

THE WRITING AB

N E W S L E T T E R

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Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in one-to-one teaching of writing April, 2001

FROM THE EDITOR

You'll notice a pattern or theme in this issue of the newsletter that happened serendipitously. Normally, we print articles in the order they're accepted for publication (except for some that have timely information), and this month we have a collection of articles in which you'll note a reverberation of the concepts of collaboration and networking. Not an unusual occurrence in a publication focused on writing center theory and practice.

Margaret Garner and Carolyn Young introduce us to the collaboration they established with ESL students and their instructor in an engineering course; Denise Stephenson reports on collaborative projects tutors in her writing center have engaged in; Brandy Cunningham and Karin Foust offer us insights into the networking among their tutors; Dani Stein reflects on what she has learned by collaborating with the students she meets with; and Doug Enders updates us on NetMeeting, a software package that permits networking with students online.

Also in this issue, on page 6, you'll find Jeanne Simpson's call for discussion about a project she's initiated to collect statistics that will be useful for us all.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Group conferencing: A collaboration between ESL students, their instructors, and writing center consultants

The need for group conferencing from the instructors' perspective

Peer review groups are a regular feature of University of Wyoming writing classes. However, these groups sometimes do not provide all the peer feedback that English as a Second Language (ESL) students need. When that situation occurs, the University of Wyoming Writing Center has found that group conferences facilitated by a writing center consultant can fill the gap. We began when a writing instructor sought the writing center's help for students in a sophomore-level writing course linked to a mechanical engineering laboratory. The linked course is designed so that in the writing part, students produce various technical documents, and in the laboratory part, they write lab reports. The writing instructor and the lab instructor work to-

gether on the assignments and discuss the students' writing progress. When the class was taught that semester, four of the 24 students were ESL students. Normally these students do quite well in a regular technical writing course, but this semester their problems were exacerbated by three factors: they were struggling with the engineering content, the laboratory instructor was not experienced in working with ESL students, and in-class peer review groups had not been productive.

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is 10-15 double-spaced typed pages, 3-5 pages for reviews, and 4 pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. If possible, please send as attached files or as cut-and-paste in an e-mail to mjturley@purdue.edu. Otherwise, send a 3 and 1/2 in. disk with the file, along with the paper 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).

The success of peer review groups depends on effective student communication. However, the difficulties for these ESL students were twofold: the native-speaking mechanical engineering students were very competitive among themselves; they tended to keep knowledge to themselves and see writing from a right and wrong perspective. Thus, the ESL students had difficulty getting the help they needed from the in-class peer groups.

Consequently, the writing instructor arranged a series of conferences for these four students at the writing center with a writing center consultant trained in ESL small-group conferencing. Participation was optional. As it turned out, three of the four ESL students (a Norwegian, a Malaysian, and a Japanese—all males) and the laboratory instructor supported the idea. The students agreed to meet once a week with a writing center consultant and talk about their writing assignments. The project proved to be a wonderful example of collaboration—the collaboration of the ESL students, the writing instructor, the mechanical engineering laboratory instructor, and the writing center consultant.

The strategies for group conferencing from the writing center's perspective

In order for the collaborative project to work, the center combined its expertise in two important ways: (1) applying one-on-one conferencing techniques to enhance the productiveness of the peer group, (2) offering information as a cultural and rhetorical informant to help ESL students understand the differences between American academic culture and each other's cultures. Then, the consultant and the instructor carefully planned for four components of the group conference:

- Establishing a writing community
- Handling assignment clarification
- Talking about organization and development issues
- Addressing sentence-level problems

Establishing a writing community.

Setting up common goals and expectations is important to the success of peer groups if groups are to be productive. A consensual agreement in which all participants will share their writing and their critiques with mutual respect has to be established. As in any group, personalities and individual characteristics can often make communication difficult. In this group, the Norwegian student was assertive, vocal, and impatient. The Asian students were quiet and reluctant to criticize. But the commonality of their non-nativeness helped make the group cohesive. When ESL students are combined with native-speakers of English in peer groups, they can often feel ignored and useless with nothing to contribute to the group. In contrast, this group gave these students the chance to participate in an interactive writing community, where they could speak out and be listened to. With a writing center consultant trained in ESL, they could discuss their difficulties with the English language and talk about coping skills and writing techniques that could help them gain self-sufficiency.

Part of understanding academic writing is recognizing multiple audiences, and establishing a writing community provided that opportunity. The students were the experts in **WHAT** they wanted to say (the content of their discipline), and their writing instructor and consultant were the rhetorical and linguistic experts helping them with **HOW** to say it. In a small-group environment, students had to negotiate several mechanical engineering issues, such as the "right" calculations, variables, experiments, or procedures. They were audiences for each other, listening and reading for content accuracy while the consultant was the non-expert member of the group, listening and reading for comprehensibility and clarity. To facilitate communication among the multiple readers, the group agreed that everyone would come prepared with printed copies of text—as-

signments and drafts—so that everyone could focus together on a writing issue. Also, by understanding that they had a responsibility to the “writing community,” the students agreed to give group time priority over individual attention.

Establishing a “writing community” created a forum where everyone could acknowledge that in some circumstances the writing center consultant might not be able to address all technical or content issues. In these cases, the students would have to confer with their writing instructor or their mechanical engineering lab instructor. To avoid the risk of sending mixed messages, the writing center consultant worked in tandem with the writing instructor who regularly met with the mechanical engineering lab instructor.

Handling assignment clarification. Once everyone understood the roles and responsibilities, the group talked out and interpreted the assignments. Clarifying assignments is important because some ESL students think they understand the instructor’s language and expectations when, in fact, they do not. Often, fearing to insult the instructor, they are reluctant to raise clarification questions in class.

For example, a complex assignment called “Success or Failure” provided everyone with a challenge. Students were asked to role-play a young engineer who discovers an engineering problem in an experiment and must write a memo to the client company, accounting for the error and asking for some changes. The writing center consultant helped the students see that the assignment consisted of two parts: the problem—how to figure out the miscalculation in the experiment, and the solution—how to report the error in the form of a memo. As engineers, the students figured out what caused the error in the calculation but did not know HOW to write the memo. As students from other cultures, they had difficulty identifying with the situation well

enough to analyze the memo’s audience. To help them understand the rhetorical purpose of the memo, the consultant asked them to relate how such a memo might be written in their own culture and what the tone would be. Then they discussed how an American reader would respond to a memo that contained bad news. The consultant played the role of an American company president and simulated some responses. The group discussed whether the memo should be straightforward and announce the problem or should present context and background first.

This assignment demonstrated the importance of both consultant and writing instructor interpreting a rhetorical approach in the same way. The consultant had advised the students to explain the problem at the beginning of the memo; the instructor suggested that because of the nature of the error and its cost to the client company that the memo “lead in” to the problem by way of background information. To avoid giving the students mixed messages, the instructor and the consultant decided that the latter approach was appropriate. Once the students had figured out WHAT the problem was, they appeared willing to hear that there might be different ways to organize HOW to express it in writing. This situation provided an opportunity to discuss the importance of anticipating multiple audiences when writing a technical document.

In another assignment the students practiced writing a design proposal. The guidelines for the proposal were prepared by their mechanical engineering instructor and suggested specific headings that confused them. First, they questioned the distinction between sections of the proposal. They asked, “What is the difference between project description and design criteria?” They also asked, “Does proposed approach mean methods?” Such questions demonstrate the difficulty ESL writers have with American academic terminology. They didn’t recognize, in

this case, that the different expressions “proposed approach” and “methodology” meant the same thing. In another instance, they were also confused by the assignment’s use of the word “quantify.” Handling these types of clarifications meant that the writing center consultant encouraged the students to talk out definitions of these terms within the group as well as to check with their writing and lab instructors before completing their memos for the “real” audience in the assignment.

Talking about organization and development issues. Many of the assignments that the students brought to the group conference called for a specific format and structure, such as the problem/solution memo and the design proposal. Because these assignments were structured, organization was not as problematic for the students as was development. In this area, the ESL writers had two main concerns: how much contextual and transitional language to use and how much descriptive detail to include. Understanding the purpose of document sections was not as difficult as understanding HOW to develop them or HOW MUCH language to use in various parts. One student knew that the introduction of a memo should direct the reader to the purpose of the memo. He used a one-sentence paragraph that accomplished the purpose, but because of HOW he stated it and HOW MUCH language he did not use, it was not an effective introduction. When the group members discussed his draft, they compared his with their introductions and gave him advice for development. The consultant role-played the response of a typical native-speaking reader and explained that “conciseness” in a technical document doesn’t always mean “short.”

When working on the design proposal, the students were uncertain about how much detail was needed to accomplish a certain rhetorical purpose. Questions like “Is this enough detail for a background?” or “How de-

tailed should the project description of my proposal be?” were common. One student felt his proposal description was too repetitive because he described WHAT he was designing using the same language as HOW he was designing it. Addressing these kinds of questions in a group environment worked well because the students themselves responded by comparing their writing with others’ writing. They negotiated a probable “answer” and confirmed their decision with the consultant, who explained how to be concise but not at the expense of coherence and unity.

Addressing sentence-level problems. Working with sentence-level and idiomatic problems in completed drafts (with or without instructor comments) was top priority for students during the conferences. Students received two types of comments from their instructors: global and local. Generally, their writing instructor addressed sentence-level issues as global problems by asking students to consider rewriting for clarity, focus, or sentence closure. Because the lab instructor was less experienced with ESL writing, she focused on local errors by editing grammar and writing comments like “poor sentence” on drafts.

Whether addressing global or local errors, the consultant’s approach was to make sentence-level issues a problem/solution challenge for the group to negotiate. Either the writing center consultant or one of the students would read the document aloud. The group discovered that most often a student in the group could recognize what was wrong. If the group worked with a draft without instructor comments, the consultant pointed out the sentences that might cause a native English speaker to misunderstand the writer’s meaning because of the unconventional usage or syntax. The advantage of working with a cultural mix of ESL students is that they have different strengths. In this group the Norwegian caught the lack of articles in the others’ writing; the Asian students recognized

the Norwegian’s subject/verb agreement problem. If one of them suggested even a partially correct solution, the consultant reinforced it with a grammatical explanation.

When a consultant questions ESL students in one-on-one conferencing about conventional diction, students are often at a loss to “discover” correct idiomatic expressions. In the group, the consultant prompted students: “Native speakers would say it like this . . . or like this” Many times, she asked, “Would mechanical engineers say it like this?” Then as mechanical engineers they came to a consensus or asked their lab instructor. On the other hand, the consultant was at a loss to advise the students on correct methods of integrating and punctuating mathematical calculations; the students advised each other on the proper formatting. They scanned each other’s writing for consistency in setting up equations and calculations.

The time-consuming task of working through grammar, syntax, and diction with ESL students is not easily solved even in one-on-one conferencing. The difficulty for the consultant working with a group of students having sentence-level problems is how to share the time so each student has a relatively equal amount of attention to discuss his writing. Because ESL students often want the consultant to individualize and expect her to “fix” all the errors in their writing, it’s important they understand that individualization is an unrealistic goal for a group conference. If students remember the goals and understand their responsibility as part of a writing community, a group conference is very rewarding. This type of conference gives students renewed confidence that they DO know WHAT they want to say and a new confidence that they have learned HOW to say it by interacting with their peers.

The results of group conferencing from the instructors’ perspective

Four important results emerged from

this project:

1. The students gained confidence in themselves so they could approach writing assignments with more confidence. This change was especially apparent in a student who was repeating the course. He no longer seemed afraid. Consequently, he had a stronger voice when writing.
2. Through the group they learned to help each other, which carried over to the classroom. They talked among themselves before class about assignments. And although the classroom peer review groups never worked well for them, they became more open about giving comments to others and asking others for comments.
3. Because they became better writers, they did better in the class. As a consequence of practicing their writing in conferences, they produced better documents for the class. Two of the three students earned Bs for their work.
4. An additional benefit was that through discussion with the writing instructor, the mechanical engineering laboratory instructor learned about working with writing and ESL students. She learned the concept that people’s writing styles reflect their cultures; she learned to focus on major errors and not minor ones and to understand these students’ thinking styles.

The results of group conferencing from the ESL students’ perspective

An interview with the ESL students revealed their perceptions about their preparedness for this advanced writing course and the benefits of the group conference.

What was difficult about being in an advanced writing class as an ESL student? Although both Asian students

said they thought their learned English skills had prepared them, they agreed that the performance expectations in the advanced class were higher than in their previous English classes. They perceived that the hardest part of writing a technical paper was grammar and diction, which they defined as knowing how to use the “jargon” words. One said, “I knew the equations, but I didn’t know how to write about them.” Another said, “Analyzing the data was hard, but writing about the analysis was harder.”

The other difficulty was participating in peer groups, which required students to review drafts. The ESL students felt they didn’t know grammar well enough to give feedback to native English speakers.

How did the group conference help?
First of all, the students felt that this advanced writing class gave them experience studying “real” English. Convinced that WHAT they were writing was valuable, they cared about HOW the writing was expressed. They said that the group conference improved their confidence in their writing skills because they could talk out content issues with other mechanical engineering students in the group, which helped their understanding of the course material. Second, sharing experiences of the complexities of writing English in front of an understanding audience also strengthened their confidence. They discovered that when in a group of other non-native speakers, they were better able to spot some of each other’s grammar problems and suggest solutions. One student remarked, “The WC conference help me proofread to find grammar mistakes, articles, and noun verb agreement, or I would get . . . Cs [on my writing]!”

Recommendations for training writing center consultants in ESL strategies for group conferencing

The group conferences revealed that successful collaboration is a rewarding experience for students, their instructors, and the center. However, such

collaboration requires hard work. We recommend the following guidelines before trying group conferencing with either ESL or native-speaking students:

1. Give consultants as much general ESL background and training as possible.
 - Remind consultants of the cultural differences that can affect the way ESL students study, write, and behave in an American academic setting.
 - Review and avoid conferencing techniques that are often ineffective when used with ESL students, such as questioning students in order for them to discover answers, having students always read aloud, or asking students to “hear” language problems.
 - Suggest effective techniques such as talking out ideas, drawing ideas, and providing students with grammatical explanations and idiomatic expressions when appropriate.
2. Establish a writing community that is mutually supportive and comfortable for all participants. When that community is composed of students from different countries, cultural differences can create tensions unless common goals are worked out. Because the community includes not only the students but also the writing instructor, the consultant must create compatible goals with the writing instructor, also.
3. Train consultants in small-group conferencing. Consultants need to learn how to facilitate group interaction. These conference groups blend the characteristics of classroom review groups and writing center conferences. One way to help consultants learn

how to facilitate such a group is to have them form their own writing group among themselves. Each time it meets, one consultant, on a rotating basis, can be the facilitator and the others can bring their own pieces of writing, thus each having a chance to role-play the facilitator as well as the participant.

4. Teach consultants strategies to ensure that each group member’s paper gets some attention and that constructive comments are made. They need to take care that one person does not take over the group. The consultants do not want to dominate, yet they need to learn to push gently so that ten minutes is not spent on one sentence. They need to ask probing questions to advance the discussion.
5. Encourage consultants to apply one-on-one conferencing strategies when appropriate. Many techniques we use in our conferencing (such as posing questions, allowing clients to direct the session, and being a good observer) are useful techniques when working with small groups.

Writing centers can make small-group conferences work if consultants use the patience and skills required to adapt one-on-one conferencing strategies to small-group strategies and if consultants are willing to understand the cultural and academic needs of ESL students. At the University of Wyoming, we have found group conferencing with ESL students who share the same assignments to be yet another way the writing center can offer assistance to students and expand our educational goals.

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Call for discussion on statistics project

Frequent discussions on the WCENTER listserv revolve around the need for comparisons between writing centers. How many students per year are served? How much space is available? What is the director paid? And so on. The February 2001 issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* includes an article by Rachel Perkes emphasizing the need for benchmarking and developing statistical reports.

In response to this need, Jeanne Simpson is developing a survey instrument for gathering writing center statistics while she is a visiting faculty member working with Carol Mattingly, writing center director at the University of Louisville. Tentatively, the survey will be distributed in the fall of 2001; the data gathered from responses will be analyzed and published in spring 2002.

A call on the WCENTER listserv for suggestions for items to be considered for the survey yielded 17 responses from a variety of institutions. The items suggested are listed below in order of frequency of suggestions. A key element in this project will be to identify carefully how terms will be defined. For example, what do we mean by a “student contact?” In order for the final data to be useable, all respondents need to be counting the same things in the same way. The survey needs to reflect the ideas and concerns of the whole writing center community.

To that end, you are invited to respond to these proposed survey items with your suggestions, concerns, additions, recommendations. Please take a few minutes to review the items listed below and respond with your thoughts. E-mail responses may be sent to numprs@ezlink.com.

Written responses may be sent to:
Writing Center Statistics Project
University Writing Center
312 Ekstrom Library
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40292

Proposed items in order of frequency requested:

- Number of conferences, student contacts [Issue: defining a student contact]
- Number of clients per AY [Unduplicated headcount]
- Number of contact hours
- Salary of director
- Percentage of load for directing writing center [Issue: defining load uniformly.]
- Number of hours open per full week of classes in AY
- Usage rate (ratio of number of hours actually used to number of hours of available tutor time per week)
- Number of staff members [Issue: defining staff—would we separate out tutors from assistant directors, directors, clerical staff, etc?]
- Tutoring budget [Issue: defining terms here, separating personnel lines from operating budget]
- Rate of pay for tutor/consultants [Issue: connecting pay rate with type of tutor/consultant]
- Status of tutor/consultants: peer, grad assistants, faculty, professional non-faculty, volunteers [Issue: define these categories carefully]
- Primary source of clientele by dept. [Problem: department structures vary so widely, would this information be useful or usable on a national level?]
- Kinds of students served (grad, undergrad, ESL, developmental) [Issue: defining terms; some overlap with the categories]
- Years center has been in service
- Square footage of center’s space
- Availability of online services or OWL
- Number of on-line consultations
- Type of training program for tutors/consultants: none, workshops, non-credit course, credit course, counted in compensated hours
- Institutional location of center: independent, departmental, learning center, WAC program
- Physical location of center: classroom building, library, student services building, residence hall, other
- Source of funding: student fees, annual budget allocation, grant funding [Issue: defining each source and asking for approximate percentage of each]
- Number and affiliation of professional staff of center: faculty/tenured, tenure-track, untenured with long-term or short-term contract non-faculty
- Number of clerical/support staff
- Number of computers available in center [Issue: should computers used by director and staff be counted or only those available for student use?]
- Reporting line for director (department chair, dean, provost, other?) [Issue: defining this reporting line ONLY for the directorship, not other duties; place close to percentage of appointment item]
- Typical length of conferences/tutorials
- Highest degree earned by director of writing center

Learning by doing: Collaboration in the writing center

Learning while doing is one of the bricks a writing center is built upon. Writing centers are not mechanics shops where experts slowly replace parts at exorbitant rates while the customer waits at home. Nor do they function as emergency rooms where highly educated specialists rapidly make life and death decisions, again at exorbitant rates, this time while the patient lies unconscious. Rather, when students enter writing centers, they must be prepared to participate in the process. They must be the expert, the specialist. Yes, they are assisted by others, by the writing consultants, the tutors. But the students learn while they are there. Though they usually get the service free with no exorbitant hidden fees, they cannot drop the paper off (at least in most centers). They cannot sit unconscious while someone else repairs the damage in the paper. Instead, they learn while working on their papers themselves.

Not only do the students who come to writing centers learn while doing, but the act of tutoring is a learning experience for the tutor as well. The cliché suggests that you never learn a thing as well as when you teach it. And tutoring certainly has that element. Tutors, though they are typically already confident writers, learn a great deal about writing in working with other student writers. Tutors learn a variety of ways of starting a paper. They learn some of the conventions that they themselves have struggled with. They learn how important audience is and why writing for the all-knowing teacher doesn't create a paper that stands alone. And they also learn a great deal about human interactions. Working one-on-one or in small groups quickly exposes a tutor to a range of human emotions and situa-

tions which demand thinking quickly and responding ethically and empathetically.

With all of this learning happening in situations where tutors are virtually, if not literally, on their own, most writing centers have training programs that mentor them, especially at the beginning. These training programs vary widely with compensation in the form of course credit or wages, with training happening before performing the job or while learning the job, with training from supervisors, faculty and peers. Many of us find that storytelling is a vital aspect of this training, with trainees explaining what happened in a given session, reflecting on their own actions in the situation, and asking for input about what else might have been done. Those listening use their own experiences as well as readings and theory to add to the collaborative brainstorming of possible solutions. I find this narrative aspect of training particularly critical for novice tutors. In addition to a one-credit course the first semester, all of my tutors get paid to meet weekly to discuss how things are going. The learning curve is particularly steep for beginners, and this form of interaction allows them not only a learning opportunity about tutoring, but a chance to be reassured that they are succeeding in many ways even while they are struggling with important questions about how to do the job better.

That's great for beginners, but what about returning tutors? How do we continue to help them grow in their knowledge of what it means to help others with their writing? Doing the job itself provides one of the best sources of continued learning. And participating in the training of inexpe-

rienced staff by sharing their experiences solidifies knowledge, while also raising questions which challenge experienced tutors to continue to be analytical about the tutoring process. But even in situations where the telling of tutoring tales is structured to require experienced tutors to reflect and possibly adapt their tutoring styles, the learning curve for the experienced tutor is greatly reduced. This is to be expected. During their second semester I often witness the relief of developing tutors as the process becomes more automatic so they can begin to relax and be less self-conscious during sessions.

However, this means that the learning while doing aspect of tutoring is diminished for experienced staff. At my writing center, this is further complicated by the fact that we only hire once a year, and in winter, there are no new tutors to initiate. While tutors could continue to share stories in meetings as they do in fall, I found that learning diminishes dramatically during winter terms. Stories that in fall created enormous questions and concerns because of the lack of experience on the part of half or more of the staff, in winter degenerated into gripe sessions and derision about faculty and students. I considered just eliminating winter meetings, but my staff was reluctant to give up meeting every week. Of course they don't want to lose an hour of pay, but they also appreciate time with one another. It's not just social time, it's another of the bricks in the writing center foundation—collaboration. Tutors work collaboratively with student writers, but they also need time to collaborate with one another.¹

Further, I realized that even with a course to teach them about writing conferencing, even with 20+ hours of

discussion about experiences while doing the job, even with sixty-five to several hundred hours of experience tutoring, they can still learn more. And the more they learn, the better they do the job. After seven years of tutoring, I'm still learning. So last year I decided to change the structure, create a situation that again required them to learn while doing.

Other than my student tutors, I am a staff of one. Anything that needs creating, doing, or developing falls to me. Why not get some help from the tutors? I decided that in winter, tutors would have work groups rather than discussion groups. If there were a job to be done, tutors would once again be learning while doing. At the end of fall term our lead tutors conducted brainstorming sessions in their groups to come up with ideas of what the center needed. Then we had tutors prioritize their interests, and we scheduled work groups based on those preferences. While I let this process evolve, I did guide the design of the work groups so that the topics were areas I believed beneficial.

In some cases, the primary purpose was knowledge to be gained by the group members themselves. For example, one group studied learning disabilities and another studied the teaching of English as a second language. Both of these groups did research and discussed their findings, learning about these special populations and assessing how tutoring might be altered or challenged by them. Each group also produced something for orientation the following year. The LD group created a trifold brochure that highlighted a few of their findings which they distributed at our orientation, and the ESL group designed an experience for orientation. The experience was to simulate for tutors what it might be like for foreign language speakers to be in U.S. classrooms. To create the simulation, one member of the ESL group spoke German for several minutes without explaining in English what she was

saying or doing, overwhelming the tutor audience with language they couldn't understand. From the LD group there is a brochure that we can continue to use or develop further. The ESL group didn't leave a legacy; their one-time simulation ended their contribution to the center, though I know that some of them learned a great deal about working with second language writers.

A third group, focused on creativity, developed a 16-page handbook called, "Get Out of Your Mind!" The handbook offers many ways of breaking through writer's block, being open to new and creative ideas, and adding interest to papers. There are fun activities for individuals and groups. The booklet has been used by tutors, especially when they are working with our basic writers in small group meetings. But they have also been requested by faculty who liked the idea and wanted to use some of the materials. This group believed that creativity makes writing more interesting, both in the process for the writer and ultimately, in the product for the reader.

Actually doing something is the key to learning by doing, and I discovered, not surprisingly, that the more concrete the purpose, the greater the reward for the group. Last year's creativity group spent many hours coming up with ideas and creating materials beyond what they were paid for. The group leader even took a two-credit internship to complete the handbook and make sure it had a professional look. Of the four members of that group, one person moved on to another college, but the other three all took on leadership roles in our center this year. One might conclude that this group pulled together our most talented and dedicated folks. That isn't necessarily wrong, but the enthusiasm generated by the incredibly useful resource they created also deepened their commitment to the writing center.

At the beginning, I helped them

think about what use could be made of their investigations into creativity. They lamented the boring papers they wrote and read. They discussed the lack of opportunity they perceived for creativity in academic writing. And then they hit upon the need they had for lively, interactive, confidence-building writing exercises to use with their basic writing groups. The moment that purpose was identified, they were off and running. I became one of their proofreaders, and I also offered feedback along the way, encouraging some of their ideas more than others, pointing out what could and couldn't be reproduced easily. But mostly, I watched as they came together weekly, excited about each new idea and how it might fit.

The collaborative atmosphere generated in this group should not be overlooked. The lead tutor was an integral part of the group, not the one dictating the route they would take. While she was often the one who involved me, an important element from my perspective, all group members raised questions, offered suggestions, and generally discussed equally with one another the progress they were making. I know this from my own observations as well as conversations with the lead tutor. This offers another purpose to these work groups. Most of our tutors are involved in group work with basic writers. They frequently struggle with the role to take in the groups. This kind of collaboration offers tutors a group dynamic to strive for in such settings. While the level of interest may not be initially as high in basic writing groups, a model of leadership based on collaboration can help tutors develop trusting relationships in the groups.

Not all groups had someone willing to take an internship to finish their projects as the creativity group did. So I learned that groups might need me to help determine timelines, especially in terms of backing up deadlines so that the final stages of a project, like proofreading, can be completed. One group

revamped a collection of tutor reflections and advice that had been hanging around the center for awhile without getting much use. They added recent newsletter articles to the collection and organized it in a logical fashion so tutors could look for help without having to read until they just stumbled upon an article that was useful. But the group lost track of time, and the semester was over before I was able to get the printed collection from the lead tutor. By that point, group members had dispersed from campus, and there was no way to get a complete electronic version of the documents. And the computerized version was important since the group hadn't proofread the collection. It took another semester to collect and revise the final materials. If I'd asked to see their work a couple weeks before the semester ended, and if I'd asked for a disk of the final product, the work the group did would have been available much sooner.

Similar problems occurred in the remaining groups as well. Without a clear purpose, some groups were far less successful from my perspective, but that's mostly my fault. The creativity group invited my input, other groups didn't. Unfortunately, I didn't pay very close attention to each of the groups as the semester wore on, and in some cases groups got stranded at the brainstorming stage and didn't fully move into implementing their ideas. A topic alone does not provide a purpose or project. The "doing" aspect fell away as groups talked their way through the semester. It was a more focused discussion than previous years, but the talk was never embodied in any physical form.

With that in mind, I made it clear this year that I was looking for tangible results. Halfway through the semester, groups are working on the following:

Revising our hiring process—by changing the essay applicants critique and the structure of our group interview to make it less intimidating and by developing recruitment tools.

Improving orientation—by structuring a more interactive time with faculty when they join us and by eliminating elements that don't pertain directly to tutoring.

Developing public relations tools—such as writing center flyers to post around campus. Designing a logo and slogan contest. Creating materials to use when we go into freshman seminars for presentations.

Expanding a resource about the problems that tutors face—by writing scenarios of common problems and ways of addressing them. Written ways of offering such tutor talk are sometimes desired by quieter tutors.

Developing ways to improve faculty relations—by sending out surveys to faculty and tutors to create a handout for new tutors that explains how to work effectively with faculty in the composition classroom.

Designing a web page for the center—by exploring the web sites of other university writing centers. Without much web-authoring experience in the group, they've decided to carefully design a home page with photos as links to the areas of information they'd like to have available. However, they don't expect to get those links done this semester. (This limitation of expectation helped the group move from floundering on "I don't know enough" to enthusiastic creators.)

This semester I've gone into the groups to check on questions they might have. I discuss with lead tutors, who run the groups, any problems they sense in group dynamics. I help brainstorm ways of creating collaborative environments. This makes the job of leading the group easier for them and creates more positive attitudes among

the group members. I've made sure that groups are prioritizing their ideas and working toward concrete goals. The groups don't need me watching over them or holding their hands, but they do need me to set parameters and expectations. I try to monitor items being sent with the writing center's name on them, like the surveys, but otherwise I mostly stay out of the way.

The work groups are a systemic way of continuing the tutors' experiences of learning by doing. All of my tutors are engaged in this process. In most groups, all work is done during the weekly meeting. But in some, like this year's web group, tutors spend their own time outside of the center to continue their research. The tutors working on the web go surfing on their own and bring back images and ideas from their expeditions. Like the creativity group last year, the enthusiasm for the project takes on a life of its own which encourages people to give more of themselves than they normally would.

As I reflect on the creativity and web groups, I realize that two important factors are at play in driving their performance. In both cases, the individuals had genuine interest in the topics. In both cases they knew a little about the topic but were forced to do some research on their own to move forward with their ideas. Personal interest and research combine to create powerful learning experiences, especially when there is a clear goal.

Another way of bringing these two elements together to learn by doing in the writing center is to have tutors present at conferences. Other writing centers are quite proficient at this, though I'm just learning the ropes. But even with my few novice adventures into this territory, I can see how well the concrete purpose drives the tutors to go beyond their jobs, beyond the effort they put into most class-based research, to learn not only about the material they are dealing with but also about conferences and how to create effective presentations. It's better ex-

perience than any speech class can ever be because the end result is an actual performance in front of an audience interested in the topic.

In the past, our conference presentations have been relatively local—state or regional—and have involved only a couple of tutors. This year, we’re going to the National Writing Centers Association Conference. The costs of such a trip for five tutors is much greater than our budget can bear. This obstacle created another kind of concrete need that had to be addressed. While it involves only 15% of my tutors, it’s given us a goal to attain together. In two weeks of working on this problem, we’ve not only raised most of the money we need, but we’ve generated a great deal of publicity about our planned presentation. And our plans for the actual presentation have been the most vigorous undertaking I’ve seen yet. There’s a genuine

team effort under way. Individuals are taking up ideas and developing them. One person went to the president of the university and got half of the money we need. Another person contacted the student paper and landed the best article we’ve ever had about the writing center. Someone mentioned our project to a faculty member who is now going to join us in our presentation. Tonight we’re deciding what materials need to be developed and what elements are critical in our presentation. Individuals and pairs will take tasks and prepare them for our next meeting, all without pay. And the event is still two months away. It amazes me the extra energy that these students are putting forth. These are undergraduates. Most of them are not English majors, and most of them are not going to be teachers. But they work at the writing center, and they see this as a great opportunity for fun as well as personal growth and professional development.

Learning by doing and working collaboratively—two foundations of writing centers that should be recognized for the potential they provide to motivate our tutors to learn their jobs well, to develop resources for the center, and to add professionally to the field.

Denise Stephenson
Grand Valley State University
Allendale, MI

¹Bryan M. Kopp of Purdue describes a way of creating tutor collaboration while on-the-job in his article, “‘Climate control’ for the writing center: A collaborative web project to improve staff morale” (*Writing Lab Newsletter* 23.2 [October 1998]: 5-6). Kopp asserts the web project enhanced morale and encouraged personal and professional development for the tutors, not to mention the resource and promotion benefits for the writing center.

Tutorial Coordinator Writing Bucks County Community College

Full-time position in the Tutoring Center (51205) Exempt level 14. Responsibilities include assisting students in mastering writing and study skills necessary to successfully complete their courses; overseeing the Writing Area of the Tutoring Center which includes recruiting, interviewing, training, scheduling, and supervising Per Diem Instructional Assistants, Professional Tutors, and Peer Tutors to ensure proper tutoring is provided in all assigned areas.

Requirements: Bachelor’s degree in English; experience in teaching and/or tutoring; and the specific knowledge that is required to tutor all of the courses in the assigned area. Must be able to work evening hours as needed and occasionally travel to other campuses. Start Date: May 21, 2001. Send resume to:
Bucks County Community College
Office of Human Resources
275 Swamp Road
Newtown, PA 18940-4106

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Call for Proposals
Nov. 2-4, 2001
Allentown, PA
“*Writing from the Center*”

Proposals are invited from peer tutors, writing center administrators, and faculty. Tutor-led, active presentations are encouraged. Please include the following in your proposal: name and address of contact person; address, phone no., and e-mail address; time required (50 or 75 minutes); intended audience; format (interactive workshop, panel discussion, demonstration, presentation of paper); participants and their titles; description in 300-400 words; abstract of 50 words; equipment needed. Send completed proposals to Linda Miller, English Department, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, PA 18104; lmiller@muhlenberg.edu; 484-664-3316. Proposal deadline: April 16, 2001; Notification: June 2001.

TUTORS' COLUMN

Networking: Tutors helping each other

Learning to work together as a team is one of the great rewards of tutoring. But few of us had the opportunity to network among peers until we became tutors, so we were not aware of the many benefits networking provides. Learning to rely on ourselves and trust our own judgment is encouraged by our instructors and mentors and is an important asset that we gain in college. As students, we study alone and learn to achieve success relying on our own ingenuity. We individually conduct research for assignments, write papers, practice exercises, and complete homework assignments. We also tutor students in one-on-one sessions. However, in the Writing Center, problems do arise in tutoring sessions that can be alleviated by communicating with each other. Some students fail to grasp concepts, personality conflicts develop, or sometimes questions arise we are not prepared to answer right away. We may become frustrated or begin to doubt our abilities. By learning to discuss these problems with one another instead of trying to resolve them individually, we acquire new methods for resolving problems. Networking expands our potential as we exchange successful instructional techniques, create resolutions for discordant situations, and find answers to difficult questions.

Unique traits, interests, and abilities are assets for each student individually. Collectively, these assets become a challenge as we attempt to tailor our consultations to meet the distinctive needs of each student. It is just as difficult to determine what will help a student comprehend certain composition concepts in a consultation as it is in a

classroom, even though consultations are usually conducted one-on-one. Our repertoire of instructional methods is limited, as is our knowledge about learning difficulties. For this reason, jotting down notes after consultations helps identify weaknesses in both the student's knowledge and our own, and sharing these notes with other tutors helps us further define new strategies when we seem unable to communicate the material in a way that benefits a student. Brainstorming together invariably introduces new insights, and ideas become apparent that may become a turning point for a troubled student. Instead of dreading the next consultation with that student, we are excited at the opportunity before us.

Networking not only increases our knowledge, but it can help us handle conflicts as well. Discordant situations can occasionally occur among tutors and students because of personality conflicts. Some students do not accept constructive criticism well, or they argue with tutors about the advice they are given. Occasionally, a student will refuse to abide by the accepted practices of the Writing Center. Networking can help us deal with these situations.

An example of one problematic situation involved a student who continuously arrived for unscheduled consultations. His first visit was unscheduled, but since none of the tutors were busy, he was given a consultation. He had an outline of the paper due within a few days. His outline was very broad and lacked specific examples on his topic. Together the tutor and student discussed what the student needed to im-

prove his paper. They devised an outline and a rough draft. The following day the student returned with merely a typed outline which he and the tutor had developed in the previous consultation. The student then proceeded to ask the tutor many of the same questions he had asked in the last session. The tutor and student went over the information again, only this time in more depth. The student seemed to be confident in the advice and suggestions he received from the tutor. However, he returned unscheduled the following day without a rough draft and the same questions that had been discussed during the last two sessions. By this time, he had become more than a problem; he was a situation! His refusal to schedule an appointment and to make recommended changes to his work began affecting other appointments. When this was pointed out to him, he became belligerent.

Such situations are discouraging to a tutor who can then begin to doubt his or her ability. But if the lines of communication are open in the Center, another tutor can volunteer to see the student. If there are no conflicts, a joint session can also be conducted. Sometimes this helps the unfocused student as well. When these students are directed to a second tutor, they receive additional reinforcement, not only of the writing process but of the need for proper scheduling and manners.

Problems can also evolve among tutors. When one of our tutors quit close to the end of the semester, it created an unfortunate situation. The tutor had not mentioned to any of us that she intended to quit, nor were we aware she

was having problems. After she missed a day at the Center, the director called the tutor and discovered she no longer worked with us. We were frustrated that she would not discuss her problems. Not only did she let us down, but she also let her students down. And each of us had to take up where she left off, whether it was taking an hour that she was supposed to work or having to pick up students who knew and depended on her. If she had communicated her concerns, we might have been able to encourage her and prevent her from quitting. The loss of her knowledge and abilities handicapped our resources.

Since we do not have the level of expertise in a subject an instructor possesses, communication among tutors can reduce the pressure we put on our-

selves which sometimes results in poor consultations. Therefore, we should accept that we do not readily have an answer for every question students ask and not waste time berating ourselves or questioning our abilities when, after searching diligently, we still are not able to confidently answer a question. Sometimes we may even find the answer in a reference volume, but we are still confused because the answer is open to interpretation. This is a great opportunity to network with another tutor, and we often discover that he or she has been trying to find solutions to similar questions. If another tutor is not immediately available or an interpretation cannot be agreed on, we network further with the director or an instructor. This method reinforces our own knowledge and the need for us to work together, but still allows us to

strengthen problem-solving skills independently.

Communication between tutors is extremely important because we are players on a team, and without a team, the others have a greater struggle than if all tutors work together. We are rarely scheduled to work at the same time, so in our Writing Center we keep a written log that documents any problems, questions, or comments we have or wish to share with each other. It is just as important a means of communication as verbal communication is. And we are a constant source of encouragement to each other. We are still learning ourselves, and networking allows us to broaden our horizons and helps us create a successful team strategy.

Brandy Cunningham and Karin Foust
Roane State Community College
Oak Ridge, TN

In the process

Tutoring is, above all, a learning experience: in working with other writers, tutors learn about themselves, the people they work with, writing, and even life itself. The thing that stands out the most in all I've learned so far in the process of tutoring and studying tutoring is how much I have left to learn.

I've learned that no one is a complete expert on writing. Everyone, no matter how skilled or knowledgeable they are, can still learn a lot. This is obvious, but I never realized it before. Like Socrates, I am wise in realizing how little I know. Maybe that's the beauty of any aspect of education – being shown things that you would never think of otherwise, being given a peek into a world you never knew existed. It causes you to want to know more because you have real-

ized there is something you know very little about.

There is a lot I do know about writing, but so much of my knowledge of writing is too abstract to explain. I wasn't particularly aware of that fact before this year when I became a tutor at the writing center and took a class on rhetorical strategies. Suddenly, I had to encounter rules about things unidentified: comma splices, correlative conjunctions. To tell you the truth, before this year I didn't even have a clear picture of what a clause really is.

I already knew a lot about how to write. Now I'm learning how to talk about it. The initial illusion that I know little about writing has evaporated. Instead, I see now that it isn't that I don't know anything useful about writing. However, I have a lot to learn, includ-

ing the words to describe the rules that I already know.

I also know that I have a lot to learn about interacting with students who come into the writing center for help, and that's something I was already aware of without any class discussion or experience. Although I haven't had any upsetting consults yet, I still feel nervous and intimidated just thinking about the students who might come in, the questions they have that I might not be able to answer, the things they'll want from me that I won't be able to give them.

Becoming comfortable with tutoring comes with experience, and I'm working on that. So far working with the students has taught me something that I often remind myself of but still don't remember: me helping them with their

papers does not equal me being put naked in some spotlight for everyone to pick apart and laugh at. What I'm saying is that although it is common and normal to be anxious about tutoring, and I realize this, it's not the nightmare that nervous tutors can sometimes build it up to be.

Students aren't monsters, they aren't mean, they aren't out to get us. Even the ones who seem that way are merely

frustrated, and if they seem to be yelling it's probably not at us but at the assignment they're having trouble with, or even at themselves for not knowing how to deal with it. Sometimes our job is to let them yell. It's important not to get defensive and to realize that the student has come for help, not to scrutinize us on our methods and knowledge (or lack thereof).

The more I work with students, I think, the better I'll be able to grasp these ideas and feel less nervous about consults and more excited about sharing with students the love of writing and any helpful knowledge that I have.

Dani Stein
Clarion University
Clarion, PA

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

April 7, 2001: Northwest Regional Writing Centers Association, in Bellingham, WA

Contact: Roberta R. Buck, Coordinator, Western Washington University Writing Center, Wilson Library 492, Bellingham, WA 98225-9124. Email: Roberta.Buck@wwu.edu; phone: 360-650-7338. Conference website: <http://www.wwu.edu/~writepro/Conference.htm>

June 18-20, 2001: European Writing Center Association, in Groningen, The Netherlands

Contact: e-mail: eataw.conference@let.rug.nl; fax: ++31.503636855. Conference website: <http://www.hum.ku.dk/formidling/eataw/>

Sept. 14-15, 2001: Midwest Writing Center Association, in Iowa City, IA

Contact: SuEllen Shaw, shaws@mnstate.edu, or Cinda Coggins, CCoggins66@aol.com. Conference website: www.ku.edu/~MWCA.

Writing Lab Director North Carolina Wesleyan College

Assistant Professor of English/Director of the Writing Lab Tenure Track position to direct the Writing Lab in the Student Support Center at North Carolina Wesleyan College begins July, 2001. This is a 12-month position and will report to the Dean of the College. Duties will include development and implementation of a writing lab, supervision and staff development of writing tutors, and developing an online writing lab.

Requirements: Ph.D. or ABD in Composition/Rhetoric or English. Applicants for this full-time position should have at least 3 years of experience in administering or serving in a writing lab, college teaching experience, and relevant background or interest in instructional technology, electronic portfolios, and OWLs. Send letter of application, vita, and dossier to Darrell Whitley, Director of Personnel, N.C. Wesleyan College, 3400 N. Wesleyan Blvd. Rocky Mount, NC 27804. Applications will be accepted until position is filled.

Making synchronous, on-line tutorials easier: Microsoft's NetMeeting 3.1

As expected, technology is rapidly changing. Just as we get used to one version of the software, a new one comes out and we have to take time to retrain again, sometimes only to find that the upgrade isn't much of an improvement. Fortunately, Microsoft's NetMeeting 3.1 is not one of those software upgrades that fails to impress. Writing center staff will be glad to know that in upgrading NetMeeting from 2.1 to 3.1, Microsoft has introduced some significant improvements which will make synchronous, on-line tutorials easier and more efficient to conduct than in the past.

For those unfamiliar with NetMeeting, here are the essentials: NetMeeting is a software program by Microsoft that is now a standard part of their Windows software package; it more than likely will be found on all new PCs that run Windows 95 or 98 applications. For those who work with older equipment, NetMeeting is a free download from Microsoft's web page and can be used on Macintosh machines running MacOS 9.1 or better, as well as PC compatibles set up with Microsoft Windows 95 or 98 with at least a 486/66 processor with 8 MB of RAM (Pentium with 12 MB of RAM recommended). It can also run on Microsoft Windows NT (R) version 4.0 with at least a 486/66 processor with 16 MB of RAM and Microsoft Windows NT 4.0 service pack 3. A detailed description of NetMeeting's functions can be found in "Virtual Success: Using Microsoft NetMeeting and Synchronous, On-line Tutorials" *Writing Lab Newsletter* 24.6 (2000): 12-16. Suffice it here to say that NetMeeting's main attraction to writing center staff is that it allows a client to send his or her paper online to a writing consultant who then formats it on-screen for both

to view alongside a chat window, where the two can discuss it in real time. While not intended to replace face-to-face tutorials, NetMeeting does make possible tutorials for long-distance learners, as well as for those who, for whatever reason, choose not to come to the Center to work directly with a consultant.

Microsoft has overhauled NetMeeting 2.1 that was plagued by limitations that rendered it slow and sometimes frustrating to use. First, programmers have made the process of formatting the chat and document windows on client and consultant screens quicker and easier. Our consultants at Indiana State University found that, in using NetMeeting 2.1, at best it took five to eight minutes to format these windows so that both were viewable on screen to both the client and consultant alike. This process took so long because the client and consultant screens were interrelated, which meant that if one person adjusted a screen, the other person also experienced an adjustment, usually an unwanted one. What made this so problematic was that if the two computers had incompatible display resolutions, a minor adjustment made on one screen to center the chat and document windows would cause significant parts of these windows to jump off the screen of the other computer. Matters would deteriorate further with counter adjustments that would inevitably lead client and consultant into a virtual tug-o'-war. Fortunately, NetMeeting 3.1 developers have fixed this problem by making the consultant and client screens independent; that is to say, any adjustments made on one screen do not affect the other. We found that independent screen control reduced the time it takes to format both parties' screens from an

average of five to eight minutes to one or two, a savings that not only preserves time to discuss writing but also prevents unnecessary frustration from disrupting the tutorial.

A second fix to NetMeeting 2.1 has put a halt to what we at Indiana State coined "mouse wars," the frustrating battle between client and consultant which occurred because NetMeeting 2.1 allowed only one party at a time to control the mouse/cursor. In suffering long delays while in chat, impatient participants would inevitably try to take matters into their own hands by clicking the mouse to enter a new chat message before the other person could reply to a previous one. This inappropriate (but understandable) act, of course, disrupted the communication process, producing a series of on-screen non-sequiturs and a lot of wasted time. Designers of NetMeeting 3.1 wisely have made alterations to avoid such struggles for the mouse. The new version automatically gives control of the mouse to the consultant, but with a new "ask/grant function," presents the consultant with the option of offering control to the client (or reclaiming it) as necessary. While this feature obviously awards more control of the tutorial to the consultant, it does so with the benefit of greatly increasing its efficiency. At Indiana State, we have found the trade-off worth it, as it was largely responsible for helping us cut our average 75-second delay between chat exchanges to about 14 seconds, a far more endurable rate.

Another improvement that NetMeeting 3.1 offers is a highlighting feature that allows one to bring portions of text to the attention of the other participant. With NetMeeting 2.1, highlighting could be done only by

clicking and dragging the cursor over the desired portion of text. The problem with this was that selected text was easily lost if someone hit any key on the keyboard. Now, because NetMeeting 3.1 is more fully integrated with Microsoft Word functions, one can highlight by clicking on the highlight icon in the Windows toolbar with no danger of losing text. Moreover, one can highlight in different colors for ease of identification, a nice feature considering that when online one can't point a client's eyes to a passage with one's finger.

The final advancement that NetMeeting 3.1 offers is that audio/video capabilities have improved as their costs have coincidentally lowered. The video component in NetMeeting 3.1 provides an increased screen size (from an inch and a half to three) and quicker feed: the result is a larger picture hindered by fewer stutter-like delays. What's more, now that video cameras can be purchased for as low as \$30 and microphones for \$10, using NetMeeting's audio/video platform is by no means cost-prohibitive. Indeed, it may not be far in the future when all this audio/video equipment will be a standard part of most computer packages, making synchronous, online tutorials all the more feasible and face-to-face-like than at present.

Until NetMeeting's audio/visual component becomes the standard,

however, there's no getting around the fact that communicating by the written word will remain slower than communicating verbally with the aid of body language and facial expressions. Currently, we estimate that even with the new innovations that NetMeeting has presented, it would take three synchronous, online sessions to achieve what one could do in a single face-to-face meeting. Fortunately, though, some strategies exist that can help writing center staff to use NetMeeting as effectively as possible. One is to have clients print off hard copies of their papers for themselves while sending an electronic copy to the center to be downloaded and viewed before the scheduled online tutorial. Having hard copies on hand cuts time spent on needless window manipulations and thereby leads to quicker chat exchanges. Moreover, a chance to preview a client's paper prior to a tutorial gives the consultant more time to work with a client during the tutorial itself.

As a second strategy, the consultant should try to write questions and comments on Microsoft Notepad—a basic word processing program—to have ready-made to copy into the NetMeeting chat if needed. Unfortunately, most of what goes on in an online tutorial is waiting, and the longer a client waits, the more passive he or she often becomes. Thus, firing off ready-made comments helps reduce the client's dead time and can actually

increase his or her involvement in the tutorial while also helping the consultant to keep a step ahead in responding to the client's needs. For example, if a client's first two paragraphs were poorly organized, the consultant could send a ready-made question or comment asking the client how the first two paragraphs are supposed to connect to one another. While the client reads and considers the question, the consultant would then have time to scan ahead to look for other areas of concern or to write other questions or comments.

A third tactic is to schedule two-hour, online tutorials. While it might not be beneficial to work online with a client for two hours (there are arguments pro and con), it could be useful to the consultant to have up to an hour to prep for an upcoming tutorial to put into practice some of the suggestions made above. Tying up a consultant's time this way may not be so much a scheduling liability as a way to make online sessions worthwhile.

While it hasn't replaced the need for face-to-face tutorials, Microsoft must be applauded for developing NetMeeting 3.1. They have truly designed a product that makes doing synchronous, online tutorials easier and at no direct cost to the consumer.

Doug Enders
Indiana State University
Terre Haute, IN

New institute for writing center research

The Liberal Studies Project at the University of Louisville has provided funding for a national institute for writing center research. The mission of the institute is to provide ongoing support for two projects: the statistics and benchmark project initiated by Jeanne Simpson and the NWCA, and an archive of writing center scholarship. The project aims to gather and publish statistical information about writing centers to enable valid comparisons and benchmarks. Periodic surveys and reports will provide meaningful data for writing center decision making and planning. The archive will pro-

vide a centralized repository of writing center research, scholarship and publications. An advisory board consisting of Allison Holland, Eric Hobson, Brad Hughes, Neal Lerner, Carol Mattingly, Michael Pemberton, and Jeanne Simpson will meet in April. Anyone wishing to donate materials may contact Carol Mattingly at the University Writing Center, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, 40292. The advisory board would like to thank John Hale and the Liberal Studies Project at the University of Louisville for initiating this national resource.

Reissue of reference book for ESL tutoring

Alice Maclin's *Reference Guide to English: A Handbook of English for Speakers of Other Languages*, originally published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston, in 1981, has been reprinted by the Clifton Language Institute. Reprinted by the United States Information Agency in 1997 and distributed around the world to United States embassies, the book is a particularly helpful resource for tutoring ESL students who are at intermediate or advanced levels of learning English. Arranged alphabetically by topic, the book is meant to be used as a reference. There are extensive sections on articles, determiners, adjective forms, word order of adverbs, questions, and other topics relevant to non-native speakers of English. There is also guidance with matters such as documentation, connotation, and alphabetizing (for users of other alphabets).

Copies can be ordered by writing directly to the author, Alice Maclin, 1723 East Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA 30307 or through her website at <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/maclins>. The cost is \$15 plus \$3.50 shipping in the U.S. per copy or 10 copies for \$100.00 plus shipping charges.

Quotable Quote

I like to tell my students that an essay and a good dinner party work the same way. The introduction is the appetizer, and as such needs to stimulate my appetite and make me want to read on to see what this writer has to offer. The body of the essay is the main course of the meal, substantial, filling, wholesome. Finally, the conclusion is the dessert—by many accounts the best and most memorable part of the meal. Please don't serve rewarmed appetizer (it was good the first time, but try something else here—a tasty tidbit saved for this special occasion, perhaps, or a contrasting flavor from the main course). Balanced meals and balanced essays should leave the eater/reader satisfied with the experience.

Kay McSpadden, teacher
York Comprehensive High School,
York, SC

THE WRITING LAB
NEWSLETTER

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