

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

Volume 27, Number 9

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

May, 2003

...FROM THE EDITOR...

This month's newsletter is filled with the good, the bad, and the practical. Mary Wislocki offers some lessons on how to handle her writing center's generous gift of funds from a benefactor (should others among us find ourselves on the receiving end of large sums of money). In contrast, Amy Getty tells us how her promised new writing center was never quite realized and draws from her experience some suggestions for those coping with similar broken promises.

You'll also find Beth Bir and Carmen Christopher's discussion of working with students using other dialects of English, Andrea Carter's recommendations for working with history papers, and Nicole Diederich's discussion of issues of safety and ethics in the writing center.

And you'll find a double dose of Tutors' Columns, two thought-provoking articles by peer tutors Elizabeth Raisanen and Rick Fisher. This month we also have an interesting "Letter to the Editor" from a reader and a response from the author. I hope this exchange encourages more of us to react to essays that appear in the newsletter and to hear responses from authors of those essays.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Money talks: Lessons in gift getting in the writing center

Two years ago, a grateful student, Anne Gorrissen, gave \$50,000 to our Writing Center at New York University. It was completely unexpected, as much good fortune seems to be. But my elation quickly gave way to some pressing concerns: how should I use and manage such a windfall? I soon realized that it would not be easy. When I told my colleagues the good news, I was congratulated and then warned: "Be careful." Eric Hobson counseled on WCenter, the writing center list-serv: "You are in the position of power at the moment. Keep it." As a fairly new director, I needed to learn—and fast—how to maintain a position of authority over this largess and develop a suitable Writing Center project. While the particulars of my experience may not be common, negotiating academic politics and its surprises and developing creative projects that remain true to your values and your budget are so much a part of directing a Writing Center that the lessons I learned might be instructive to others.

I'll start at the beginning, with Anne. She was quietly waiting for her weekly appointment near my office. It was

nearly 6 p.m., the end of another long day, and I was still walking around the Writing Center, unwinding after our Writing Center meeting. Anne said, “Mary, I’d like to talk with you for a moment.” She said that the Writing Center had meant so much to her over her years (seven to be exact), and that she was very grateful to all the consultants who worked with her, especially her first one, and to the previous Writing Center director who had helped diagnose her learning disability. Anne

was a returning student who had been away from all things academic for over thirty years and she had much to learn, but, with the help of the consultants, she persevered and thrived. Finally she told me that she was inheriting some money—and that she wanted to give some of it away “before she got used to it.” While she didn’t have a specific plan in mind for how to spend the money, she did want it to benefit the writing consultants. Then she mentioned \$50,000. I was stunned.

The next day, someone from the university office of designated gifts called me to say that she had been contacted by Anne’s lawyer. She urged me to persuade Anne to give her money over to university “budgetary relief.” For instance, \$50,000 could be used to underwrite the consultants’ salaries. Alarmed that the only evidence of the gift would appear on a printout somewhere in central accounting, I quickly sought advice. The following five points sum up what I’ve learned.

1. Talk, talk, talk.

If there was a single crucial step in this process for me, this was it: all subsequent decisions and actions were shaped by the thoughtful advice I received. I turned to WCenter first and solicited advice. I contacted four of Anne’s former consultants, two of whom had gone on to be writing center directors. I called the former director, my dissertation advisor and friend, who was now teaching part time at another university. And I told my parents, not only for the pleasure of it, but because my father, a retired academic himself, had established two small scholarships. And of course, other people were informed: my boss and later, my dean, at his Christmas party.

Suggested plans. The suggested plans from WCenter ranged from the symbolic to the ambitious:

- Name the writing center after the donor (Ron Dushane)
- Allocate an annual sum for journal subscriptions and books

(Eric Hobson)

- Establish a scholarship fund for consultants to attend conferences (Stephen Newmann)
- Establish a consultant recognition award in her honor (Jo Tarvers)
- Organize a speaker series (Eric Hobson)
- Offer a service to returning students like Anne (Jo Tarvers)
- Create a Writing Center Foundation to support the ongoing professional development of the writing center and its consultants (Kurt Bouman)
- Open a writing center in town as part of an outreach program (Ron Dushane)

Suggested strategies. Eric Hobson gave me excellent detailed advice on how to “keep the power”:

- Maintain continuous contact with your donor and her agent
- Create a specific spending plan in collaboration with the donor
- Focus plans on students and their benefits as a political strategy
- Serve as a go-between between the donor and the college
- Attend any meetings that discuss the routing and disbursement of funds

2. Clarify your professional ideals and your political needs.

Money decisions are political decisions, although at first I didn’t fully appreciate that truism. With the advice of WCenter in mind, I met with Anne several times for lunch to discuss a kind of shopping list of possibilities. My goal was to consolidate a plan with Anne before she met with the people from designated gifts. My role, I believed, was simple: I was to provide ideas; Anne was to choose and pay for one. All of the ideas were from WCenter and all seemed equally good to me. Actually, there was only one idea I hadn’t liked even though it had been advocated by several directors: the consultant award. I thought an award would promote competition and hard feelings: some of the consultants

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had more than four years of experience and some were brand new. I didn't mention it to Anne. She remained tentative and uncommitted.

Gradually, in conversations with several people, especially the former director, I came to realize that this money could be used to accomplish several goals at the same time: the project could be shaped to address my own needs as well as Anne's desires. Recent policy changes in the university meant that I was faced with a shrinking pool of TA's who were qualified to be consultants and increased competition for those TA's from an expanding array of teaching opportunities. A proposal that would attract and retain the best consultants for more than two semesters and at the same time honor Anne's experience would be ideal. Accompanying this important insight came another that was a more unsettling one: there were potential political repercussions involved in every discussion I initiated. The opportunity to influence such a generous and malleable project can be irresistible: my early "friend or foe" designations quickly became useless. For instance, I received some important help from the former director, but I also learned I needed to limit her attempts to participate in the process.

3. Counter institutional agendas with a plan that enlists the allegiance of the donor.

Another plan was presented to Anne, not in the generic terms she saw in our first sessions, but in a more elaborated form that specially addressed her experience and my needs. Ironically, it was what I had rejected at first as all wrong: consultant awards. The change in my thinking was simple but crucial: the new proposal had the potential of recognizing and rewarding many experienced consultants, not just one. And when Anne heard the plan, she exclaimed, "That's it!" My official announcement outlined it this way: "Anne Gorrissen's gift supports and awards the expertise that experienced

consultants bring to their work with long-term clients like herself, students with severe reading and writing problems." To qualify for the award, consultants must have at least three semesters experience and work with the same student for at least 9 sessions. Applicants submit their session notes and write a case study that discusses the issues they faced, strategies they used, and the progress they noted. Consultants who meet all the criteria receive \$1000. If I leave as the director, Anne will re-assess how the remaining money will be disbursed.

I knew Anne as a gracious and warm woman; she described herself as a "stubborn Norwegian," and that was true too. Stubbornness kept her going when professors complained about her thinking and writing—and it served her well in the negotiations that followed. I didn't attend any of the meetings because I was so sure of her commitment. When designated gifts called to complain that they could not move Anne into a plan for budgetary relief, I replied that, yes, Anne was very firm about what she wanted. Anne's lawyer inadvertently eased some of the institutional pressure. He advised her, for tax purposes, not to give the money in a lump sum, but in smaller annual installments. Less money means fewer quarrels.

4. Expect institutional lapses.

Time went by, and everyone had signed off on all the necessary paperwork. Then I put in a request for the first round of checks. The office of designated gifts called me right back: the money was temporarily lost! (Someone told me that Harvard has this problem too, although with millions, rather than thousands, of dollars.) After a couple of days, the money was located in a blind account and the checks were sent over.

The final difficulty involved my dean, normally a generous sponsor of Writing Center projects and a man who keeps track of everything. However,

this project seemed to be the exception. When he learned of it (again), he wrote me an e-mail taking me to task for not informing him and for not using the money for budgetary relief. I was horrified. I wrote back that I had indeed talked with him about it, but informally at his party. This difficulty pulled me up short: it revealed to me for the first time that my preference for face-to-face interaction above all other forms of communication was undercutting my professionalism. Of course I should have followed up that talk with a memo. But it ended well: the director of the writing program, my boss, joined in vigorously on my behalf; he had been kept abreast of the plans every step of the way.

5. Open up to the gift and its possibilities.

The process is not the product: political tussles recede from memory and what remains is more than what was planned. Anne wrote an honors thesis her senior year and graduated with nearly a 4.0. We've had two award presentations—I schedule them for the first meeting of the fall semester to inspire the new consultants. Anne has attended both times. She talked about why the writing center was so important to her, and the consultants in turn thanked her for her gift, and explained what it meant to them to work with their long-term clients. Consultants who help students with "severe reading and writing difficulties" become especially attuned to their struggles and care deeply about their progress: these testimonials have been deeply moving. I've given out six checks now—only one applicant did not qualify (his student had been a successful teacher in our program).

Has this scholarship helped to retain good consultants? I can't say for sure yet, but I've started "debriefing" consultants who leave our writing center. I hope to find out a number of things

(continued on p. 9)

Training writing tutors to recognize dialectal difference

Writing centers are regularly called upon to address specific variations in the written language of students whose first dialect is significantly different from the Standard English expected for most school assignments. Speakers of Ebonics, or African-American English (AAE), and various regional dialects, such as Appalachian English, are often taught and tutored using methods and attitudes that have developed through inaccurate perceptions of dialect on the part of instructors and tutors as well as students themselves. Writing centers can and should ease the transition between home and standard dialects, minimizing the resistance some students may feel toward Standard English and the system that requires it. In order to address the tricky political as well as pedagogical issues surrounding dialect in the writing center, we looked at the available research to find context, then implemented a survey to assess current student attitudes about dialect, and finally, combined our information with well-known tutoring theory to produce a set of recommendations for training tutors. Two sets of students were surveyed: first-year English students at Fayetteville State University, a historically black regional school, and African-American first-year students at NC State University, a large land-grant institution.

We began by looking for context and found that the idea of identity is an overriding theme in Ebonics research; however, opinions appear to be split whether the dialect is to be embraced or reviled. John Rickford, Geneva Smitherman, and John Baugh agree that individual and group identity are tied to the language, and that it must be

preserved as a part of the history of African-Americans. They see it as a strong and proud tradition that honors language play, rhyme, rhythm, metaphor, story-telling, and audience awareness. John McWhorter and Leon Todd disagree, believing that clinging to a language that is a symbol of otherness is representative of the damaging tendency to preserve even a negative group identity rather than adapt to the larger culture. They refer to AAE as a linguistic handicap and think allowing it to continue is advocating the inevitable failure of its speakers in wider society.

To the researchers, dialect very directly equals identity. Surprisingly, to the students, it does not, or at least to a much lesser extent. When asked a series of questions to find out how strongly they consider Ebonics to be a part of who they are, 38% agreed or strongly agreed that it is part of them, 27% had no opinion, and 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed, which is a fairly even split. In response to whether they were proud to speak Ebonics, more than a third had no opinion, while 27% agreed mildly; almost 10% strongly agreed, and 27% mildly or strongly disagreed. But when asked whether they were embarrassed to speak Ebonics, they were more emphatic: 76% disagreed, 21% had no opinion, and only 3% agreed. It seems that they do not perceive their identities to be very strongly linked to their language, and while they are not particularly proud of it, they certainly are not embarrassed.

Scholars who argue that language is linked to identity, whether in a positive

or negative manner, also question whether students with nonstandard dialects should have to learn Standard at all. Though some Ebonics/AAE scholars are grudging about it—Smitherman says that they are forced to, since white people won't learn their language—and others wholly embrace it, all agree that Standard English must be learned by nonstandard speakers. It is simply a practical necessity for movement in a public world. However, learning Standard does not necessarily mean giving up on the home dialect. Almost all researchers advocate a system of bidialectism, learning both, and developing the ability to codeswitch, or move between the two depending on the situation.

Students seem to agree that Standard English is a practical tool for them, but they do not see it as a threat to their culture at all. A majority, 76%, say learning Standard does not mean abandoning black culture or identity. A majority also agreed that they would like to learn more Standard, this time 73%. When asked whether they think speaking Standard English is better than Ebonics—making no effort to define what is meant by “better”—60% said yes, 30% had no opinion, and 10% disagreed. No one strongly disagreed. Although Smitherman and the others would be unhappy to hear it, most of the freshmen students at FSU and NCSU perceive Standard English not as an enemy of their culture, but as a necessity to their success.

Students also report that they are very comfortable with the idea of code-switching: fifty-eight percent report that they always speak Ebonics

with friends and family, while only 24% report always using Ebonics at work and school. They generally agree that they both can, 76%, and do, 84%, switch dialects depending on the situation. When asked about their preferences, interestingly, very few were more comfortable with the idea of being around people who speak Ebonics—31% agree, 36% don't care, 23% disagree—dating or marrying someone who speaks Ebonics (49% don't care, 44% disagree), or working for someone who speaks Ebonics (38% don't care, 52% disagree). Almost everyone agreed that Ebonics is a detriment on the job market and that Standard is in fact a tool for wider communication than Ebonics.

Finally, eighty-six percent of the students report that school has definitely encouraged them to learn Standard English, but only 29% report being encouraged to give up Ebonics, so it would appear that schools are becoming somewhat sensitive to student language.

The overall conclusions that can be drawn from this survey are hopeful in that the students do not appear to have negative attitudes about who they are or the situation they are in. Students report that they are comfortable with themselves and with the linguistic differences in others. They seem to recognize the need to code-switch and are ready to learn. Armed with this information, writing tutors can become much more efficient in dealing with the needs of non-standard speakers.

Recommendations for working with non-standard dialect speakers go hand-in-hand with standard tutoring practices, although some basic foundation may be needed to explain the concept of dialect. New tutors must learn that dialect is not a matter of choice: people speak the language they hear while developing language skills. Secondly,

they need to know that each dialect is as valid as any other, and that there is nothing inherent in Standard English that makes it superior in any way to others. It is simply the one used by more people in more public situations, so it is more appropriate for those situations. Once tutors understand this basic concept, they should have no trouble with the others, which are similar to other basic tenets of tutoring like those promoted by David Fletcher and Nancy Maloney Grimm, among other writing center scholars.

Tutors should begin by acknowledging the validity of the tutee's home dialect and culture whenever possible rather than devaluing it. This can be accomplished in a number of ways, including recognizing poignant or unusual metaphors as legitimate and finding ways to incorporate dialect into some assignments rather than "weeding it out." Another way to promote positive attitudes about dialect is to avoid absolute language, and challenge students' assumptions that there is a "right" and "wrong" answer. Tutors should stress the idea of what is situationally appropriate rather than what is good or bad.

Another good idea is for tutors to familiarize themselves with the specific variations of dialects spoken by many students in their schools. For example, at FSU where many students speak Ebonics, writing center tutors have been taught to recognize multiple negatives, lack of marked possession, and nonvariant *be* verbs as dialectical variations. If appropriate, tutors may wish to talk over these features with the student so that the student knows there are good and valid reasons why dialectical features are used, but also why these features might not be appropriate for an academic assignment. It is always a good idea for tutors to reinforce the idea that writing can some-

times be hard, revealing their own struggles, if appropriate, and sharing strategies that have worked for them.

Finally, tutors should remember to accept frustration and anger as possible and reasonable responses from the tutee and to avoid dismissing emotions as unwarranted. Part of the job we do as writing tutors is allowing students to vent their feelings, and frustrations that come with dialect differences can be enormous. It is sometimes difficult to ask questions without offering advice, but students may not be looking for direction as much as for an outlet. As always, tutors need to be sensitive to the situation presented by the individual tutee.

Students speaking nonstandard dialects have a difficult task in becoming comfortable with the language that is required for most projects in academic and business worlds. Writing centers can assist them much more efficiently and positively than we currently are able to, simply by adding to our training a bit of basic information about dialect and a lot of sensitivity to the issues that accompany it.

Beth Bir

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and

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Letter to the Editor

A reader comments:

I normally love the Tutors' Column, but Ms. Larson's essay [in the March issue] seems to have perhaps ended too quickly, aiming for a heartwarming ending, instead of a deeper look at the issue of the tutor's role.

I view my job as primarily (though not solely) academic support, so when the author wrote that Veronica "completely ignored the assignment," I wondered when that would be addressed. A key feature of writing is knowing the audience. I wish Ms. Larson had perhaps told Veronica that this wonderful piece of writing (and I definitely agree that she should reinforce the breakthrough that the student made) went beyond the assignment. Were she my student, I would have asked if she wanted to continue to explore the personal piece she was writing, and perhaps helped find a "market" for it, such as a campus literary magazine. I would have also used it to encourage Veronica to take more writing courses that she may have believed were "beyond" her.

However, I would have also felt compelled to point out that it appeared this essay, though powerful, did not meet the professor's requirements. It may be that Veronica's professor was known for accepting non-traditional essays. However, many professors want their formulae followed, and the originality to come from within the bounds of the assignment, not by merely launching off from it.

However, as a writer, one can do both: File Save-As, giving both "branches" separate names (veronica-personal.doc and veronica-class.doc). Ms. Larson could have shown Veronica it's possible to follow both one's personal vision, and also adapt it to the class's requirements (or editor's, or market's), without losing clarity in either.

Perhaps these issues were explored in later sessions? I'd be interested in a follow-up column. Thanks!

April Walters
Maryland Institute College of Art
Baltimore, Maryland.

The author responds

As a composition instructor as well as a tutor, I appreciate your concerns. It is the job of the writing center to help prepare students to meet their professors' expectations and to succeed across the university and beyond. In our subsequent sessions, Veronica and I were able to address some of the issues you raised. However, I think tutors support students best when they insist on a measure of independence from the disciplines they are thought to serve. Writing centers should be a place where students have the freedom to work and reflect on their own writing processes gradually, one breakthrough at a time, even if what they accomplish does not immediately count to anyone but them.

Ann Larson
Long Island University
Brooklyn, NY

TUTORS' COLUMN

Doctors make the worst patients (So what about writing tutors?)

I think it is safe to say that this was one of the scariest assignments I've ever had to tackle for a college class. No, it wasn't alligator wrestling. Or bungee jumping. It wasn't even writing a research paper. It was . . . (insert drum-roll here) . . . getting tutored in the writing center.

Not exactly what you were expecting, was it? Well, it wasn't exactly a death-defying feat, but for me, it took courage. I have just recently finished my first semester as a tutor in Northern Michigan University's writing center. As part of the training process, all new tutors must take a class specifically geared towards peer tutoring. Up to about the halfway point in the semester, this class had been easy. We kept journals on our tutoring experiences, participated in mock tutoring sessions, read articles on writing center pedagogy, reviewed grammar, and met weekly to share our problems, frustrations, and triumphs. I figured that the rest of the course would be a breeze until one fateful class period. That day we were given a new homework assignment: we had to bring one of our own papers into the writing center and be tutored.

I give a lot of credit to those brave souls who waltz fearlessly into the writing center to receive guidance on their papers, because I felt like one of those martyrs being thrown into the lion's den. It's not that the tutors employed there are mean and imposing, but it's not easy to bring your baby to the altar to be viciously slaughtered.

I suppose I am employing just a *bit* of hyperbole here. Making a visit to the writing center is *not* traumatic, and you will *not* have to receive months of intense therapy after your tutoring session. I was simply trying to make the point that it is not easy for anyone (ok, ok, ME) to have her work, which seems *perfect* in her eyes, nit-picked apart by someone who is paid to do so.

If a student came into the writing center and told me exactly what I just told you, I would smile sympathetically and assure him that I am NOT there to criticize, only to help and make suggestions. And this is entirely true—I promise. But that it is not so easy to believe that when you're on the other side of the pen, however. Several days after our project was assigned, I brought in a research paper that I was working on for British Literature to be read by one of the tutors. Although it still needed a lot of fine-tuning, I felt very happy about its organization and content. As the tutor read my paper, my eyes strayed over the pages, and I noticed that he kept making marks at various points and writing comments such as "what do you mean" and "expand on this." *What does he mean, "what do I mean?"* I thought to myself furiously. *"Didn't I make myself perfectly clear?"* Although I didn't agree with all of the comments that he made on my rough draft, I do admit that he did make some valid points that I eventually took into consideration when working on my final draft.

A few days later, just out of curiosity, I took the same draft of the paper

(without any of the corrections that the first tutor had suggested) to another tutor for a second opinion. Interestingly enough, he had some valid (as well as not-so-valid) points to make that were *nothing like the points that the first tutor had made*. This time around we had more time to discuss various aspects of the paper, and I had sufficient time to explain my reasons for writing such-and-such a part a certain way. Again, out of curiosity, I mentioned to the second tutor a couple of the points that the first tutor had brought up to me, and he didn't even think they were issues!

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that one tutor was right and one was wrong, or that one was better than the other. They each made valid points, and they also each made suggestions that I smiled and thanked them for, knowing that I would still do things my way. One thing that both tutors had in common despite their individual approaches to writing, however, was that both were willing to listen to my thoughts and concerns and reasons for approaching the paper as I did without contradicting me. They let me speak and get my thoughts out into the open, and asked leading questions when it was appropriate. It was this constant flow of ideas that helped me more than anything. It made me reason my paper out loud, and hearing it made me see that some things made sense and other things were out of place.

I believe that sometimes writing tutors forget how helpful another set of eyes can be. Even though our brains are trained to be extremely critical, it is

still impossible for anyone to be completely objective with his/her own work. We must remember that even though we are tutors, there is no shame in our asking for guidance or even screaming “HELP!” once in a while. The extra assistance might be beneficial, even if we don’t realize (or want

to realize) that we need it. My first trip to the writing center as a tutee didn’t kill me or maim me, or even wound my vanity. What it *did* do was help me better appreciate the services that we tutors offer. It is my belief that every writing tutor should try being a tutee at least once. If nothing

else, it will at least remind us to be respectful of those courageous students who bring a piece of themselves to us for advice.

*Elizabeth Raisanen
Northern Michigan University
Marquette, MI*

A paradigm of moving towards

Last month, I talked with students in a local high school class about what it means to communicate. I asked one of the students to come to the front of the room with me to help illustrate the point.

“Walk across the room with me,” I said. Then I led her across the room, in front of the first row of tables. “This is communication,” I explained. “As a communicator, it is your job to help move your audience from one place to another. If you are writing a persuasive essay, it is your task to move the reader from a general environment of skepticism to a firm position with you, on your side of the issue. As a good communicator, you recognize the special aptitudes and the handicaps of your audience. You don’t run far ahead of them and hope they catch up—you take them by the hand and guide them cautiously to the goal.”

What I didn’t say to the students that day is that communication, like transportation, is also a continual act of *moving towards*. Though we might effectively be able to transport our audience from one point to another, we should also strive to find new ways of streamlining the process. At one time, a horse-drawn buggy was the most efficient means of transportation. Then we learned more about engines and developed new and more resourceful ways to move from place to place. We are constantly improving upon the means by which we move ourselves.

Indeed, a great deal of effort is spent on the means and route of travel; the journey is every bit as important as the destination. Likewise, it seems quite natural that we should also spend time and energy to improve our methods of communication.

The struggle of moving towards new and better ways to transmit information is, I believe, an extremely valuable pursuit. In communicating and writing, this struggle takes the form of revision. Unfortunately, though, revision seems to be largely undervalued in many educational settings. The writing model which many students seem to follow—at least in my experience as an undergraduate—looks something like this: hammer out a paper, turn it in, get it back with a grade and perhaps a few remarks, and toss the paper in the trash bin. Overall the process is a very linear one; students are rarely asked to review their papers and make revisions as they progress and expand their understanding of a topic. They’re rarely asked to look critically at their writing to see if they’ve expressed things as simply or as clearly as possible. If they do have a professor who welcomes rough drafts, the process may foster some revision, but those instructors who offer feedback prior to the final due date are few and far between.

It is my contention that the writing center and its tutors may be in an especially well-suited location from which

to foster a new paradigm, one in which writers become more aware and more appreciative of revising their works. In order for tutors to promote something new, though, it is worthwhile to first consider the view students and other writers currently have of the writing center’s role in the development of texts.

One way our writing center tries to gauge writers’ response to the help we’ve provided is through anonymous surveys. Each spring our writing center collects surveys from students and other writers who visit our center. In response to the question, “Do you have comments or suggestions that may help us improve our services?” one of the most common requests is more time for conferences. A sample of comments:

- “Session should be longer.”
- “If I can make two appointments in one day, it may be more helpful because the time is too short.”
- “Basically, have certain days that allow students to sign up for longer sessions.”
- “Longer session.”
- “I would like to see a one hour session offered for long papers.”
- “More than half-an-hour appointment would not hurt.”

The number of writers who say they would like more time for conferences does not suggest to me that the center should offer longer time slots; instead,

I see this request arising from a linear model of producing text. Based on the work I've done with the writing center over the past two years, the request indicates a pervasive view of the writing center as "fix-it shop." The linearity of the conference takes the form of a one-way street: all discussion flows from the tutor and is aimed not at the writer—who is largely passive—but at the text itself. To turn around or stop in the middle of the street is not what the writer has in mind.

The primary reason many writers want longer sessions, I believe, is so there will be sufficient time for the tutor to "fix" their papers. Once such writers leave the center, the work they intend to do on their papers takes the form of replacing this comma, striking that colon, and perhaps clarifying a sentence here or there. If the tutor doesn't point out an area to be "fixed," the writer leaves the conference unwilling to look for and make such corrections him- or herself. This relationship between writer and tutor certainly doesn't seem to promote the type of valuable revision—the type of *moving towards*—that I describe above. The question is, how can writers be encouraged to approach their work with a more critical eye and a greater willingness to revise their writing?

The answer to this question may be found in the unique service of writing centers. We have the potential to influence the process, despite the fact that we lie "off the beaten path" that runs from student to instructor. In fact, it's perhaps *because* of our location that we have the opportunity to effect change in the way students approach writing.

When students step off the path to visit the writing center, they've already shown themselves willing to take one extra step in the process. I believe they are also be willing to

make a further step, after the conference, by thinking critically about their writing and by making revisions suggested by the tutors. I've often asked the question, "What is the point you're trying to make here?" during conferences. I can't remember a time when that question *didn't* evoke a fairly insightful response from the writer; even writers who had requested help primarily with grammar don't fail to engage with that question.

The point I'm trying to make here is that most writers *are* considerate of their audience; if a tutor suggests that a point may not be clear (or makes any number of other suggestions that prompt a more thorough look at the writer's work), most writers are willing—even eager—to clarify their argument. It's just that they're rarely required to look critically at their writing. This is where the writing center can help; by offering writers a place to see that they can and should ask questions about the work they're producing, rather than just helping them "fix" their work, tutors can expand writers' ideas of how they can begin to revise their work.

To sum up—revision is and must be viewed as a necessary component of the writing process. Despite its importance, however, students and other writers are rarely asked to recognize the role that revision should play in their work. The linear process which most students follow manifests itself in writing center requests for longer times for conferences. If we believe the process should be changed, the writing center is in a fantastic position to bring about such change. Modification should not take the form of longer conference times but rather should be created by an environment in which writers are enabled to think more thoroughly about the texts they produce. Because the suggestions offered by tutors are

only suggestions, and because tutors have the opportunity to interact with the writer and the text prior to the "final" draft, the writing center is ideally suited to develop in students a more critical awareness of the way in which they convey their ideas. As tutors, we have the exciting possibility of moving students towards more effective and more thoughtful writing.

Rick Fisher
Peer Tutor

University of Wyoming
Laramie, WY

Calendar for Writing Centers Associations

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>.

Money talks

(continued from p. 3)

about their experience, so I'll ask. Then—I'll eventually accumulate fifty case studies, and I need to think how I might put them to use. Writing case studies as part of our on-going training seems a natural. Anne remains connected to us, and for that I am grateful. I just called her and we're meeting for lunch to discuss the latest applicants. She's been accepted into graduate school at a nearby Ivy League university.

Mary Wislocki
New York University
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The short and sputtering life of a small community college writing center: A cautionary tale

The field of working in and directing a writing center is one fraught with peril at the same time it is steeped in idealism. This cautionary tale examines the contradictions between the idyll of the utopian writing center and the often-brutal reality of institutional “support.” In my initial enthusiastic idealism to create a writing center at my new school, I did everything wrong.

A brief pre-history

After being downsized as a faculty tutor from an established writing center at a four-year liberal arts institution (another cautionary tale I will save for another day), I was delighted to be hired at a small community college as a full-time faculty member. My load—four composition and literature classes a trimester with one release to “establish and oversee” a “writing lab”—seemed daunting, but ideal. My previous position also combined teaching and tutoring, and the idea of starting a writing center from scratch was appealing to my ego and ideals. I moved across the country anticipating greatness.

The beginning

Grounded in both my own experiences as a faculty tutor as well as the wisdom and support of the International Writing Centers Association (then NWCA) web site, I was eager to start. I knew the center would have to start small and use as many tips as possible from web sources, WCenter, *The Writing Center Journal*, and *The Writing Lab Newsletter*. Even though I was

in a rural area with no immediate physical colleagues, I felt secure in the wealth of my support and knowledge. I would hire a small core of dedicated tutors, make classroom visits to promote this new service, use available space on campus, and market the new center as indispensable. Once the center caught on, the administration would have no choice but to increase my budget. From this position I could negotiate for more release time, to a more 50/50 situation, pouring more and more energy into the writing center and writing program.

With this in mind, and the questions from “Basic Steps for Starting a Writing Center” from IWCA in front of me, I wrote up a proposal for the ages. It was full of grand projections for the center, including what a center could do for the school and community, why it should be called a “center” rather than a “lab,” practical suggestions for the amounts of money it would need, and plans for implementation. My mission statement summed up the vision:

It is the mission of the writing center to assist all members of a campus community with communication skills. A place for developmental students working on their first college-level work as well as for faculty members hammering out articles or conference papers, the writing center is a locale for one-to-one collaboration with a captive audience, in this case a faculty or peer tutor. Areas on which to focus usually expand from ini-

tial discussion with the writer, but may include any aspect of the writing process, from brainstorming and prewriting activities to revision and final editing help. It is the philosophy of the writing center that these tutorials should be as non-directive as possible, a collaboration between tutor and writer rather than a mini “lecture” session where a writer sits passively as a tutor “corrects” errors. In this way, the tutorial session is as productive as possible while issues surrounding authorship and plagiarism are subverted.

Nothing controversial here, really, nothing to set the world on fire, but I felt it covered most of the philosophical writing center bases. Proud of my work and secure in the knowledge of what a writing center could do for the entire campus community, I handed my proposal to the dean and awaited word as to when I could start hiring tutors.

And waited.

The middle

After a few weeks with no word, I ran my original proposal by the director of developmental education, and she and I hammered out a remote backup plan where I could offer the minimal tutoring services I could do during my one release time to students in the GED lab space. Bolstered by this collaboration, I still pursued the dean. Every time I saw him in the halls, I

would ask about tutors and budget for the writing center. He would say something cryptic about “baby steps” and then change the subject to the latest DVD releases. My patience was wearing thin and my idealism was quickly fading.

Indeed, that entire first term, I never heard a word about my proposal from anyone who could approve money for me. I read and re-read my job description. Had I dreamed that part about “establishing and overseeing a college writing lab that assists developmental and transfer students”? No—there it was. Was I hallucinating about the clause relating my “supervisory duties” which would include the “training and basic supervision of instructional assistant(s) in a writing laboratory”? Strangely enough, that was still there, too. But almost three months into my new job, I still had no budget, no tutors, and no writing center.

Once the nasty realization set in that I had been duped by an unrealistic, or perhaps even deceitful, job description, I resolved to build the best writing center I could with limited resources: me. I began promoting in classes around campus a writing center as if one existed, offering my own tutoring services five hours a week, alternately in the GED lab and math lab spaces. The start was pretty good, in fact. Out of 104 possible tutorials winter term, students filled 84, creating a usage rate of 80%. Spring dropped off a bit, but so did my hours due to an increasing administrative load. I offered 78 half-hour tutorials, and students filled 61 of them for a 78% usage rate. Obviously our students needed this service.

Over the summer, through my expanding connections on campus, I was able to team up with the college librarian and the business technology instructor to transform the old, seldom

used computer lab into a learning and writing center, the Student Enrichment Center (SEC). We put in our free time in an almost guerrilla operation, adding elbow grease to paint the walls and realign the furniture from the antiseptic computer lab rows to computer clusters. We added round tables for tutoring and a comfortable love seat for lounging. The politics of getting paint beyond an “antique” white were immense and nasty, but we jumped every hurdle to create a student-friendly space on campus. The computer lab assistants we inherited, while not keen on helping with writing, were comfortable helping students in at least varying degrees, and I once again felt optimistic for a writing center presence on campus.

The end

The numbers of students in the SEC were impressive this fall and winter, but writing tutoring remains limited to my five hours a week. We are open 55 hours a week, and are able to serve 137 students on average in those hours, phenomenal numbers for a school so small. However, with the recent budget crisis in our state, as well as many others, “peripheral” services are once again the easy target for cuts. Also, on our campus, as I am sure is the case on any small campus, space is a continual source of contention.

The SEC now frequently stands accused of “stealing” classroom space, a charge which may cost us at least one night a week, if not several mornings as well, even as our student surveys overwhelmingly suggest we increase our hours. While our lab assistants will still be with us for spring term, there is little prospect for getting even one writing tutor in the SEC beyond myself, and we may have to cut our remaining hours soon. While the school now has a space for a writing center, an excellent learning environment,

and a strong student base, it still has no tutors.

morals

So what can others keen to start writing centers learn from this experience to make it not so very bleak?

1. Get everything in writing before agreeing to start a writing center or signing your contract, as the case may be. If you are a new hire or a graduate student looking for a writing center to direct or even create, make sure the institution is both philosophically and monetarily committed to making a writing center happen.
2. Understand the politics of starting a writing center, even when no English department exists. While many articles and conversations on WCenter have exposed the tensions between a tenure track English department and often non-tenure administrative positions in writing centers, know that institutional politics can still kill a fledgling center even when this tension is not present. My erstwhile job description, I discovered too late, had been written by the dean prior to the one who hired me. Her goals for the English position were not his, hence the writing center was not a priority.
3. Don't assume success will let you negotiate. The idealistic myth surrounding many writing centers is that if you can quantitatively prove that students benefit or prosper under the tutelage of a writing center, then you will have more clout within the budgeting system. My story demonstrates that this is decidedly not always so. If services are ineligible to receive funding from state or

federal reimbursement programs, prying money from the school may prove more than daunting.

4. Keep the students' best interests in mind. While I love the idea of a writing center and was personally crushed to discover the gap between my vision and the institution's indifference, the "anything for a writing center" mantra I soon adopted is not always beneficial to students' growth and development as

writers. In effect, my five hours a week often become an extension of my office hours, and little resemble what I would truly consider a writing center. Until conditions change and writing tutors are allotted, the students, as always, are the ones who will suffer.

The future

While on a small scale, I believe my experiences coincide with many of us who strive for the ideals of writing

center work. How can the ideals of what we want and theorize is best connect productively with the realities with which we are faced? While I have no answers to these questions, I hope that the solutions lie in the growing body of literature and research we continue to produce.

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Step by step: Issues of ethics and safety at the writing center

"If I don't pass, I'm going to have to shoot someone."

When I assumed responsibility for directing my university's writing center in the spring of 1999, I remembered those words and the young man who had said them to me three years earlier. At that time, I was still a graduate student at a large research university, no longer working as a writing consultant but working for the writing program as a proctor for the university-wide, junior-level writing test. The young man was a student chafing under this relatively new graduation requirement, one that required students to sit for a timed writing on a given topic as just one part of the junior-level portfolio process. Not surprisingly, students expressed resentment at the process and the timed writing in particular; yet in the two and a half years that I proctored these exams and heard these complaints, his was the only exclamation of anger that threatened violence.

Unsure of how to respond, I scrutinized the student as he left. Dressed like a typical college student, he had spoken casually, with a trace of humor, even. There were no obvious non-verbal clues as to his seriousness. (What did I expect to see—a holster?) His essay yielded no clues either, and I was in a quandary as to what to do: I was pretty sure that the student did not mean it and that I was over-reacting, but still, should I report this to my supervisor?

I didn't want this uncertainty to ever face one of my consultants, especially given the number of tragic school shootings that have occurred nationwide since my encounter with that student. In a presentation on these shootings at an East Central Writing Centers Association Conference, Michael Morris emphasized that these killers left clues in their writing. Morris argued that those in a position to view students' writing—teachers and tutors—have the opportunity to pre-

vent future violence. Admittedly and fortunately, the likelihood of a consultant's working with a violent student is rare, but the possibility of this and related scenarios merits consideration and preparation. Thus, when I took over the directorship of the writing center, I began to explore channels for implementing some safety guidelines. Writing center directors, new and experienced, share this concern for tutor safety. My goal in sharing the process I undertook is to provide steps for directors to consider and adapt to their own context, as well as to invite further discussion and publication on this important issue.

Naturally, the channels to follow will differ from institution to institution, based on its size, the newness of the writing center, and the responsibilities of the director. My duties, for example, involve scheduling and training consultants, but do not extend to overseeing the budget. The writing center is part of a larger academic support cen-

ter with a director, my supervisor, who controls the writing center budget. My first step, then, was to propose safety guidelines to her and enlist her support. As part of this step, I wrote a specific proposal outlining my concerns and recommendations. This proposal was specific in terms of troublesome scenarios and proposed courses of action, for a vague discussion of “safety” would become buried in a bureaucratic paper trail.

Fortunately, as I was drafting this proposal, Michael Pemberton’s “Crisis Tutorials” appeared in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*. In it, he raises four situations that place the consultant in ethical dilemmas with clients that involve the safety of the client, the consultant, and others in the university community. The four scenarios have the consultant dealing with a client who admits to taking drugs; a client who admits to knowing the perpetrators of a criminal activity currently under investigation; a client who threatens a professor; and, a client whose paper on her rape doesn’t meet the assignment’s parameters. Rather than having to envision compromising situations herself, my supervisor was confronted with four realistic possibilities. Moreover, this article also raises the crucial question of “What are the tutor’s responsibilities here?” (14), the question that also framed my own proposal. As Michael Pemberton points out when answering this question, “federal, state, and institutional regulations may remove any illusion of choice in these matters” (14).

That column contributed to my proposal, and my overall process, in several important ways. First, as mentioned earlier, it provided specific examples to share with the director of the academic support center. Second, by including a copy of the article with my proposal, I demonstrated that this was not an isolated concern, nor should it be, even at a relatively “safe” school. Third, the article underscored the importance of conferring with others in

the university community about how to handle such situations, and about how far the writing center’s responsibility and liability extend. It served as a reminder that, beyond the university’s policy, there are federal and state regulations to be followed.

The importance of knowing federal and state regulations was emphasized further at a presentation at another East Central Writing Centers Association Conference. The writing center consultants and director, Jill Pennington, investigated the legal obligations of the writing center, sharing their findings in a presentation entitled “What Do You Do When Students Bring ‘Beyond Writing’ Issues to the Writing Center? Legal and Ethical/‘Moral’ Obligations.” Their investigation into regulations examined the university’s role *in loco parentis*, and was complicated by the reality that, at most universities, post-secondary students and freshmen less than 18 years old attend classes and use the writing center. When the student is not a legal adult, the writing center’s legal obligations may be vastly different than when students are over eighteen. As a result, knowledge of state regulations is crucial.

Furthermore, their presentation reinforced the importance of using other resources both to determine the extent of writing center responsibility and to craft writing center guidelines that adhere to existing policies and laws at the university, state, and federal levels. I had taken that first step by submitting my proposal to the support center director; she took the next step by contacting the appropriate campus offices. She also sent the proposal to our counseling services for input. From this input, I crafted a loosely worded guideline statement to share with consultants at our meetings and in the training class, and to include in our training notebook.

The guidelines address two generic situations: one in which a client indicates a desire to harm or knowledge of

harm done; and, one in which the client brings up a personal crisis of some sort, such as drug use or rape. In both instances, consultants are required to report the nature of the session to the writing center director and to the director of the academic support center. It then states that “These individuals will then take the appropriate actions with authorities.” In the scenarios dealing with personal crisis, more discretionary guidelines are given to the consultant, such as whether to refer the student to a health service provider (contact information is available at the writing center) or to continue the session. The statement ends with a reminder that “Tutors are *not* counselors nor are they responsible for what a student says or does! However, to defer a sense of responsibility or liability in such circumstances, tutors should report these types of incidents to their supervisors.”

These guidelines have several advantages, given the context of our writing center. First, they rely on the university’s existing organizational structure. Once the consultant reports the incident, the directors can contact the necessary personnel and verify the age of the student. The responsibility shifts from the consultant to the directors. The loosely worded reference to “authorities” affords the directors flexibility when contacting others, for, depending on the circumstances, these authorities could be legal services, student services, counseling services, or law enforcement. Once we have contacted the appropriate authorities or personnel, we’ve made the attempt to fulfill our legal and ethical obligations while adhering to the organizational structure of the university.

Second, the guidelines do allow for discretion on the part of the consultant when possible—based on his relationship with the client—to refer the client to other services such as counseling. This leeway addresses the consultant’s sense of personal responsibility for the client, a sense that often develops in a long-term tutoring relationship, and

that could present an ethical dilemma for the consultant.

The main ethical dilemma that the guidelines pose for the consultants is the seeming violation of consultant/client confidentiality—an important philosophy of writing centers. The legal language can seem at odds with the more personable aspects of the writing center and its mission. To help consultants adjust to this apparent contradiction, these guidelines must be integrated into the training process. This was my next step: including a discussion of these scenarios and the guidelines into the annual training course. Like many training courses, this one involves role playing. Prior to role playing, we read “Crisis Tutorials.” Consultants then respond, in writing, to a directed journal question, asking them how they would handle these situations. We then discuss their responses in class, and compare their suggestions with the recommendations given in the guideline statement. If

als.” Consultants take on the roles of both client and tutor. The rest of us act as back-up tutors, providing input when the lead tutor needs assistance. Afterwards, we review strategies—what worked and other options. We also role play two other situations in which I take on the roles both of a violent client and of a gravely ill client. I assume these roles because I want *all* the consultants to be considering their responses. Throughout this portion of the class, I emphasize that this is not meant to alarm or scare them; that the chance of this ever happening is extremely remote; that it is best to be prepared. The consultants are very aware of the violence that has taken place in our schools, as well as the threats possible in the wake of the September 11th, 2001, attacks. They appreciate the importance of being prepared. In the two years that I have integrated this issue into the course, consultants have commented that the situations we practice in class are harder than any they’ve actually

move further into the 21st century and take steps to improve our technology and to increase our services, these issues of ethics and safety will persist, albeit in a myriad of forms. While we may lament the necessity of legal issues encroaching on our focus on writing, directors need to address these issues so that our consultants can work with an increased sense of preparedness and confidence. I realize that I’m “preaching to the choir” when I say that we should take steps to anticipate these issues by training our consultants to handle them. The very first step is to acknowledge the on-going need to do so, and then to institute or regularly to revisit guidelines and training methods in a manner that keeps pace with the evolution of writing centers, society, and our respective institutions.

*Nicole Diederich
The University of Findlay
Findlay, OH*

The consultants are very aware of the violence that has taken place in our schools, as well as the threats possible in the wake of the September 11th, 2001, attacks. They appreciate the importance of being prepared.

there are any differences, we discuss them; usually, these focus on the issue of confidentiality. Despite their, and at times my own, discomfort with sharing the intimate details of a tutoring session, I emphasize that in these instances, confidentiality takes a “back seat” to civic responsibility and the well-being of others, *including* the client. How would the consultant feel after withholding knowledge of criminal activity, itself a crime, when another crime occurs as a result? Or have a student commit suicide after bringing a confessional paper to the consultant?

After discussing these guidelines and the philosophy behind them, we role play the scenarios from “Crisis Tutori-

encountered. May it always be so. My hope is that consultants leaving the course will never have to draw on these practice sessions. If they do, I believe that they will be informed and confident in their responses.

When I was a writing proctor, I was unaware of any existing guidelines to follow when that young man threatened violence. Ultimately, I did tell my supervisor, who told hers, our WPA, who called the student. He explained to the student that making such a threat is like saying that you’ve got a bomb when you’re in an airport. Fortunately, the student was mortified and apologized profusely. As the WPA told me, “better to be safe than sorry.” As we

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Historical analysis: How to help students with history and history-related papers

Working in the writing center is always challenging because rarely do we as tutors know with what type of assignment a tutee will need assistance. When such an assignment is in the area of history or a history related topic and you, as the tutor, are unfamiliar with what to look for in a paper for that discipline, panic can set in quickly. When you discover the student is describing a historical event about which you know little or nothing, inwardly unrest increases. Perhaps the strategy of focusing on the basics of grammar, because you do not know what else to do, is a quick fix.

To get some ideas about writing history papers, I interviewed several history professors at Weber State University, the college I attend. One problem that the professors agreed on as being somewhat universal was the difficulty many students have with writing an analysis. History subjects are different in their nature from other subjects, such as science and literature, because of the aspects of the data that are used to write a history paper. Sadly, many of the students especially those in basic history classes, may not understand how to write a quality analysis. A quality analysis consists of a logical and balanced presentation without bias. It contains accurate facts and carefully cited material, and avoids historical myths.

One of the major issues that lower division history students have difficulty with is logically connecting the incidents of a historical event. Many of the students fall into the trap of just listing what happened without really making clear, concise connections as to cause and effect. Such an analysis can be particularly difficult because one of the jobs of historians is to examine occurrences and try to decide if the first incident caused the second one and so forth. Often many factors may have led to the cause and effect of a specific historical event, and they can appear

to be elusive to a student. Recently, I helped a student who was writing a paper on the history of dance in the Polynesian Islands. He explained that when the explorers and missionaries from other countries came to visit the islands, they viewed the native dances as heathen. The student mistakenly made the connection that forcing the islanders to stop dancing was against their U.S. Constitutional rights. I explained to the young man that the U.S. Constitution has no jurisdiction in the Polynesian Islands and that the connection he had made was incorrect. As tutors, we need to help our students become aware that numerous factors may be involved and that their analysis is probably not the only right answer to the problem.

A tutor should reassure a tutee his/her analysis is valid if the tutee has written a thorough, well-thought-out paper. How then do tutors, many of whom do not have a grounded background in history, evaluate the analysis? One of the first steps is to see if the paper makes logical sense. Whether a source is a letter, a newspaper article, or another historian's viewpoint, all must be examined with care, so interpretations are not off base. If the causes of a paper's premise are far out in left field, it is important to point out the problem to the student. For example, if a student were to speculate that aliens from outer space assassinated John F. Kennedy, many credible, reliable sources definitely would be necessary to support the argument. Supermarket tabloids would not do. While this may be an extreme example, history students can get carried away by conspiracy theories, for many such events that cannot be proven. For example, one place they may find support for these events and theories is on dubious Internet Web sites.

Students may also go off the accurate research track while trying to prove their own theories. Bias is evident throughout the subject of history because no one can be completely impartial in his/her research. Whether amateur or professional, students, as well as historians, are no exception to this problem. A person's background, culture, beliefs, upbringing, and values can all get in the way of how a person perceives history. In examining the event, writers should try to put their personal beliefs aside as much as possible. A big warning sign for a tutor is when the paper or the source the writer quotes is one-sided to the extreme. A paper should strive to contain a balance of pro and con sources. Sometimes it is best to see the analysis as partly an argument. In doing so, as tutors, we should look to see if opposing viewpoints are included and encourage our students to attempt to see the event from an outsider's point of view in order to have a balanced explanation of the situation.

Another bias can occur when a student examines evidence. If students are trying to prove a particular theory, they may misinterpret the source. This problem is best explained in the saying, "What you're looking for is probably what you will find." If someone wants something to back up a theory, that person can ignore evidence to the contrary. The bias may not always be intentional, but it is a symptom of wishful thinking. For the tutor not familiar with the topic of the paper, this bias may be extremely hard to detect. Checking the paper's bibliography to make sure that the tutee has used several sources to support the paper is important. Asking the tutee if he/she has encountered other opinions on the topic and encouraging him/her to include them will help. If the tutor has a basic understanding of the topic, and it seems appropriate for the session, the tutor can always play the "devil's advocate" to help the student examine other viewpoints.

Students can also get hung up on using historical myths to support their arguments. Myths show a lack of thought, research, and understanding. While historians often say that in history “truth can be stranger than fiction,” it is good to remember, “If it is too good to be true, it probably is.” Do not be afraid to question an event or idea that seems “too good to be true.” If it does, ask the student about the source’s credibility. Some myths have been started or propagated by “historians” themselves. Sadly, some feel, “If it will improve the story and emphasize a point, lie a little.” For example, the myth of George Washington and the cherry tree was started by an early biographer who wanted to sell his book by making even the child Washington a moral figure. In this case and others, the historian’s overall credibility is questionable. If the tutor strongly suspects that a tutee has intentionally distorted details or it appears he/she has done so, it would be helpful to the student to bring it to his/her attention.

One of the great myths in history that may be easy for tutors to spot is the myth of the wonderful, extraordinary leader. It is important to remember that if nothing else, everyone is human. Sometimes it is easy to make leaders superhuman because they are removed from our time, culture, and society, and it is difficult for us to relate to them. Even great leaders in high positions have had human frailties and have made mistakes. No one is perfect. If a student brings in a paper making someone seem beyond being human or less than human, it would be good to explain that it is important to portray people realistically. However, it is also significant to remember that an individual can make a difference in how a historical event occurs.

History is a discipline that builds on the research of other historians. It is important for tutors to remind students that they need to cite the ideas of others. Those who read the paper deserve to know where the information, be-

yond what is basically known about the topic, was found to avoid plagiarism. For the subject of history, it can be easy for students to become confused, even if they have taken good notes. A student sometimes may not remember if the ideas in the paper are his/hers or if the ideas belong to someone else. Even some prominent historians have had this difficulty. We can aid our students and help them avoid such a problem by urging them to cite anything that is questionable.

The next time students come into your writing center with a history paper, use these suggestions as a guide for helping them overcome problems they may have with an analysis. Watch for signs of illogical analyses, bias, myths, and information that should be cited that is not. By following this formula, you can help tutees follow the straight track of quality analysis.

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