to my surprise found not a young male, but a young girl. By the apprehensive look on her face, I judged her to be only about eighteen or nineteen years old and a freshman at the college. A little more conversation revealed that I was right.

Silently chiding myself for assuming others possessed my weaknesses, I asked the question that created a whole

new outlook for me on the attitudes and problems of young writers. “So Michael, how do you feel about your paper?”

“Okay. I'm not a very good writer. I can never get my transitions right, and I left this paper to the last minute, but even when I plan ahead my papers never flow well. I don't know what my problem is.”

She was right. Her paper lacked any sort of transition, and jumped from one idea to another as if she had been writing in stream-of-consciousness style, which is fine for a Faulkner novel, but the style made her research paper extremely difficult to read, and extremely boring.

“Michael, how many times do you usually re-write a paper before you turn it in?”

“Re-write? Am I supposed to?”

I now realized what Michael's biggest problem was. Like so many other freshman students she believed that re-writing meant throwing out the entire paper and starting over again. Somewhere in her mind's eye, she connected revision with a picture of a man at a typewriter with cast off beginnings of a novel decorating his work space like crumpled paper snowballs. Somehow Michael had received the impression that re-writing was something you did before you actually started your paper, not vice versa.

Revision is one of the most important aspects of writing taught through the Rhetoric Associates program. It is also one of the most misunderstood processes in writing. Most students have a few basic misconceptions that prevent them from revising effectively.

After my experience with Michael I began asking all of my students how many times they had revised or rewritten their papers. The most

common answer I received was “I ran spell-check, isn't that enough?” In *The Craft of Revision*, Donald Murray states,

Beginning writers try to revise backwards. That is usually what they have been taught intentionally or inadvertently by teachers who pass back papers with grammar, spelling, mechanics, typography, criticized or corrected. (47)

These students too often believe that correcting spelling and grammar in the computer lab is all that is necessary for successful revision. Therefore their papers are free of mechanical errors, but still lack flow and style.

Spelling and grammar are important concerns, but it is best when writers make them the last step in the revision process rather than the only step. Before checking their spelling and grammar, students need to check the flow of their ideas, the style of their writing, and the conciseness of their word choice. Even if a paper is grammatically perfect, wordiness will quickly lose the reader. Likewise it is easy for the reader to become lost and confused if a student jumps from one idea to another in a stream-of-consciousness style. This is where revision should start. A first draft gives a writer a piece of raw clay. It is the moving around of ideas, the addition of examples to emphasize one point, and the complete obliteration of another point that mold the raw clay into a masterpiece. Once the clay is molded and formed, it is easy to fix the grammar and spelling as the finishing touches.

Another misconception common among many students is the high school mentality that big words equal brownie points. To these students revision is reading through a paper, thesaurus in hand, and replacing all small simple words with words that sound important and have at least three syllables. Unfortunately, students often substitute words that they themselves

(continued on p. 12)

NWCA News from Eric Hobson, President

The National Writing Centers Association/East Central Writing Centers Association National Conference at Indiana University is only days away, and many of us across the writing center community have just returned home from either the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Atlanta, GA; the South Central Writing Centers Association conference in Little Rock, AR; the Mid Atlantic Writing Centers Association conference in Dover, DE; the Northeast Writing Centers Association conference in Lewiston, ME; or some combination of these. We are catching our breath, unpacking and repacking suitcases, working through the accumulated piles of papers, mail, memos, and other assorted detritus of a waning academic year, polishing posters, presentations, and workshops, making sure that our travel arrangements are still in order, and asking ourselves quietly if we ever got around to making those hotel reservations in Bloomington. This level of activity is fitting, however, because it signals the dynamism of the writing center community as a group of committed educators.

CCCC and NWCA

As always, the NWCA special interest group session at the CCCC was not only well attended, but exciting, engaging, and celebratory. The session's three presentations on writing center research were challenging and stimulating. As a presenter in the session, I found Nancy Grimm's and Beth Boquet's arguments so riveting that I managed not to think about my own comments at all until I realized with a jolt that not only was it now my turn to speak, but I now wanted to talk more about issues they had raised than about many of the issues I had planned to build my talk around.

In a fitting connection with the session's focus on writing center research, the 1999 NWCA Scholarship Awards were presented. Past NWCA Presidents Joan Mullin and Al DeCiccio who chaired the committees charged with reviewing and voting on all the nominated articles and books, presented this year's awards. Joan presented the award for best article to Neal Lerner for "Drill Pads, Teaching Machines, and Programmed Texts: Origins of Instructional Technology in Writing Centers" (In *Wiring the Writing Center*. Ed. Eric Hobson. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 1998. 119-36), his engrossing review and meta-analysis of 100+ years of discussion about educational technology and its place in and around the writing center. Al DeCiccio presented the award for best book to Eric Hobson, editor of *Wiring the Writing Center*. Both Joan and Al, speaking for the members of their committees, thanked the community at large and the authors whose work was nominated for providing them with such a body of excellent work for them to read, discuss, and enjoy.

The following articles were honored as finalists in this year's selection process:

Bushman, Donald. "Theorizing a 'Social-Expressivist' Writing Center." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 22.7 (March 1998): 6-11.

Carino, Peter. "Computers in the Writing Center" In *Wiring the Writing Center*. Ed. Eric Hobson. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 1998. 171-93.

Childers, Pamela, Jud Laughter, Michael Lowry, and Steve Trumpler. "Developing a Community in a Secondary School Writing Center." In *Weaving Knowledge Together*. Eds. Carol Haviland, et al. Emmitsburg, MD: NWCA Press, 1998. 29-57.

DeCiccio, Albert, Elizabeth Boquet, Deborah Burns, and Paula Gillespie. "Responsible Practice in the Writing Center." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 22. 6 (February, 1998): 6-11.

Leahy, Richard. "The Rhetoric of Written Response to Student Drafts." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 22.8 (April 1998): 1-4.

Monroe, Barbara. "The Look and Feel of the OWL Conference." In *Wiring the Writing Center*. Ed. Eric Hobson. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 1998. 3-24.

Stock, Patricia Lambert. "Re-forming Education in the Land-Grant University: Contributions from a Writing Center." *Writing Center Journal* 18.1 (Spring 1998): 7-29.

Sunstein, Bonnie. "Moveable Feasts, Liminal Spaces: Writing Centers and the State of in-Betweenness." *Writing Center Journal* 18.2 (Fall 1998): 7-26.

Books honored as finalists in this year's selection process were:

Capossela, Toni-Lee. *The Harcourt Brace Guide to Peer Tutoring*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998.

Haviland, Carol Peterson, Maria Notarangelo, Lene Whitley-Putz, and Thia Wolf, eds. *Weaving Knowledge Together: Writing Centers and Collaboration*. Emmitsburg, MD: NWCA Press, 1998.

Silk, Bobbie Bayliss, ed. *The Writing Center Resource Manual*. Emmitsburg, MD: NWCA Press, 1998.

NWCA's booth in the CCCC Exhibits Area looked like Grand Central Station.

People congregated to talk, pick up needed materials, stock their writing center libraries, find dinner companions. Many people wandered over just to see what the hubbub was about and got sucked into the conversations. The NWCA Executive Board wishes to thank everyone who donated money to help endow the NWCA Research Grant Fund. We hope you enjoy your new NWCA coffee mugs and/or NWCA pens. (If you didn't get to CCCC, the new NWCA mugs and pens will be available in Bloomington at the NWCA/EWCA National Conference.) Likewise, thanks go out to all of our colleagues who volunteered their time to staff the booth.

Highlights at the National Conference

The program for the NWCA/ECWCA Conference is impressive. I hope everyone has planned to arrive on Wednesday in order to take advantage

of the four pre-convention workshops offered (there are 25 slots per workshop) and the other concurrent sessions that will be presented during the morning. Several sessions fall into the don't-miss-this-one category: Muriel Harris' Thursday evening dinner address, "Where Should We Go? Writing Centers and Navigating the New Century" and Edward White's Saturday luncheon address, "Coming to Class in the Teaching of Writing" certainly qualify. For the stout of heart and infinitely patient/curious, I recommend attending Friday's NWCA Executive Board Meeting; or, if you are satisfied with a summary of NWCA's activities, you can catch my "State of the NWCA" address on Friday afternoon.

Of course, the real highlights of the conference will be the papers, presentations, workshop, round table discussions, and posters that *you* will bring to

the community's conversation. The Indiana Memorial Union conference center offers numerous spaces to sit and talk before, during ;-), and after sessions. Additionally, Ray Smith and his colleagues at IU have arranged a number of social activities on- and off-campus that are certain to please everyone who attends.

Because this conference is OUR conference, every member of the NWCA Executive Board has committed to being available to talk to NWCA members and non-members about what they need from the organization. I will gladly listen to any concerns and try to create ways to help every writing center do its job as well as it can. So, should you want to bend my ear, do so.

Everything that I have seen from behind the scenes of this conference's planning suggests that it will be memorable. See you there!

THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

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