

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 27, Number 10

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

June, 2003

...FROM THE EDITOR...

With this last newsletter issue of the academic year, I'm enclosing wishes for a quiet, relaxing summer for us all—but not too relaxing. Do consider using some of your “down time” to write an article for the newsletter. Let the rest of us know about services you've added, problems you've solved or solutions that didn't work (that's useful too), and insights you offered in your conference talks or workshop discussions (that hundreds of us didn't hear). What activities and readings are included in your tutor training? How do you evaluate your tutors and/or your center? What do you include in your yearly report? If you are stepping into an existing writing lab, what concerns do you have? Tell us about your online tutoring, how you reward tutors' accomplishments, or if your campus newsletter is useful.

In short, take some time to reflect on your work, think about what you'll be doing next fall, and share those thoughts in writing with the rest of us. Feel free to send a query or ask questions about possible topics for articles. Contact me at harrism@cc.purdue.edu

In the meantime, I hope you're enjoying thoughts of languid summer days ahead or—if you're on the other side of the globe—where you'll soon be taking your winter holiday.

• Muriel Harris, editor

...INSIDE...

Conducting an Oral History of Your Own Writing Center

• Carey Smitherman 1

Greatly Improving Writing Center Attendance

• Leslie Durhman 6

Conference Calendar 6

Tutors' Column:
“Unconditional Positive Regard in the Writing Center”

• Laura Beth Miller 8

“Overcoming My Own Perfectionist Tendencies to Help Others Succeed”

• Kreszenze M. Kossler 9

Zen Tutoring: Unlocking the Mind

• Deborah Murray 12

The Volunteer Factor:
Using Faculty from Outside the English Department to Staff a Writing Center

• Gary L. Kriewald 14

Conducting an oral history of your own writing center

Documentation of the history of individual writing centers has been fragmented and widely dispersed. Available pieces of writing centers' histories tend to generalize individualized experiences, such as personal struggles and triumphs, feelings of marginalization and hesitancy about the establishment of a national organization, to the whole writing center community. Researchers of writing center history are left to decipher facts from anecdotal evidence, hence the confusion over what is truth and what is writing center lore.

Oral histories can play a vital role in documenting writing center research in that they will provide writing center researchers with personal accounts of writing center directors. Although Valerie Raleigh Yow describes oral histories as subjective, she states that this subjectivity “is at once inescapable and crucial to an understanding of the meanings we give our past and present” (25). Oral histories have been chosen as the means to collect personal accounts in many fields because of their individuality. In this regard, they fit perfectly with the individual experiences of writing center directors and scholars.

Conducting oral histories is a way to get beyond the surface dates and events in any field. Oral history is defined as a branch of historical research that serves as a method for gathering and preserving historical information in the spoken form with modern technology. Interviewing scholars often produces information relevant to the history of a field that would otherwise be excluded or overlooked. This knowledge comes about through the conversational form of oral history, often concentrating on a specific event

through the eyes of several participants, and piecing together a more complete history through several points of view.

The Writing Centers Research Project (WCRP), established at the University of Louisville in 2001, provides a place where information on writing centers is archived. A major part of the WCRP is to conduct and collect oral histories of early writing center directors in hopes of pulling together a collective history of writing centers. These histories, along with the other literature obtained by the WCRP, are being placed in a central archive for research by writing center scholars. As Assistant Director of the WCRP, I began the task of learning to conduct successful oral histories to add to our archives. At first, I was not aware of the complexity of this task, but through various forms of training, I was able to learn about this type of research. I attribute my knowledge to Tracy K. Meyer, the director of the Oral History Department at my institution; Charles Morrissey, who led an informative workshop at the Oral History Association National Conference; and several oral historians whose publications helped to guide me as I began oral history interviews. I would like to share what I have learned so that other writing center administrators may effectively conduct this type of research.

Not only are we able to learn of specific events, but through oral history, as Stahl and King explain, we are able to understand the impact of educational events and important figures in a field and the current professional generation, since the field's professional ancestors influenced current professionals (14). This method provides us with a more personal approach to history that fits well with the personal characteristic of writing centers. Stahl and King state that the heritage of scholars in a particular field (in their case, literacy) should be preserved through memories and recollections. Oral histo-

ries not only give current professionals in the field a look into the lives of the people who have shaped their field, but also a more cohesive look into the earlier years of their field as a whole (17).

Marilyn K. Harris states in a paper presented at CCCC in 1995 that oral history plays a key role in verifying history in composition. She says that, while it's too late to claim much of the information from the earliest years of composition teaching and research in the United States, it is still possible to retrieve the rest. But the clock is ticking. Scholars must learn how to identify the information around them and be able to preserve it. Oral history is a crucial practice in doing so. But to be successful at retaining this history, scholars must learn several things, including "how to construct useful questions, how to conduct interviews, how to record and transcribe the materials they get, and when and how to ask for collateral materials" (3). They must also be willing to accept that history is far more complex than dates and significant events. "It is a comprehensive record of society" (1). If writing center directors will take on the challenge of learning to gather useful and accurate oral histories, their individual writing centers, as well as the field of writing centers as a whole, will surely benefit. Oral histories will give each writing center scholar a voice. These voices, when put together, will serve the writing center community with a more accurate knowledge of its history.

An element of urgency motivates efforts to complete the oral histories of early and influential members of the writing center community. What remains of many of the histories of individual writing centers is contained in boxes in directors' offices, filed in writing center staffers' home files, or is being thrown away, piece by piece, in yearly "housecleaning" rituals to prepare more space in writing centers. Besides these dwindling physical evidences of writing center history, the

The *Writing Lab Newsletter*, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by the Department of English, Purdue University, is a publication of the International Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779. All Rights and Title reserved unless permission is granted by Purdue University. Material will not be reproduced in any form without express written permission.

Editor: Muriel Harris

Managing Editor: Mary Jo Turley
English Dept., Purdue University, 500
Oval Drive, West Lafayette, IN 47907-
2038 (765)494-7268.

e-mail: harrism@cc.purdue.edu
mjturley@purdue.edu

web site: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/newsletter/index.html>

Subscriptions: The newsletter has no billing procedures. Yearly payments of \$15 (U.S. \$20 in Canada) are requested, and checks must be received four weeks prior to the month of expiration to ensure that subscribers do not miss an issue. Please make checks payable to Purdue University and send to the Managing Editor. Prepayment is requested for all subscriptions.

Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays. 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).

directors who founded centers, the ones who are vital parts of the genre of writing center history, are disappearing as well. Many of these early, influential directors are now retired or have moved on to other types of work. Therefore, I ask you to consider researching your own writing center's history, including conducting interviews with early directors, tutors, and staff of your center as available. Not only will these histories benefit writing center scholars around the world as a part of the WCRP archives, but they will also solidify the history of each local writing center as a part of its archives.

No matter how useful the method of oral history can be to all those involved and those who reap the benefits of the history, E. Culpepper Clark, et al., Valerie Raleigh Yow, and Harriette McAdoo advise us on problems that may be encountered when trying to use oral history as a method of historical research. Culpepper et al., in "Communication in the Oral History Interview: Investigating Problems of Interpreting Oral Data," explain that the absence of rules, authority, and training will most certainly lead to a failed effort in using the oral history method (28). It is of the utmost importance that a person hoping to conduct meaningful oral histories be trained in specific interviewing techniques and in understanding the true meaning and purpose of the oral history.

If you are interested in beginning an oral history of your own writing center, here is some advice on getting started.

- * Contact the human subjects department at your institution to find out about any paperwork and consent forms that need to be established. This step should be done as soon as possible since the process can take a fair amount of time.
- * Learn about the methods involved in conducting oral histories. To

facilitate oral history interviews concerning writing centers, the WCRP has compiled an instructional packet containing knowledge about oral history interviews. We feel that this packet will give you a solid foundation for beginning this type of research. Visit the WCRP Web site at <http://www.wcrp.louisville.edu> to obtain this information.

- * Find resource people at your institution who may provide expert advice on this type of research, such as faculty members who have been trained in doing oral interviews or members of an oral history department. I found the director of the oral history department at our institution invaluable in leading us in the right direction.
- * Make a list of the past directors of your writing center as well as others who helped shape your center into what it has become today. Research the writing center background of those on your list. Read any publications written by your interviewees and try to learn more about the roles they played in the development of your center. Then, contact them by letter, asking them to agree to an interview. This would also be a good time to ask for a vita to make sure there are no publications you have overlooked or roles the person has had that you are unaware of. By this point, you should also be constructing a list of interview questions that relate to your writing center as a whole as well as the influence this particular person had.
- * Ask those you interview to bring in any paper trail they may have to supplement the interviews, such as budget reports, tutoring logs, evaluations, etc. This paperwork can be vital to your research.
- * Make sure that you ask open-ended questions. We have found

that in interviews, some people may seem to get off topic, but that can be positive. Although we want all of our questions answered, some of the stories our interviewees tell are more valuable than what we had envisioned for the interview. Make sure you give the interviewees time to talk about all they think is relevant as well as the opportunity to revisit topics in the interview at the end that have already been covered.

- * Remember the interviewer is the best person to transcribe the interview. We have found that the interviewer, especially when s/he transcribes the interview soon after it has been recorded, can remember instances of sarcasm, humor, and irritation that may not be evident to someone transcribing the interview who was not present. You will want to note these intonations so that others who read your transcriptions will not gain an incorrect sense of the meaning of the interview.
- * Provide your interviewees with a copy of the transcription in order to offer them the opportunity to clarify their responses as well as to check the transcription for accuracy.

Once your oral history interviews are complete, I urge you to start an archive for your writing center as well as send copies to the WCRP. Archives are a way to house information that might otherwise be lost in moves, change of administration, etc. And these archives can be an invaluable resource for writing center administrators. Historical information may help with budget negotiations, grants, and the further professionalization of writing center administrators at a particular institution. On a national level, the continuation of the oral history project is urgent for the historical understanding of the writing center community by providing documentation of the perspectives of

early and influential writing center administrators as well as the politics of important events in the writing center movement.

Carey Smitherman
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY

Works Cited

Clark, E. Culpepper, et al. "Communication in the Oral History Interview: Investigating Problems of

Interpreting Oral Data." *International Journal of Oral History* 1.1 (1980): 28-40.

Harris, Marilyn M. *Oral History and Not Entirely History: Gleanings in the Field*. Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1995, Washington, DC.

McAdoo, Harriette. *Oral History and Educational Research*. American

Educational Research Association, 1976, Washington, DC.

Stahl, Norman A., and James R. King. *Preserving the Heritage of a Profession through Oral History Projects*. Conference of the United Kingdom Reading Association, 1996, Newcastle, England.

Yow, Valerie Raleigh. *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994.

International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) / National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW)

October 23-25, 2003
Hershey, PA

Pre-registration for this joint conference ends July 15, 2003. Please visit our Web site to register and to discover more information about our conference and venue: <www.wc.iup.edu/2003conference/index.htm>.

Conference of the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE)

Call for Proposals
March 10—14, 2004
St. Louis, Missouri

You are invited to submit proposals for the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) Conference, which explores developmental education as a gateway to academic and personal success. The conference is usually in need of sessions discussing writing related activities, especially writing centers. For more information and submission forms, please visit the NADE 2004 conference Web site <<http://www.nade2004.com/>>.

Michigan Writing Centers Association Conference

October 4, 2003
Flint, MI
"Energizing Ourselves, Expanding our Centers."

For more information, or to register, visit our Web site at <www.flint.umich.edu/Departments/writingcenter> and click on the conference link.

Call for Papers Deadline Extended

Graduate Students in the Writing Center, edited by Melissa (Dunbar) Nicolas and Beth Rapp Young.

How do graduate student tutors, clients, and administrators contribute to, promote, and transform the work that happens in writing centers?

Writing center scholars have produced a wide array of tutor education manuals that help new tutors learn about writing center philosophies, introduce them to tutoring techniques, and provide them with strategies for negotiating the often complex tutor-writer relationship. Writing center scholarship has also produced important work to help administrators and researchers conceptualize writing centers' location in the academy and identify avenues for future research. And, there has been significant work done to aid writing center directors with the practical day-to-day activities of running a writing center. Collectively, this scholarship engages readers in conversations that are timely, informative, and practical.

However, these publications often overlook a significant group of writing center clients, tutors, and administrators—graduate students. This omission is unfortunate because graduate students problematize many of the “truisms” of writing center work. For example, many writing centers seek to provide “peer” feedback, but graduate student tutors may feel more like teachers than peers to undergraduate writers. Administrators are required to advocate for their programs in sometimes risky ways (e.g., to explain why they don't focus solely on

editing), yet graduate student administrators are not always able to tolerate these risks. This proposed collection, *Graduate Students in the Writing Center*, will address the concerns, issues, and needs of this population through a combination of both personal (5-15 pages) and research essays (20-30 pages).

While we are very interested in hearing directly from graduate students about their experiences, we invite essays written by anyone in the writing center community who works with graduate students in the writing center in any capacity. Particularly timely topics include:

- Working with graduate writers, perhaps on dissertation proposals or conference papers
- Teaching graduate students to be tutors
- Mentoring graduate students as they learn about writing center administration
- Understanding writing center work through the eyes of graduate students
- Exploring the complications of “peer” tutoring when graduate tutors work with undergraduate clients

Complete manuscripts (MLA format) should be sent as an attachment to Melissa Nicolas or Beth Rapp Young by August 1, 2003. For more information or to submit a manuscript, please contact Melissa Nicolas (mad17@psu.edu) or Beth Rapp Young (byoung@mail.ucf.edu).

Outstanding Achievement and Service Award

Every third year, the International Writing Centers Association presents the Muriel Harris Award for Outstanding Achievement and Service to writing centers. A committee of previous recipients selects the person who will receive the award at the IWCA conference in Hershey. Nominations are invited from all members of the writing center community. Please send nominations with details supporting the nomination to: Jeanne Simpson csjhs@eiu.edu before June 20, 2003.

Pacific Northwest Writing Center Association Forming

Given that the current Pacific Coast association encompasses so vast a geography as to make regional assembly improbable, several of us salmon-saving tree-huggers are organizing a smaller region to include Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia.

If you would like invitations to upcoming regional soirees—or if you'd like to volunteer for our new board, please contact Roberta Buck, 360-650-7338, Roberta.buck@wwu.edu.

Greatly improving writing center attendance

Introduction:

Because our Writing Center staff has an excellent working relationship with our English faculty, and because of our shared desire to improve attendance at our Center, we created a special orientation activity. The “Scavenger Hunt” is more than just a typical tour (which many students are quite weary of by the first weeks of each semester); it is a hands-on exercise in gaining familiarity with our services and facilities. In this way, any anxieties students may have about locating the Center or receiving tutoring are alleviated right away.

The “Writing Center Scavenger Hunt” is a handout listing fourteen questions. Each question is designed to introduce the student to a particular feature of the Center (and can easily be adapted for your own Center). For instance, one question requires the student to search for a particular link from our home page, others ask them to find particular words or items in the thesaurus, dictionaries, handbooks, and specialty reference books, and yet another requires them to ask a tutor a question. This way, they become familiar with our computer equipment, reference materials, and personnel all in one visit.

This activity can be used by all instructors in any discipline who

require written work from their students. The teacher need not be present for the activity, but many do use it as a class activity within the first two weeks of the semester. If desired, teachers can access copies of the Hunt and its instructor sheet at any time, since we keep copies handy for them.

Typically, we have our tutors begin the activity by introducing the students as a group to the Center, which helps them see we are professional and approachable. Then their teacher can add any comments they may have (some teachers on our campus require students to attend the Center at least once as part of their grade), and the students begin their Hunt.

This can be done individually or in teams. It can be a race, with a bonus (points or chocolate or whatnot) to the winner(s). We have found it works best to have some students begin the questions in the middle and some at the end of the page, so not everyone is trying to thumb through the same quotations book or dictionary at once. The Hunt takes approximately 45 minutes to complete, and could be shortened or lengthened depending on the teacher’s needs. Some instructors send their students to do this activity

outside of class time by a given due date, which works fine also.

Dissemination:

When we first offered the Hunt, our Writing Center Coordinator announced it via email to all faculty, and we had a great response. The message also let them know we would be happy to tailor-make activities adapted to their subject materials or specific assignments. Now the message is sent the beginning of each semester as a reminder, and our Hunt is mentioned as part of our staff orientations as well.

Conclusion:

We are very proud of our Center, and are always looking for ways to increase our visibility and student-visit numbers. The “Writing Center Scavenger Hunt” remains a successful and fun tool for improving attendance throughout the semester.

Scavenger Hunt

A copy of the Scavenger Hunt appears on the opposite page (page 7) with an explanation of each question to help others tailor make their own. Adding lines for the answers and placing corresponding graphics makes the form visually appealing.

*Leslie Durhman
Chandler-Gilbert Community College
Chandler, Arizona*

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

October 4, 2003: Michigan Writing Centers Association in Flint, MI
Conference Web site: <www.flint.umich.edu/Departments/writingcenter>.

October 23-25, 2003: International Writing Centers Conference and National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Hershey, PA
Contact: Ben Rafoth, brafoth@iup.edu. Conference Web site: <www.wc.iup.edu/2003conference>.

Writing Center Scavenger Hunt

We have many resources to offer and would like you to familiarize yourself with all of them.

Find the following items, recording your answers for each.

1. According to the “Guidelines for the Process of Writing” poster, what is the last category under “Proofreading”?
This step orients the student to our space by having them look up and around at the walls.

2. Find one of the rules for capitalization in a handbook and write it down.
This step orients the student to our reference books section.

3. What are the Writing Center’s hours of operation?
We post our hours in several places, and writing them down becomes one more reminder.

4. Find another word for “tutor” in a thesaurus.
Same as 2 above.

5. Which author belongs to this quote?: “No person who is **enthusiastic** about his work has anything to fear from his life.”
Same as 2 above. The bolded word is a clue to searching in the quotations book by subject.

6. In a dictionary, find the definition of “rhetoric.” Also list one of the word’s derivations (i.e. which language the word originates from). *Same as 2 above.*

7. Describe the TutorTrac logo on the log-in screen.
This step gets them to the front of our room to the main log-in computer.

8. The free handouts are divided into different sections. What are they?
We offer 72 different handouts, so this step gets the students to look at the whole of them at first, and then to realize there are different sections within the entire offering. Our sections are: Punctuation, Usage, Parts of Speech, Writing Styles, Citations, Study Tips, and Research Writing.

9. Find a “Cliches and Idioms” handout in the cubicles. What do the very last lines of the handout state?
This step gets them to locate one particular handout out of the many.

10. According to the “Using Hyphens” handout, would you hyphenate anything in the follow sentence? If so, show where.

Karen found eighteen baskets and thirty four pre Columbian artifacts.

Same as 9 above.

11. Ask a Writing Center tutor the name of one of her favorite books.
This step gets them face-to-face with a friendly tutor.

12. Find a “Narration Writing Style” handout in the cubicles. What is the second of the five components listed there called? *Same as 9 above.*

13. Go to one of the computers. Find the Writing Center’s web page. Click on the Chandler-Gilbert Community College’s Grammar Exercises link. Name two of the ten exercises listed there.
This step gets them familiar with our Web site and its many offerings.

14. If you are not already logged into our system, please do so now. Find a computer with a TutorTrac log-in screen and follow the steps. If you need assistance, please ask a tutor to help you. Go ahead and log out right away. You are all set for your next visit.

This step is a convenience to the student and to us, and puts the idea there once again that they are welcome to return.

THANK YOU AND RETURN SOON!

TUTORS' COLUMN

Unconditional positive regard in the writing center

As a writing assistant in training, I am required to observe several conferences over the span of a semester. One important thing I noticed from my observations was the manner in which the writing consultants treated their clients. Each writing consultant displayed “unconditional positive regard” for the client they were working with. This attitude is a crucial part of the interaction that occurs during the course of a conference. However, simply having a term to describe the optimum attitude is not enough to empower a consultant to keep such an attitude during a conference involving a lot of miscommunication, weariness on the part of the consultant, or lack of motivation on the part of the client.

The book *Messages: Building Interpersonal Communication Skills*, by Joseph A. DeVito, details a method, called the “POSITIVE approach” (300), that DeVito claims will help a person strengthen communication in his or her personal relationships. However, these ideas can be applied to the writing center as well. “**POSITIVE**” is an acronym for the different elements involved in this method: positiveness, openness, supportiveness, interest, truthfulness, involvement, value, and equality.

Positiveness is the first element involved in this method. According to DeVito, “positiveness in conversation . . . entails both a positive attitude toward the communication act and the expression of positiveness toward the other person—as in, say, complimenting” (300). Many students who come into the writing center are unsure of themselves and their writing abili-

ties. Finding something specific to compliment them on can ease their minds and help them be more open to suggestions they may regard as criticism.

Openness is next. “Openness entails a willingness to empathize with your partner,” says DeVito. The act of empathy can do a lot for a stressed writer. Writing consultants should put themselves in the position of the writer. Listen to him or her. Really understanding where he or she is coming from may prevent unnecessary frustration for both parties.

Supportiveness is also very important. Among the characteristics that DeVito lists in his definition of supportiveness are the following: “encouraging the other person to be the best he or she can be . . . by sharing the skills that you have that your partner needs to control his or her own destiny, and by offering constructive criticism rather than simple, but discouraging fault-finding” (301). This is a very good summary of what much of writing center work is. We are there to work with students in the context of their own writing until they gain the skills they need to guide their own writing process, which, in turn, may lead them closer to “controlling their own destiny.” Keeping this focus on the student and the ultimate purpose of the conference may help the consultant sustain an attitude of positive regard for the student.

It is important to show *interest* in the student and his or her work. Showing interest in students and their writing will make them trust the consultant

more. In addition, each paper presents an opportunity for the consultant to learn something from the student. Often students come to the conference for assistance with a topic that the consultant does not know much about. Sincere interest in what the student is attempting to accomplish can benefit both consultant and student. DeVito says in the interactions that result from both parties showing sincere interest in each other, “each . . . is likely to become a more interesting person, which contributes further to communication enhancement” (301).

Honesty is a little more complicated than most of the other parts of this method. If a writing consultant is attempting to be non-directive, it may be necessary to withhold information or ideas from the writer so as to ensure that the writer is taking responsibility for his or her own work. However, this is not dishonesty. DeVito says, “honesty and truthfulness does not mean revealing every desire you have” (302). On the other hand, if there is vital information a student must know, for example, that he or she needs to completely restructure a paper, the consultant must be honest with the student. In this situation, honesty is the best way, perhaps the only way, to help.

“**Involvement** means active participation in the relationship” (302). Similar to attention, involvement requires the consultant to be completely present, mentally and physically, throughout the conference. A writer’s involvement is crucial, too. When a student is completely withdrawn from the conference, it may be as helpful to

mimic the student as to communicate to them that you will not do the work for them.

The next vital element is *value*. As humans, we all want to feel valued. The writing consultant must make the writer feel that he or she is important. If the consultant isn't paying attention or is frequently checking the clock, the writer will get the message the consultant's attention is on something more important. It may be difficult for clients to improve their writing if they do not feel it is significant.

According to DeVito "*equality* entails the sharing of power and decision making in conflict resolution" (303). In the case of the writing center, "conflict" can be viewed as the disparity between the quality of work that is brought to the assistant and the potential quality of the paper. Ideally, the writing consultant and the writer would be able to work as equals to resolve the issues the writer must face as they are manifested in the paper. Even when total equality or collaboration is not possible, the writer has to retain a certain amount of control in the conference to preserve ownership of the work.

The "*POSITIVE* method" can be very helpful to writing consultants because it is one way to diminish the ambiguity of the term "unconditional positive regard." This method can help the consultant stay focused on what he or she is there to do: work with the student in a respectful way.

Laura Beth Miller
Eastern University
St. David's, PA

Work Cited

DeVito, Joseph A. *Messages: Building Interpersonal Communication Skills*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999.

Overcoming my own perfectionist tendencies to help others succeed

Every student comes to terms with it at one point or another during his or her academic career, and I was forced to face the music early: failure. For me, failure came in my particularly strong field of writing. That fateful day sophomore year, I handed in what I felt to be a good paper, composed diligently with every ounce of personal zeal and sophistication I could possibly muster. Later that week, however, I found that my paper, in fact, was not what my professor wanted, expected, or liked. Arrgh! This couldn't be! I was an A student, a perfectionist who always received good marks on my writing. But no, I was being asked to redo a writing assignment, and thus rebuild my self-image as a college writer. I learned with difficulty over the ensuing semesters that I would always need to adjust my writing techniques, no matter how experienced I became at composing at the college level. I would have to learn to moderate my perfectionist attitude if I was going to make it through the college experience. My personal writing preferences would never parallel the preferences of every one of my professors.

Now, as a future high school English teacher and a current Writing Consultant/Teacher Assistant, I find mirror images of my previous self marching into appointments and tutorials, faces set, positively sure that I have nothing to offer them that they don't already know. One such student sat down and stoutly said, "I don't really need any changes to my paper. I'm only here because my teacher said *I have* to see a consultant." A little shaken, I assured her vaguely that we could read her paper together and see what we could find. She accepted all of my praises and none of my criticisms, and I learned that sometimes consultant sessions are relatively pointless, except for the sake of experience.

Not all students are so overwhelmingly confident in their writing. I also

see students creep into appointments, scared to death to have their writing put under a microscope by someone they've never even seen. These students are often grateful for any attention, whether it be positive feedback or constructive criticism. They leave with appreciative comments, thus offsetting the not-so-pleasant visits from other students.

Overall, I find a wide array of writing abilities, personalities, and work ethics. Many of them do not match my own, so when I read varying papers I must mentally revert to my past lesson and suppress the little voice inside my head screaming, "Change everything! Make it look like yours!" However, my job is not to make others' writing look like mine. My job is not to blatantly criticize or change essays into graduate level compositions. My job is not even to impose my "pearls of wisdom" or experiences on them. My job is to help them, at whatever level they may be, to recognize their own weaknesses as well as strengths and to learn how to use their talents to improve their writing skills. When I have completed a session where I have managed to stay within these personal boundaries, I feel especially productive.

One particularly rewarding session came upon completing a particularly difficult session with a student who felt that once she had written something, it was in need of very little revision. "I just hate changing anything that I have written," she explained with a great deal of exasperation after I pointed out an especially blatant sentence fragment. I took a deep breath and told her I understood how she felt, as I, too, was often reluctant to revise writing to which I was particularly attached. She calmed down a bit, and I tightened the rein on my criticism, making a special effort to frequently point out the good qualities in her paper. I avoided my intense desire to show her how much she needed to curb her own attitude toward her imperfect writing, instead fo-

cusing on helping her in the manner that both her attitude and the situation demanded. When she walked away from our session, she was noticeably more grateful for my help, and I was left with a unexpected sense of satisfaction over our difficult consultation. It was after this particular session that I realized the satisfaction I felt constituted a new type of perfection for me.

Suffocating my unfavorable tendencies as a perfectionist is a very difficult goal to accomplish on a daily basis, as any admitted perfectionist will tell you. The perfectionist characteristic can be found in any tutor who cares about what he or she is doing and wishes the student to do well on the assignment. The trick for me was making sure that I was aiding the student, leading as well as directing toward what he or she would write. I had to constantly remind myself to limit my comments and suggestions and work only on what could be accomplished within the session, by the *student*. This was contrary to my initial wish for a two-hour session to help each student perfect each piece to the best of our combined ability. Though the need to help in the most thorough manner possible was genuine, it was most definitely not plausible and simply not acceptable. This type of help inarguably breaks the ethical laws of tutoring, as well as teaches the student absolutely nothing.

As I reflect upon what working with students, both as a consultant and a TA, has given me, I have come to the conclusion that my experiences with students and their writing has provided me with essential lessons. I can continue learning about my own weaknesses and strengths as a writer and as a person. I've also grown in my ability to connect with and understand other writers. Overall, there is that particular sense of satisfaction that stays with me after a session, as I watch the student walk away. I did my very best to help, and sincerely hope I somehow opened a door for that student to improve and feel successful. Through these experi-

ences I realized that my previous sense of what constituted perfection had altered. I found that I can maintain my standards as a perfectionist, but I can

also curb my desire to change, change, change!

Kreszenze M. Kossler
Regis University
Denver, CO

An update from the Writing Centers Research Project (WCRP) archive

Thanks to generous contributions from many of you, the Writing Centers Research Project (WCRP) archive has grown substantially during the past year. Recent acquisitions include a sizeable gift from the Purdue Writing Lab (Muriel Harris and Mary Jo Turley), which includes conference materials, Writing Lab training documents, and copies of writing center dissertations. Neal Lerner has also continued his support of the WCRP this year, donating copies of several dissertations, numerous out-of-print books, and other historical documents. Other donations include administrative reports from Marquette University's writing center (Paula Gillespie); a large collection of letters, memos, and NWCA reports (Jay Jacoby); ECWCA correspondence and administrative papers dating back to the early eighties (Cindy Johaneck); SCWCA newsletters and NWCA conference materials (Jim McDonald); and promotional materials from a variety of writing centers across the country (Denise Stephenson).

In addition, the following writing center scholars have generously provided copies of their dissertations for the archive: Jim Bell, Anne Ellen Geller, Eric Hobson, Neal Lerner, Susan Wolff Murphy, Rick Sheets, and Jeanne Simpson. And just as exciting are the recent additions to the WCRP Digital Archive. As of April 2003, the writing center community may access complete issues of *The Writing Center Journal*, volumes 1.1 through 8.1 and 18.2-20.1 by visiting the WCRP web site (URL below).

Those who wish to contribute materials may contact the WCRP for further information (see below). Currently, the WCRP is actively seeking originals of regional and national conference proceedings *from any year* in addition to the standing request for writing center materials produced *before 1995*. This includes writing center related correspondence, administrative reports, tutoring documents, audio and video tapes, ephemera, promotional materials, and other in-house documents from local writing centers. A more comprehensive list is available at the WCRP web site.

Finally, to everyone who has helped to create this valuable resource for research, scholarship, and historical preservation, the WCRP extends its sincerest thanks!

Contact Information:

Writing Centers Research Project
Carol Mattingly, Director
312 Ekstrom Library
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40292
(502) 852-2173
wcrp@louisville.edu
<<http://www.wcrp.louisville.edu>>

New (Non-) Copyright Policy

Recently (March 2003), we adopted a new policy regarding copyright of accepted manuscripts. At the suggestion of Purdue's Patent and Copyright Office, future manuscripts will be covered by a Non-exclusive Publication Agreement (NPA). This agreement leaves the copyright with the author(s) but gives Purdue University and the *Writing Lab Newsletter* certain rights. (Our previous form assigned copyright to Purdue University although our intent was to share it with the author.)

Essentially, the *Writing Lab Newsletter* requests right of first publication, with a six-month window before your manuscript can be published elsewhere. Since our queue is frequently a year or more in length, this would effectively put

your manuscript "on hold" for eighteen months. (If you request imminent publication, though, we will try to move the manuscript forward in the queue.)

The NPA addresses fair use, online permission, and electronic archiving, as well as your right to publish the article online within six months of first publication. It also covers subsequent reprinting for commercial purposes, which is yours to determine.

Once a manuscript is accepted, you will receive a copy of the agreement for signature. (Some 25+ authors have already signed the new form.) If you have questions or would like a copy of the form and cover letter, please e-mail me at mjturley@purdue.edu.

Mary Jo Turley
Writing Lab Newsletter, Managing Editor

Need to renew your subscription?

Please check your expiration date on the mailing label. If it's 08/03, send \$15 soon to the Oval Drive address (see masthead, page 2). You'll also receive a "lost touch" postcard, but we need your check (payable to Purdue University) or a credit from Cindy Johanek, IWCA Treasurer, by July 31. Otherwise, you may miss the September issue.

E-mail me (mjturley@purdue.edu) if you have questions.

Computers in Writing—Intensive Classrooms

Computers in Writing—Intensive Classrooms (CIWIC), the summer institute for teachers who want to incorporate technology into their classrooms will be held June 16-27, 2003, at Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI. Coordinated by Cynthia Selfe, Anne Wysocki, Dickie Selfe, Gail Hawisher, and Johndan Johnson-Eilola, CIWIC has three workshops that participants can choose from:

1. Approaches to Integrating Computers into Writing Classrooms (CIWIC-AIC), which provides a space for participants to explore the thoughtful integration of technology in composition and other classrooms by examining the value of such tools as electronic conferencing, text and visual composition software, print and Web design, digital video, and sound editing, as well as technology-enhanced assignment design and lab management strategies;
2. Integrating New Media into Writing Classrooms (CIWIC-NM), whose participants learn graphics

and authoring software for composing, discussing, and developing compositional and rhetorical approaches for teaching multimedia texts;

3. Individual Projects (CIWIC-IP), which is for returning CIWIC participants who want to take on a more focused project with individualized support.

All three institutes use classrooms at Michigan Tech and the state-of-the-art computer facility, the Center for Computer-Assisted Language Instruction (CCLI). All participants receive three semester-hours of graduate credit. Participants need have no previous computer knowledge; individualized instruction will be provided. Participants from all educational levels are encouraged to attend. For more information and registration materials, visit our Web site at <http://www.hu.mtu.edu/ciwic>, or contact Cheryl E. Ball by email at ceball@mtu.edu, by phone at 906-487-3272 (office), or 906-487-2582 (lab).

Zen tutoring: Unlocking the mind

A Zen approach to tutoring can help tutors be more creative and more fulfilled. When we are silent, when we are paying attention, we can be more responsive to our students. When dealing with a challenging tutorial session, rather than trying to figure things out rationally, I try to follow the advice of the following koan: “To know what is happening, relax and do not try to figure things out. Listen quietly, be calm, and use reflection.”

Listen Quietly

All effective tutors practice active listening, and writing center literature is full of helpful guidance in this respect. What does Zen offer us in terms of listening? To listen, one must be silent. Being silent means more than simply not talking. It also means being present in the moment, being mindful, being fully engaged. Mary Rose O’Reilly talks about this quality of active presence in her essay, “Silence and Slow Time: Pedagogies from Inner Space.” O’Reilly says, “Perfect NOTHING has a quality of PRESENCE, like certain rests in music. The secret is to be there and not someplace else, and if you are really present, the right action will follow. If [one is] not there, all the fixes [one] know[s] will be the wrong fixes” (142). O’Reilly’s perspective provides insight for tutors. If we are present in the way she describes, a variety of approaches can be successful. If students detect that we are engaged (and believe me, they can tell), their own degree of investment increases as well.

Active presence is also crucial while we are reading a student’s text. We need to silence the chatter in our minds, silence the need to come up with a quick fix or a pithy response. Instead, to provide a meaningful, engaged response, we need to read the words the students have written, ask them questions that are appropriate,

then listen to their responses. Writers often know what they need to do to revise their texts; tutors help make them aware of their own intuitive knowledge.

Our degree of engagement is apparent to our students. Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his treatise on “Behavior” asserted “When the eyes say one thing, and the tongue another, a practiced man relies on the language of the first.” Remaining in the moment—engaged with *this* student at *this* time in *this* room on *this* day—helps our minds, eyes, and tongues remain consistent with one another. And students can tell the difference.

Be Calm

It is often difficult to be calm in a writing center. We face pressures from faculty and students, including the teacher’s urgent need for results (“my student is coming to the writing center, and her writing isn’t getting any better!”) and the student’s urgent need for immediate service (“my paper is due in one hour; I need to see a tutor now!”). Also, it can be difficult to focus on the moment when several things are happening at once. Perhaps the phone is ringing, one student is waiting at the door to ask a question, you have an appointment with a professor in half an hour, and you still need to finish reading a student’s draft and offer a meaningful response to it. So, how can you be calm? I find that a famous Zen story offers some insight into facing this sort of deluge of demands:

A teacher . . . told his students to put their full attention on whatever they were doing, one thing at a time. They practiced hard. They ate while they ate and read while they read. One day, they noticed that the teacher was eating breakfast and reading the newspaper. A brave student approached him, bowed, and said, “Teacher, you tell us to walk

while we walk and talk while we talk. But we notice that while you eat, you read.” The teacher nodded his head and said, “When you eat, eat, and when you read, read, but when you eat and read, eat and read.” (Roth 50)

What this story illustrates is that even while doing more than one thing, we can be mindful. Even when our job includes multiple demands, we can focus on the moment. In fact, in the face of a frazzling schedule, it is even more important to do so. Paradoxically, when we slow down, we have more time.

To avoid feeling rushed and communicating this feeling to students, I try to remember to be gracious. When I am working with one student, I focus on that encounter while keeping my awareness open to others who might drop in. If another student seems to need immediate attention, I first apologize to the student I am working with: “I’m sorry; I need to check with this person; could you excuse me for a moment?” Then, I ask the interrupter, “Did you have a question for me?” I try to answer that question quickly, scheduling another appointment if necessary. When I return to my student, I thank him/her for his patience and return to the task at hand. I have found a certain degree of graciousness smooths over the interruptions, while allowing me to take care of those I need to. It helps me remain calm.

One of the factors necessary to remaining calm is avoiding burnout. How can Zen help one cope with the stress that can result in burnout? The basic idea of Zen is remaining mindful, in order to “come in touch with the inner working of our being” (Suzuki 44). To do this, we don’t have to sit and chant; in fact, we can do it in the everyday moments of daily activity. The books of Jon Kabat-Zinn, Lewis Rich-

mond, and Gary Thorp provide guidance on how one can “discover the joy in everyday tasks” (as Thorp puts it). Tutoring offers ongoing practice in mindfulness.

Just as daily domestic tasks such as washing dishes help one practice mindfulness, the daily tasks of tutoring do so as well. Tutoring includes a series of repetitive activities, such as asking students to sign in, filling out paperwork, reading a writer’s draft, and providing meaningful feedback. Remaining mindful while doing these tasks is a challenge, since any repetitive task can cause the mind to drift into autopilot. With the mind on autopilot, one is more likely to burn out. With the mind on autopilot, daily tasks can seem meaningless and boring. With the mind on autopilot, not only can tutors be perceived as uncaring, but sometimes, tutors burn out because they do stop caring. I find that when I remain mindful, I enjoy my work more: I finish chores more productively and I look forward to meeting each student.

As Bob Tremmel’s book, *Zen and the Practice of Teaching English*, asserts, we have to take care of ourselves, so that we can help others (60, 61). Eat well, sleep well, exercise, breathe. . . . All tutors face multiple challenges, challenges that may include papers of our own to write, as well as personal responsibilities. And as conscientious tutors, we want to do everything we can to help our students do their best work. The challenges we face are ongoing: no wonder so many of us feel stressed. This type of stress feeds on itself, too. When I walk in to a room full of colleagues, teachers and tutors who are comparing workloads, the anxiety is palpable. I have to remind myself that I am only human, that with 24 hours in a day, I have to leave myself time to take care of the needs of my body and soul. It is especially crucial for those of us who work with people to take care of ourselves. If we do, the time we spend tutoring will be more productive, less harried,

and more fulfilling. Time is richer when we are calm.

Use Reflection

Readers may wonder “What makes Zen tutoring different from what we do already?” Perhaps nothing, perhaps everything. A recent article by Pat Belanoff, “Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning, and Teaching” offers insight into the Western model of reflection, what might also be termed “contemplative rumination” (408). I find Belanoff’s essay insightful, but it is important to realize that from a Zen perspective, reflection is something else.

Unlike the traditional western model of studying, thinking, then thinking some more, until eventually arriving at “truth,” in Zen, reflection emphasizes turning *off* the mind, allowing fresh insight to reveal itself. Most writers experience those moments of insight, when all the fuzzy thoughts line themselves up into new, fresh arrangements. As tutors, we can also benefit from turning off our rational minds, so that our reflective insight can come through.

Students who visit the writing center range from “honor students” to “novice learners.” If we listen, pay attention, see past the labels (including those like “honor student” or “novice learner”), we can help students achieve their potential. A Zen perspective, in its illogical nature, helps us help students transcend the stale “logical” ways of perceiving themselves: “I’m an engineer, so I can’t be creative” or “I’m an ‘A’ student, so I don’t have any room for improvement” or “I can’t be a good writer because I’ve never gotten good grades.”

Consider this analogy, based on my reading of Suzuki’s *Introduction to Zen*. In Zen, enlightenment (satori) is often represented by the moon. Zen masters cannot deliver the moon to their students, but they can point a finger, showing the way to the moon—

enlightenment. In the same way, even though English teachers know how to write (we have the moon), we can’t simply give this ability to our students; all we can do is offer suggestions and try to point students in the right direction. Understanding how to write, like achieving enlightenment, is something that we have to attain for ourselves (and, using beginner’s mind, continue to seek). Ultimately, we teach ourselves; Zen merely points the way.

When working with a student in the writing center, we don’t just say, “Here, let me fix that!” (though, late in the day, we may be tempted to do so). We know this approach isn’t going to lead to a better writer, and, instead, is likely to lead to a deteriorating relationship with the student.

Instead, slowly, step-by-step, we listen, ask questions, answer questions, rephrase, take notes, and wait, attentively for that “aha!” lightbulb, gleam-in-the-eyes moment when something happens, something sinks in, or synapses fire, and the writer gets it—at least for a moment. Even in the best of cases, this “getting it” is incremental, demanding silence—and patience—from writers and tutors. Phillip Moffitt’s discussion of the relationship between a spiritual teacher and student seems appropriate to the writing center tutor/student relationship as well: “Understanding requires cultivation, repetition, and reflection. When your mind is locked, it may well be that the best way for a teacher to help you gain clarity is through creating so much confusion or frustration that your mind finally lets loose” (65). I like the idea of a mind “letting loose,” though I imagine that writing teachers might be less enthusiastic than spiritual teachers about “creating confusion.” Still, the idea bears reflection. And more reflection fosters more growth—for tutors, as well as students.

As our students travel the path toward enlightenment, we can help them navigate, but our directions must be of-

ferred as a result of listening to students describe their positions. We can't tell them where to go until we know where they are. In order to know where they are, we must listen quietly, be calm, and use reflection.

Deborah Murray
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS

Works Cited

- Belanoff, Pat. "Silence: Reflection, Literacy, Learning, and Teaching." *College Composition and Communication* 52 (Feb. 2001): 399-428.
- Emerson, Ralph. "Behavior." from *The Conduct of Life*, 1860. <www.emersoncentral.col/behavior.htm> 5 March 2002.
- Ford, Debbie. *The Dark Side of the Light Chasers*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*. Hyperion, 1995.
- Moffitt, Phillip. "When the Student Is Ready." *Yoga Journal* April 2002: 61-69.
- O'Reilly, Mary Rose. "Silence and Slow Time: Pedagogies from Inner Space." *Pre-Text: A Journal of Rhetorical Theory* 11.1-2 (1990): 133-43.
- Richmond, Lewis. *Work as a Spiritual Practice: A Practical Buddhist Approach to Inner Growth and Satisfaction on the Job*. New York: Broadway, 1999.
- Roth, Geneen. *When You Eat at the Refrigerator, Pull Up a Chair*. New York: Hyperion, 1998.
- Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro. *An Introduction to Zen Buddhism*. New York: Grove, 1991.
- Thorp, Gary. *Sweeping Changes: Discovering the Joy of Zen in Everyday Tasks*. New York: Walker, 2000.
- Tremmel, Robert. *Zen and the Practice of Teaching English*. Boynton/Cook, 1999.

The volunteer factor: Using faculty from outside the English department to staff a writing center

When scouring the academic landscape for qualified staff, most writing center directors look instinctively toward the nearest English department. The reason for this reflex action is fairly self-evident. Whether one is searching for faculty or peer writing tutors, it makes sense to mine the most potentially productive resource; and denizens of English departments are guaranteed to possess at least the minimal credentials. What happens, however, if this resource is unavailable or, at best, inadequate to one's needs? At the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year, as the newly appointed Coordinator of the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Rock County, I found myself in just such a predicament.

UW-Rock County (one of 13 two-year "colleges" in the University of

Wisconsin System) was established in 1965 and had been without a tutorial facility for most of its existence. Though enrollment had hovered around one thousand for the past few years, only the 125 students enrolled the TRIO Program had access to tutorial assistance (TRIO is a federally funded learning support program that provides academic and advising services to first generation, low income, and physically or learning disabled students). U-Rock, as our campus is generally known, offers the associate's degree and prepares students to transfer to a four-year college, typically one of the campuses in the University of Wisconsin System.

Fall of 2000 saw the appointment of a new dean, who made the establishment of an all-campus tutorial facility—designated the Learning Support Center—one of her top priorities. The main emphasis would be on math and

writing, though tutoring in other fields—e.g., physics, biology, Spanish—would be offered on a limited basis as need arose. After revenues were secured to fund positions for a director (25% FTE) and a writing center coordinator (25% FTE), to renovate a classroom, and to purchase the basic furnishings and equipment, I was charged with the task of finding qualified staff. Since U-Rock's students generally stay for only two years before graduating or transferring, I did not have the option of looking to the usual reservoir of talent for peer tutors—upperclassmen or graduate students—and no funds had been allocated to hire professional staff.

In addition to the problem of finding qualified tutors, I was faced with another dilemma—determining how many hours per week the Writing Center should (or could) operate. At a minimum, I wanted to keep the Center

open during the peak class periods when most students are on campus; the ideal schedule would be 7 hours per day (10 a.m.-5 p.m.) Monday through Thursday with shorter hours (10 a.m.-2 p.m.) on Friday when fewer students have classes.

Faced with these challenges, I decided to test the “volunteer spirit” of the U-Rock faculty. In late August, at our all-campus meeting held one week before classes began, I made a plea to my colleagues, many of whom had voiced their strong support for the creation of the Learning Support Center, asking them to serve as volunteer tutors in the Writing Center. I reminded them (diplomatically) that many of them had complained to me and other members of the English Department for some time about the low quality of student writing skills and suggested that they now had the opportunity to help rectify this deplorable state of affairs. The response was enthusiastic and overwhelming. Sixteen faculty and staff volunteered to tutor at least one hour per week in the Writing Center. These individuals represented a broad spectrum of academic disciplines: anthropology, biology, chemistry, communication arts, French, history, psychology, philosophy, sociology, and theater. In addition, two staff members—our campus’ head librarian, who has a master’s degree in English and an employee in the University’s public relations office, who has a master’s degree in journalism—offered their services. (Before broadening my appeal to the faculty as a whole, I had recruited the four full-time members of the U-Rock English Department, whose support I hoped would encourage their colleagues in other departments to join the cause.) The schedule was completed by the 12 hours per week that I would tutor as part of my position as program coordinator. The Writing Center was now able to offer the services of a highly qualified staff at times that would accommodate the greatest number of users.

Though all the faculty volunteers held graduate degrees (*nearly* all held doctorates), required formal writing assignments in their classes, and were highly competent writers themselves, not everyone was familiar with the day-to-day functioning of a writing center, and several had expressed a desire for training in the “nuts and bolts” of tutoring, e.g., how to assess and prioritize problems in student papers, how to establish rapport with students, how to practice the basic “etiquette” of tutoring, etc. To address these concerns, I held an hour-long workshop in which we examined copies of student papers exhibiting a broad range of writing problems and engaged in several role-playing scenarios designed to illustrate ways of establishing a friendly, productive working relationship with students. I also conducted a brief review of the Writing Center’s procedures, such as record keeping and scheduling. Throughout the semester, as often as my schedule allowed, I observed the faculty volunteers as they conducted tutoring sessions, made myself available to answer questions and address concerns, arranged individual meetings with faculty to discuss and assess their experiences as tutors, and administered a written evaluation of the Writing Center’s services to tutors and students at the end of the semester.

Staffing U-Rock’s Writing Center with professional volunteers has proved a beneficial and enlightening experience for all involved. For many of the professional tutors, the opportunity to see students engaged in the writing process has been a revelation. Unlike composition instructors, who often shepherd students through each stage of the writing process—brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing—most faculty who require written assignments see only the finished product. The assumption operating here—often implied, sometimes expressed—is that “teaching writing” is the proper domain of the composition staff. Working with students who had completed their

composition requirement convinced most of the volunteers that college students need to work on developing their writing skills well beyond the one or two comp courses they take as freshmen. In his book *Making the Most of College*, Richard Light reports, “Of all skills students say they want to strengthen, writing is mentioned . . . more than any other” (54). It is no exaggeration to say that all the faculty volunteers from outside the English Department have come to realize that they must share the responsibility for helping students become effective writers, both in the Writing Center and in their own classrooms.

Several professors who tutored students enrolled in their own courses reported that they received new insight into the difficulties students actually faced when grappling with their writing assignments. (Several also reported that students seemed more willing to seek help on those assignments from their professors when they were working in the Writing Center rather than during their office hours.) One instructor vowed to revise an assignment she had given for years after observing that several of her students were confused by what the assignment called for them to do. “I guess I might have to take some of the blame for all those bad papers I’ve been getting,” she said. “I just assumed it was because of lack of skills, or procrastination, or just plain laziness.” Some faculty tutors vowed to spend class time *explaining* writing assignments rather than simply administering them, and more than one voiced plans to instruct students in the principles of writing, especially those appropriate to their disciplines. This point too is corroborated by Light’s findings. In response to the question “In what context is writing instruction most helpful?” college students claim to learn most effectively “when writing instruction is organized around a substantive discipline” (59). As another way of attaining this goal, some faculty have asked me to conduct workshops in their classes that focus on specific

features of writing assignments in which their students are engaged (e.g., composing effective thesis statements, developing ideas, integrating and documenting source material).

The policy of using faculty volunteers as tutors in U-Rock's Writing Center was born of necessity but continues because it has been shown to pay dividends for students and instructors alike. (One measure of our success is that all the faculty tutors who volunteered at the beginning of the school year returned for spring semester, along with two new recruits.) Perhaps the most gratifying (and unanticipated) result of this experience is the beginning of a grassroots commitment to writing across the curriculum, whereby "faculty mutually recognize and encourage each other's efforts to develop their students' writ-

ing skills" (Kunka 5). Even writing centers that are already staffed by peer tutors and/or professional staff from the English department could benefit by expanding their traditional boundaries to embrace the talent lying just beyond their doors.

Gary L. Kriewald
University of Wisconsin-Rock County
Janesville, WI

Works Cited

Light, Richard J. *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001.

Kunka, Jennifer Liethen. "Beyond the Writing Lab: Transporting Workshops Across the Curriculum." *Writing Lab Newsletter* 27.1 (September 2002): 5-7.

What's in your URL?

As our OWLs (Online Writing Labs) grow and add materials, you may want to let the rest of us know about some of your materials that may not be on other OWLs. For example, if you have a page on *Chicago Manual* style (that many of us do not have) or "audience awareness" or "forming a topic sentence" or "visual literacy" or "tutoring online" or a syllabus for a training course or another such topic that covers areas not likely to be found on most OWLs, e-mail the URL and title or description to harrism@cc.purdue.edu. We'll list these in future issues of the newsletter.

Please do not send URLs for whole OWL Web sites as those are listed on the International Writing Centers Association Web site. Instead, point newsletter readers to particular pages we'd like to know about.

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
Purdue University
1356 Heavilon Hall
West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356

Address Service Requested

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Purdue University