

— FROM THE EDITOR —

With this issue we wind up Vol. 31 and take a break before gearing up again in September. In this issue you'll find Ellen Mohr's review of the many years of marketing her community college writing center. Susan Dinitz and Jean Kiedaisch expand our perspective on handouts by discussing the contributions of their tutors in developing guidelines for writing in various disciplines. Kathy Gillis, guest editor, introduces Bonnie Devet's choice of a past article in *WLN* that still works for her and her tutors. Devet's article celebrates 30 years of *WLN* articles that have contributed to our field. Jana Pate explores her ethical quandaries and how she turned generalities into personal realizations about her tutoring. Many of the names of authors here are familiar as long-time contributors to the literature of our field, and we welcome their wisdom and experience. And we hope to hear from fresh new voices as well.

Also in this issue you'll notice that we still explore familiar issues that persist over the years—how to market our work, how to view handouts, how to train tutors using readings, how to reflect on the ethics of what we do. Plus news of how we are moving forward: a writing center director named a Distinguished Professor, the international, regional and state conferences, a workshop for high school writing center people, and a conference calendar that includes conference sites that show us how international we have become.

Much to read and think about though we look forward to some quiet time to relax as well—also an important activity. See you in September, I hope.

◆ Muriel Harris, editor

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MARKETING THE BEST IMAGE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE WRITING CENTER

◆ Ellen Mohr
Johnson County Community College
Overland Park, KS

Patrick Sullivan uses cultural narratives to show the success that community colleges have had in "democratizing" higher education. Two-year colleges open the door to educational opportunity by keeping tuition affordable and providing resources for the under-prepared (142). They prepare students for transfer to four-year colleges or universities and for the work place and may also, as Ira Shor notes, even take on the responsibility "to absorb and manage the downward mobility of students driven out of four-year colleges..." (167). Both Sullivan and Shor emphasize the important role the community college plays in providing academic preparation and economic opportunity. To accomplish these goals, community colleges assess students and place them in appropriate classes where they have every opportunity to progress. Smaller classes and approachable instructors increase the students' comfort level and their confidence builds. The services the college offers should support that open environment and the college's mission. They should be marketed so that they project a comprehensive and positive image.

One of those services is, of course, the community college writing center which strives to provide an academic setting that equalizes opportunity and

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is approximately 2500-3000 words, 1500 words for reviews and Tutors' Column essays, in MLA format. If possible, please send as attached files in an e-mail to submission@writinglabnewsletter.org.

eliminates the stigma of labeling students. In other words, a community college writing center welcomes all students (regardless of their under-preparedness) and provides an avenue for reaching their goals. We strive to attract not only students but also the whole campus community and the community outside the college. The comfortable, inviting setting of most stand-alone writing centers focuses on the writer and the writer's project, not the skill level.

Writing centers do more than serve under-prepared writers even though enhancing student learning is certainly one of the many goals they achieve. To this end we must ask ourselves some important questions. If in our community college writing centers we target only at-risk students, will we lose the students who are writing in college-level courses? How does a remedial image affect our connection with writing across the curriculum? How can writing centers best market and accurately portray our complex mission?

CREATING A POSITIVE IMAGE

The first step to image building is to keep ourselves and our supporters from labeling students who come to the writing center. Because many of our students know they are at-risk, under-prepared, or developmental, labeling them as such only further alienates them from academia and from us. Likewise, the tags we assign to non-native speakers of English, returning adults, first-generation college students, low income adults, or the learning disabled become negative and distracting in a writing center environment. Labeling or the language we use to describe our students may also contribute to how the writing center is viewed by outsiders. Several problems arise when writing centers are considered part of developmental tutoring support: they risk consolidation with other developmental services or even closure when budget cuts slash remedial programs. This assumption, which is based on my years of experience and stories from colleagues in other cc writing centers, on the WCenter listserv, and in current writing center literature, is influenced by several factors.

First, two-year college writing centers are often located in a learning or academic achievement center. They are often politically placed with the student services branch of the college because of budget constraints and misunderstanding. Obviously, the expense of operating a writing center separate from a learning lab is considerably more than having all services under one branch, with one director, in one physical location, and with a single budget line. This fact is especially true in a college with an enrollment under 5000 students where one can see that running separate labs for various subjects would not be cost efficient. Thus, students coming from a lifetime of learning centers and/or remedial labs where they were "labeled" are now in college facing similar labels: "at risk," developmental, or under-prepared. Somehow we have to educate our campus-at-large that a writing center thrives best if it has no labels, or if, at the least, the labels are inclusive and non-judgmental. We serve all students because all students can improve their writing ability. Students must know that when they come to us, they will be treated equally, that with practice writing is an essential lifelong skill they can learn, and that the writing center is part of the writing process. We are writers helping writers. The college community (instructors and administrators) can help us convey those messages. As writing center directors and staff, we can practice strategies that market and model those values in our writing centers. We need strategies that welcome all writers to our centers and encourage writing across the curriculum.

Another step to positive image building is to clarify what we do in a writing center. Instructors send students in for a variety of reasons: to take an assessment, to work through specific grammar programs, and to get papers proofread by a tutor. Telling these instructors that we don't think these activities are especially helpful might alienate them. So, instead we need to educate them to our services. Writing center doctrine discourages us from proofreading or letting our centers become labs for "drill and kill" computer-guided grammar exercises. In fact, these guidelines are found in the community college writing center position statement which is pending endorsement from the International Writing

Centers Association (Gardner and Pennington 261). In our writing center we have two ways that we tackle this problem. One is to educate students to what we do when they come into the center. It is not telling them what we don't do. The second is to educate instructors through students and through our marketing literature.

For instance, when instructors send their students to take a computer generated assessment (MicroLab), they often do not explain its purpose. The test, which assesses students' abilities to recognize and correct sentence-level errors and mechanics problems, identifies the specific trouble areas. Modules covering each of those areas give students practice to improve their scores. In the writing center we must connect the program to the individual student's writing and pattern of errors. If instructors noted the pattern of error in their students' writing and sent them to work on the specific problem, the student might be less likely to think of the task as "busy work," and the instruction might be more beneficial. This strategy models good teaching practice and also addresses the proofreading issue. In fact, teaching grammar skills in the context of the student's writing is, as the experts tell us, the best practice. Is this developmental work? Of course it is, but we don't assign unnecessary programs or label the student or the student's writing level with that or any other term that may segregate or demean him/her.

When instructors use negative tactics to get students into the writing center, they damage the center's image. For example, sometimes an instructor will write in big red letters across the top of the student's assignment, "Go to the Writing Center!" Often the instructor has graded only part of the paper, drawn a line, and then written the bold command. Thus, students perceive the center as being a punishment or as providing only remedial work, so they feel branded (labeled) when they are sent. They arrive in the writing center, embarrassed, defensive, and sometimes angry, and we must deal with the consequences of the teacher's unwitting demands. Chances are their students will grudgingly do the assigned work and then avoid returning unless mandated by the instructor. "We don't proofread" is the last thing we need to say to these students. Even though that may be the problem that is marked (numerous superficial errors), I can guarantee that we can review the paper using the writing center's hierarchy, higher order concerns before lower order concerns. Students learn that good revision often leads to fewer errors. While they are with us, we can give them some proofreading strategies, such as reading their essays aloud to someone or having someone read the essay to them. Students who use our writing centers return to their classrooms and may tell their instructors that we refused to proofread or correct their essays. On the other hand, they may tell their instructors that we provided suggestions for improving a thesis, or reorganizing, or adding support to a poorly developed thesis.

TEACHING THE USERS

When we communicate with instructors, we help them to understand what it is that we stress when we work with their students, and we give them the positive language to use when encouraging their students to visit the writing center. We can market our writing centers so that instructors understand what transpires in a tutor session. When we work directly with instructors, we can suggest that they

1. Give students a specific task(s) to complete in the writing center.
2. Tie the task to an assignment or a graded paper.
3. Have students bring specific assignment(s) to the center.
4. Keep models of good completed assignments in the center.

“Marketing our services is more than a flyer with location and schedule identified; it's making sure everyone understands our mission.”

NEWS

DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR AWARD TO JANE SMITH

Koster, Josephine (Winthrop University) sent the following news to WCenter (the listserv for those of us in writing centers):

Friends, please join me in congratulating my colleague Jane Smith, director of the Winthrop Writing Center, who about an hour ago was named University Distinguished Professor. This title is the highest honor the Winthrop Community bestows upon a faculty member and indicates “exceptional skill in teaching, significant research or creative effort, high standing among professional colleagues, and general service to the University.” This title honors Jane not only for her wonderful individual work, but her long-standing devotion to and promotion of the Winthrop Writing Center and the work of our tutors. Jane has also been a long-time officer of and member in the Southeastern Writing Centers Association. Isn't it wonderful to see a member of the Centerfolk be so honored? Congrats, Jane!!!

5. Focus on the hierarchy that works with all levels of student writers.
6. Tell students verbally and in their syllabus that they should take advantage of the writing center's services.
7. Take their students into the center and have the staff explain the process and services of the writing center.
8. Ask someone from the writing center to talk to their class.
9. Be aware of what the writing center does and does not do. Accentuate the positive.
10. Help students to become wiser users of the center . . . learning what questions to ask and seeking guidance for the higher order concerns instead of looking only for editing corrections. One way we can help instructors is to share our hierarchy with them.

The writing center's hierarchy which focuses on writing process not writing product is the most effective tutoring strategy we have because it encourages us to be non-directive, it stimulates student dialogue, and it promotes critical thinking. It reinforces the writing process and keeps the center learner-focused. It works as well with students developing a topic sentence into an extended paragraph as it does with students writing literary critiques, researched arguments, or lab reports. Each table in our center has a sign holder with the hierarchy list and questions to guide the discussion. The list, also, constantly markets what we do in a tutor session.

In our tutor training workshops, we discuss and practice how to use this strategy. Tutors may read the students' drafts or the students read their drafts aloud to the tutors, or tutor and student may simply discuss the assignment, looking at how the paper might be improved with reorganizing, adding or deleting for support. Here is where we are abandoning labels and equalizing opportunity. All students who come in with a draft go through the same process: we fill out a critique form that follows the hierarchy. Students get a copy that they may give their instructor, further reinforcing what happens in the tutoring session: for the student, for the instructor, and even for us.

The hierarchy always holds up; all students, regardless of the assignment, regardless of their skill level, must consider the same global issues: aim of assignment, purpose, audience, organization, etc. For developmental students, for non-native English speaking students, for students with learning disabilities, the process is more tedious, but most of these students understand that they need more time, more help, and more perseverance to succeed in academics and in their chosen careers or professions. We can individualize the process to each individual need. We can advise working through certain software programs because we can tie the tutorial to a unique need. This strategy is so much better than an instructor just assigning a whole class to come in and work through a program without connecting it to any assignment.

Of course, for all of us, a discussion about thesis, organization and development is difficult when there is a language barrier or when faulty sentence structure gets in the way of understanding the text, in other words, clarity. Often, this barrier is cultural. Several issues concern us: one is that we will do too much for these students and rob them of their own voices or viewpoint; another is that we will not do enough and deprive them of their “equal” right to information.

STRATEGIES FOR MARKETING YOUR CENTER

When instructors send students not knowing what's available in the Writing Center, their students come in not knowing why they are there. Marketing strategies can help reveal what guides the tutoring sessions and how other resources may be used. We have to “teach” the college community to value the writing center as more than just a developmental student service. Although we still fight the “remedial” image, we have instructors now who pay attention to the list of writing center resources that we have

connected to each of the English program's objectives. Some of these instructors have even devised detailed checklists, set deadlines, and efficiently tied writing skills to computer programs and to a graded essay. Their students are less likely to see their writing center work as busy work. Many of their students take our advice and return with rough drafts to further reinforce the drills. The more information we can provide the instructor (even if it is delivered inadvertently through the student) the more likely we are to fulfill our mission of helping students improve their writing skills.

Thus, the key to the image of the writing center as inclusive is to take every opportunity to enlighten instructors across the campus. Here are some possibilities:

1. Be active in college committees. Your visibility makes others aware of the center and gives you a chance to laud the center's services.
2. Take advantage of professional development opportunities. Help with writing across the curriculum endeavors whenever you can.
3. Send out a letter (e-mail or regular) to all faculty members about what the writing center does. Emphasize that we provide guidance on rhetorical issues . . . thesis and focus, development and support, organization, even style (voice, diction, etc.); programs to teach the mechanics . . . the rules of writing . . . and grammar; and programs to practice sentence structure, improve vocabulary, and correct sentence-level errors.
4. Invite instructors to a tutor meeting to talk about their assignments and let tutors talk to them about what we do. Get them to keep good student samples in the writing center.
5. Include the hierarchy triangle and your center's mission statement on all marketing literature (flyers, brochures, newsletters). If you don't have a mission statement, write one. In the *Writing Center Director's Resource Book* our colleagues, such as Clint Gardner and Tiffany Rousculp, at other community colleges, have some excellent suggestions about mission statements.
6. Encourage instructors to come to the writing center to see what programs the center has and while they are there, ask them about their assignments, what they expect from their students and from the writing center, and then explain how the writing center can help them and their students.

By communicating what we do in the writing center, we alleviate the apprehension instructors might have about sending their students, like fearing that the tutors will do too much of the work for the students or give the wrong advice. If instructors, also, have a concern for an ethical violation of instructor privilege and privacy, we can assure them that we respect the students' and the professors' rights by keeping our files secure and our tutoring sessions private. Furthermore, we can dispel the long-established fear that tutoring actually creates dependency on the tutor rather than promotes self-reliance by explaining the learner-centered conference and sharing our hierarchy. Marketing our services is more than a flyer with location and schedule identified; it's making sure everyone understands our mission.

Finally, most writing center directors who realize that they are not reaching all of their potential clients could remedy the problem with better communication. That statement is, of course, simplistic, but it is also practical and realistic. The suggestions discussed in this article are all things we can do to better market our centers: they don't cost money; they don't take much time. When we make the commitment to serve all students equally, we show our belief that all writers can improve if given the opportunity and that when writing improves, lives change. This commitment is our community college writing center mission. This mission then is our promise to equalize opportunity and our step toward democratizing higher education. ♦

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TAKE NOTE

EAST CENTRAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

March 21-22, 2008
Columbus, OH

Watch for a more complete announcement in a fall issue of *WLN*. For information now, contact Doug Dangler: dangler.6@osu.edu.

MICHIGAN TUTORIAL ASSOCIATION/ MICHIGAN WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Proposals
Oct. 19-20, 2007
Muskegon, MI

For information and the proposal form, see the Conference Web site: <http://www.michigan-tutors.org/mta_conferences.htm>.

Proposal deadline: June 8, 2007.
Contact Kathy Schrader: 231-777-0393; conferencechair@michigan-tutors.org

TUTORS CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE: HANDOUTS REVISITED

Susan Dinitz, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT
Jean Kiedaisch, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT

As directors, we have felt conflicted about the use of handouts in our writing center at the University of Vermont, as they seem to contradict our philosophy. Handouts seem by their nature to be reductive, prescriptive, and rule-driven, to suggest that knowledge is passed on rather than constructed. In Andrea Lunsford's terms, they seem to support the idea of a writing center as a "storehouse" rather than "a collaborative Burkean parlor based on the notion of knowledge as always contextually bound, as always socially constructed" (8).

And so over the past several years we have come up with a local, contextualized use of handouts. The University of Vermont (UVM) Writing Center is staffed by undergraduate peer tutors from across the disciplines, mostly juniors and seniors, who take a two-semester training seminar. For years, one of their assignments has been to give presentations on writing in their own disciplines, for which they create a handout. These handouts were originally gathered in folders and made available for tutors to use with students. Eventually the folders became so full of materials that one class decided to organize each folder into a notebook on writing in that discipline, with sections covering a variety of topics and copies of each handout for use during sessions. Now, in order to create a class presentation, each tutor reads through the notebook from her or his discipline, recommending what should be removed, inserted, or revised and updated, and then constructs a handout that will add new material or a new perspective to the notebook.

We have come to realize that these handouts collected into notebooks, rather than contradicting our philosophy, actually embody our writing center's views of writing and of tutoring. Rather than buying into the "banking" system of education, they embody the view of knowledge as constructed by people within the disciplines that form academic communities.

TUTOR-CREATED RESOURCES ON WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

The notebooks often begin with a general overview that connects conventions for writing to the making of knowledge in a discipline. For example, in their handout "Writing In the Discipline of History," Frank Jones, Alex Korn, and Francis Lennon look at what it is historians do to explain conventions for writing in that discipline:

Something to keep in mind is that the "field work" for historians consists of sifting through mountains and mountains of primary writing sources In order to be able to find what they are looking for, historians need universally accepted systems for categorizing and cataloging everything they come across. Out of this need originates certain peculiarities specific to historians such as an emphasis on the format and clarity of a paper and an incredibly disciplined adherence to certain bibliographic forms.

This explanation may help account for why, for example, historians like to see a footnote at the bottom of the page to fully identify a source the first time it is cited rather than to see an in-text citation.

Following an overview, each notebook includes handouts describing in more depth common types of assignments in that discipline and what the expectations are for those types of writing. These make it immediately apparent that disciplines are unique communities with their own

ways of writing, and that being a good writer in college involves learning those ways of writing. For example, Clayton Trutor begins his guide to writing in political science by explaining, “The strange history of political science makes writing in this field of study uniquely challenging because its diverse influences have had many different reasons for considering the *polis*.” He contrasts the Greek conception of the field as “the most noble of intellectual pursuits” because it is value-based with the more modern view of it as empirical social science. This leads to his explanation of four subfields in the discipline (American Politics, Political Philosophy, International Relations, and Comparative Politics), which in turn leads to his explanation of the varied types of writing in the discipline, from Philosophically Analytical Essays, which “come to political science through the humanities,” to Case Study Essays, which come through the social sciences.

The genre of lab reports provides an interesting lesson in how genres of writing and writing assignments can be found in multiple disciplines but still vary according to the discipline. Though tutors at first thought that they could create one handout on lab reports, they soon discovered that they needed separate sections on chemistry and biology lab reports and a whole separate notebook on lab reports in the field of natural resources. For example, according to the tutors with experience in chemistry, the lab reports for introductory chemistry classes should include the results and discussion in one section. However, the biology majors suggested that students separate these sections for biology lab reports. And unlike chemistry lab reports, biology lab reports were to include an abstract section and a review of the literature as part of the introduction. The Lab Report Notebook also contains a section on scientific articles, including one written by a tutor in a Biomedical Technology class, Ann Cwik. This article, set up as it needs to be for publication, illustrates for students how the lab report genre informs the professional genres and the scholarship in the field.

THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE: CONVENTIONS AS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED WAYS OF CONVERSING

Of course, it is possible to go to an OWL or handbook and find plenty of guides to writing in the various disciplines. Why not just refer student writers to these sites? Are the handouts collected in our notebooks different in any important ways?

For one thing, the notebooks embody and thus model the nature of disciplinary conventions not as rules but as agreed upon ways of talking, ways that change over time as a community changes. For example, in “A Few Words on Writing History Papers,” Jesse Lawson explains:

Problems with personal voice come in when asking whether or not to use “I.” It used to be standard convention never to use the personal pronoun, but this practice has become more commonplace in recent years. Adding personal dimension to a historical work can often increase its depth and be pleasurable for the reader. Some might even trust a historian more if s/he takes you into his/her confidence.

He quotes Thucydides to support this point, then adds “On the other hand, a historian is supposed to be an authority on the topic discussed, which means that saying ‘I think’ or ‘In my opinion’ can suggest that the author does not trust his/her own opinions—so why should the reader?” Jesse makes it clear that there’s not a simple answer to whether or not to use “I.” And he doesn’t just say what the conventions are, but also why, suggesting that the reasoning can change and thus the conventions can change.

Indeed, the notebooks themselves are an open rather than a closed form, changing year after year. Each reading by a new class of tutors is an invitation to revise and update the information they

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, WRITING CENTER TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

The University Writing Center has an open position, Assistant Director. Master's degree in English, English Education, or a field related to writing is required. This is a 12-month staff position. More information and applications can be accessed through TAMU Human Resources at <http://employees.tamu.edu/Jobs/JobListings/default.aspx>. Deadline is July 15, 2007.

Requirements include three (3) years teaching writing or working in a writing center or other tutor center; good writing and communication skills and administrative ability. Preferred experience would include specialization in rhetoric and composition; writing center administration or other supervisory experience; CRLA certification; and experience with computers. Salary range: \$36,000-46,000.

For questions, contact Professor Valerie Balester, University Writing Center Director, Texas A&M: v-balester@tamu.edu; 979-458-1420.

present about writing in that discipline. Thus the notebooks embody the reality that disciplinary conventions change over time.

The handouts also embody the reality that conventions for writing in the disciplines are subjective rather than objective—created *by people*, used *by people*—not a set of rules (from who knows where) that must be followed, as generic handouts often seem to suggest. The handouts usually are not written in an objective style or tone; you can hear the writer's personal voice. Consider Clayton's choice of a title—"Clayton's Super Political Science Writing Guide"—and of headings—" *A few morsels of information on format*." And he chooses to include his own opinion of some of the conventions, as in this third "morsel":

Political Scientists improperly use **MANY** words to suit their purposes; don't be surprised to see *Jimmy* or *Susie Polisci* come to the writing center with a paper full of this rubbish (e.g. the words "liberalism," "materialism," and "idealism" describe things completely foreign to their common usage).

In addition to writing in their own voices, the tutors often explicitly encourage students to develop and use *the students'* own voices—to *not* position themselves as simply following a set of rules or guidelines. In the first section to her handout on Philosophy Papers, Laura Mattison emphasizes the following:

What makes a philosophy paper difficult is not only the difficulty involved in the analysis of philosophical texts, but also the challenge of creating original and engaging thoughts of one's own and then being able to relate all the ideas together in a coherent whole. . . . It is important to realize that a philosophy paper is not simply a regurgitation of others' ideas, but an opportunity to reflect on the writings of others and to draw one's own analysis and conclusions.

In another example, Ben Doyle begins his essay "Writing in My Discipline" (which is English) by explaining

I don't read books, I rewrite them. This is the essential activity that must take place for a successful assessment of a literary text. Before a reader/writer can begin writing a paper on a book, they must rewrite the book through the process of reading it. In English circles this activity is called "a close reading." People reading a text are always going to be grounded in their own particular point of view, ideologies, and prejudices and so different people's contradictory readings of the same text can both be considered correct, providing of course that there is evidence in a text to support their interpretation. . . .

So, how do you write a paper for the discipline of English? Take a stand. Don't just read a text, rewrite it from an ideological perspective, let your reader be aware of that perspective and why you have chosen to embrace and interrogate it

Like Ben, Liz Fenton encourages the writer, not the guidelines, to be at the center of the process of writing an English paper. Her method for empowering the writer is to encourage play. She advises, "Write a wacky introduction. One common misconception about introductions to English papers is that they must be seven to ten sentences of dry outline ending in a thesis. This is not always true. If your professor seems game, try something different. . . ." Similarly, she encourages writers to "Play with form. Not all essays are eight paragraphs, and not all begin with a thesis and end with a conclusion. Experiment. . . . Try to hit on a form that matches your style, so your paper's shape will add to your argument."

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE CONVERSATION

TAKE NOTE

NORTHERN OHIO WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION

Call for Papers
September 8, 2007
Burton, Ohio
Keynote Speaker: William Macauley
"Putting It to Work: Practicing Theory and Theorizing Practice in the Writing Center"

Bring your stories about your practice in the writing center to our conference. Tell us how you developed your ideas about "what works" and why. This conference is based on the concept of "reflective practice." Potential session topics should interest tutors as they develop working theories about the nature of writing center work and their roles as tutors.

Submit a proposal online at <fpdc.kent.edu/regionalcenter/lc_0607/w_matters>. Submission Deadline: June 30, 2007. Want more info? Contact us! Conference Co-Chairs:

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The handouts in the notebooks, then, in addition to making visible and explicit the subjective nature of conventions for writing in a discipline, emphasize the important role of the writer in relation to these conventions. Another way in which they embody the nature of conventions as socially constructed lies in their being collected in notebooks to be used during tutoring. Thus they imply that in order *to learn* these conventions, a writer must learn how to participate in a conversation and can't just be "handed" a set of guidelines.

The handouts convey this sense of being part of a conversation through their construction of audience, voice, and purpose. In Liz's title, "Writing in English, English in Writing (a friendly guide to writing literature papers)," you can hear her adopting the stance of a peer acting as a guide to the uninitiated. She often writes in the first person, as in her aside, "When I get stuck, I tape Xerox paper all over my walls and make six-foot outlines of ideas-in-progress. I also write first drafts in crayon. It really works." And she directly addresses the reader, creating this sense of conversation, in her advice to "Make sure your paper follows your introduction or vice-versa. If you find out after finishing your paper that you have written about something other than what is in your introduction, you may need to alter your introduction. That's okay; do it."

Many of the tutors choose to create their handouts in the form of an outline or set of notes, clearly inviting explanation and conversation during a session. Similarly, sample papers are often included in the notebooks, and they're almost always annotated in a way that helps to create a conversation. On the first page of her sample sociology research paper, Kerri Riveley includes glosses noting "introduction outlining a topic"; "clear mention of hypothesis"; and "literature review—presentation of findings found in various published articles and books." The annotations connect the paper back to her one-page explanation of "Detailed Components of a Sociological Research Paper." Thus the paper becomes not a model to replicate but part of a conversation between documents in the notebook and between tutor and student.

The tutors are also very aware that they are helping *people with a process*, not teaching a list of writing rules or conventions to follow. Liz's "friendly guide to writing literature papers" has sections on the various parts of the process: Reading, Getting Started, The Body, The End, Revision, Editing and Proofreading, Citation, Some Suggested Readings. And the tutors are aware that this process may vary with an individual's learning and composing styles. For example, Jesse's "Few Words on Writing History Papers" begins with a section on "Getting Started." After discussing how to select a topic, he explains, "Having chosen the topic, the procedure will be different depending on the student," and then goes on to describe how the procedure may vary.

CREATING THE NOTEBOOKS: A CRASH COURSE IN WID FOR TUTORS

A final way in which the notebooks model the nature of academic writing as socially constructed within disciplines involves the actual process of creating the notebooks. Designing a handout and giving a presentation makes tutors much more aware that writing is socially constructed within their own disciplines. The English majors, who often think they know what is expected in a "good" paper, have to articulate what they know, and they often learn that other English majors have somewhat different ideas and methods, requiring extended conversations with the group to arrive at some consensus about the English notebook handouts. And in hearing presentations by tutors in other disciplines, they learn, for example, that not every good paper begins with a thesis statement somewhere in the opening paragraph.

In some ways, then, even if the tutors never used these notebooks in sessions, the process of study-

ANNOUNCEMENTS

WRITING CENTERS IN HIGH SCHOOLS: MULTIPLE MISSIONS (SPONSORED BY THE INTERNATIONAL WRITING CENTERS ASSOCIATION: AN NCTE ASSEMBLY)

ALL DAY WORKSHOP OFFERED ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2007, at the NCTE Conference in New York City (Nov. 15-18). See: <<http://www.ncte.org/profdev/conv/annual>>.

Teachers can register for only this workshop if they choose—without registering for the whole convention.

Workshop fee:

Member - \$125, Nonmember - \$150, Student - \$75

The number of writing centers in secondary schools grows each year and writing centers are more and more seen as viable partners in meeting the learning goals of 21st century secondary schools. Experienced writing center directors at the secondary and university levels will offer an all-day workshop to help teachers apply pedagogical models of writing center work in secondary settings and design future plans. Participants will also examine local concerns with special attention to the multiple literacies, diversities, and abilities served by writing centers. Participants will develop action plans for next steps in writing center work (starting a writing center, developing a peer tutoring program, getting institutional or grant-based support, or creating a cross-institutional collaboration, for example). Facilitators will offer a variety of writing center models, including university/K-12 alliances and school-based centers. In addition, we will share experiences and research results showing the positive impact writing centers can have on faculty, students, and the school as a whole.

ing and presenting them and creating new materials serves as a wonderful training tool. The process helps tutors understand that disciplinary conventions for writing exist; that they are socially constructed within disciplines, and so are employed and interpreted in many diverse ways and change over time; and that one of their roles as a writing tutor can be to help students understand these conventions and how they relate to the student's own voice, aims, and writing process.

In conclusion, the notebooks end up being a collection of handouts that will facilitate a conversation, handouts that do not pretend to be authoritative or self-contained, that, by design, are subjective rather than objective, a part rather than the whole, tentative rather than rule-based, an offer of help and guidance rather than a list of guidelines that must be followed. And the purpose of the tutoring conversation that the handouts facilitate is to help students learn to engage, with a voice and ideas of their own, in the particular conversations of a discipline, much as Bruffee imagined in his seminal article, "Peer Tutoring and the 'Conversation of Mankind.'"

Thus, though we still remain suspicious of requests we receive for handouts, with their accompanying assumption that there must be something we can hand writers that will tell them what they need to know to solve all of their writing problems, we have ended up thinking that the way of using handouts we have described here actually models much of our philosophy of how students develop as writers and of the role in that process played by our writing center. ♦

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(Editor's Note: For this issue of WLN, Kathy Gillis has graciously accepted the task of being a guest editor who invited readers to write about a past article in WLN that they found—and continue to find—useful. Kathy offers us first an introduction to the article that was chosen. It's by Bonnie Devet, who writes about a 1988 article by Wendy Bishop that still speaks to her tutors in meaningful ways. After Kathy's introduction, you'll find Bonnie Devet's article discussing that previous article by Wendy Bishop. If you wish to read Wendy Bishop's original article, please go to WLN's Web site: <<http://writinglabnewsletter.org>>. There, in Vol. 13.3 in the archives, you'll find it.

Many thanks to Kathy Gillis for her work as guest editor for this project, and more thanks and appreciation for all the authors of thirty years worth of articles that have expanded our field's literature, enriched our practice, and energized our work.)

... FROM THE GUEST EDITOR ...

Happy 30th Anniversary to the WLN! Since April of 1977, the WLN has provided members of the writing center community with a forum for discussing topics that have influenced our work on both a practical and theoretical level. From training tutors and navigating upper administration to teaching others how to respond to the needs of various discourse communities, the WLN has helped shape our individual and collective writing center identities. All the while, our community has been observing and participating in the evolution of what it means to communicate effectively in writing. This effort has been no small task given that the definition of “effective” changes and requires students and faculty alike to respond quickly to shifts in communication theories, situations, and technologies.

That the WLN has been able to address so many topics while staying true to Muriel Harris's call—that we keep the newsletter “brief, useful, and informal”—makes this event an accomplishment that deserves to be commemorated and celebrated. Last year, in preparation for the thirtieth anniversary, WLN readers were invited to look back at previous issues, identify one article that has significantly impacted their work, and compose a brief response to that article.

Choosing among so many good articles proved challenging; however, Bonnie Devet's “Opening Lines: Starting the Tutoring Session”: A Synecdochic Article from the Writing Lab Canon,” stood out as it identified an article that speaks as powerfully today as it did nineteen years ago when first published. Devet's response emphasizes the ongoing value of Wendy Bishop's November, 1988 article, in which Bishop shows readers the extent to which the opening lines of a tutorial can determine the outcome of each session. As experienced tutors and directors well know, it's comforting to anticipate what clients might say; however, we also know that the exchange between tutor and client will never be quite what we expect, and certainly nothing we can choreograph.

While this uncertainty may create some initial anxiety, we also know that each opening line, even those unheard of in 1988, holds the opportunity for tutors and clients alike to hone their communication skills while collaboratively enhancing their knowledge about a subject. The opening lines we read in the WLN have provided readers with the same promise, year after year. Congratulations WLN and all who have contributed to its opening lines!

◆ Kathy Gillis
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, TX

TAKE NOTE

IWCA/NCPTW

Oct. 30-Nov. 1, 2008

Las Vegas, NV

“Alternate Routes: New Directions in Writing Center Work”

Our next International Writing Centers Association (IWCA)/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing (NCPTW) conference will be hosted by the Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association (RMWCA), with support from NCWCA and SCWCA, at the beautiful Alexis Park Resort Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. This Web site gives more information <<http://departments.weber.edu/writingcenter/IWCA.htm>>, and registration will be open soon.

This year's theme invites you to explore the roots that have fed writing center growth up to now, the routes through which it has come already, and its possible new directions. How might we productively question received truths of writing center practice? What are best practices for writing centers in collaboration with academic affairs? How do writing centers best serve writers and their communities, academic or otherwise?

We welcome administrators and tutors from all varieties of writing centers to attend and to submit proposals to present at this conference: university, two-year college, secondary school, community, undergraduates, graduate students, and professional tutors.

We look forward to seeing you there!”

Claire Hughes
RMWCA Vice President
office: 801-626-8722
cell: 801-920-7120
clairehughes@weber.edu

“OPENING LINES: STARTING THE TUTORING SESSION”: A SYNECDOCHIC ARTICLE FROM THE WRITING LAB CANON

◆ Bonnie Devet

College of Charleston, Charleston, SC

Like all directors, I'm starved for time, time to read the latest research on writing centers, time to create new training techniques, time to think and to reflect. So, when I discovered that Wendy Bishop's 1988 article "Opening lines: Starting the Tutoring Session" (*Writing Lab Newsletter* 13.3 (1988): 1-4) works just fine, thank you, after many, many semesters of hearty use, I have kept drawing upon it in order to train consultants.

In case, dear fellow directors, you may have missed Bishop's article in your own time-deprived days of running a lab, it discusses the all-so-important first moments when clients enter a lab and begin to interact with tutors. Based on her experiences, Bishop lists some of the opening lines commonly spoken by clients as they first enter a writing lab: "I need my paper proofread" or "I just need someone to look at my paper for five minutes." Then, it also gives examples of what clients often say as they are sitting down with tutors to begin a session: "I just want to pass this class and get out of English" or "It's a terribly boring paper." Besides the instances of client-speak, Bishop's piece offers possible tutorial responses to the opening lines and discusses the effectiveness of these responses by showing how opening lines reflect clients' attitudes towards labs and towards the writing process. Sounds like tame stuff, right?

But herein lies the rub as to why this article has emerged as a must-use in my own training. First, "Opening Lines" covers a topic absolutely vital to a lab's existence. Sensitivity to clients' needs, as any lab director would attest, is never more important than in the students' initial encounters with tutors. Those first moments, like the launching of a ship, can mean a smooth sailing or a Titanic sinking, so tutors must, indeed, be able to read the emotional intent conveyed by even the most innocuous of opening lines.

But there is more as to why I always use Bishop's article. The piece's content lends itself well to staff meetings. At the beginning of a fall term, when consultants are becoming acclimated to the endless variety of clients magically appearing at the lab's door, I am eager to train them in what to expect from the students. So, I write down the article's sample opening lines, one to an index card ("I can't understand why I got a D on this paper") and drop the cards into a box. Then, at a staff meeting, I draw one card at a time from the box and read aloud its opening line, so that the randomness of clients' coming into the lab is replicated as nearly as possible. Next, consultants explain how they would respond to the opening line, comparing what we would say to Bishop's suggested responses. In this way, all consultants—new and returning—chime in with suggestions and personal experiences with clients.

How typical are Bishop's opening lines? The article does, indeed, accurately present what tutors may hear. But, interestingly, as befits the ever-shifting, never-to-be-pigeon-holed nature of writing center work, my consultants always volunteer opening lines *not* mentioned in Bishop's article, such as a client's saying, "Do I have to bring my assignment sheet?" or "Can you write my paper?" or "I'm just not a good writer, so my teacher told me to come here for help" or "I've got a take-home final. I need someone to help me with the exam's essay."

Like all articles, though, it has other blemishes, too. My consultants have been known to disagree with Bishop's suggestions on how to respond to clients' words; very often I hear consultants authoritatively say, "That wouldn't work in our lab." The consultants' reactions are useful, though, leading to staff discussions of what we *would say* to our clients.

Consultants have pointed out another blemish in the article. No context is given for the opening lines. A consultant's initial response depends on whether the client is new to the lab or is a full-fledged, regular customer. Responses also vary whether the client is a freshman unaware of college rules or an upper classman experienced

Do the consultants' reactions mean the piece is flawed? No, in fact, evaluating and disagreeing with the article is useful; it fosters the consultants' critical thinking, a skill much needed in their tutorials. My consultants' reactions show another reason why it is a "good" piece. The consultants' bringing up additional examples shows a universal truth about all articles in the writing lab canon: no article completely ("totally," in teenage parlance) captures the consulting experience. Each session with every client is never conventional, never fixed, never set. In fact, we directors have to admit that our training cannot entirely predict a consultation's movement or direction. Directors can only help tutors practice, like pianists playing scales, so they learn movements and possibilities as well as gain flexibility and adaptability for whatever enters the lab door. Bishop's article fosters that kind of practice and preparation.

Finally, I have chosen Bishop's article as "a favorite article" because it represents Bishop's early career as a writing lab specialist, a role, I am pleased to report, she never forgot when she expanded her interests to the entire field of composition. Bishop urged the rest of the composition world to use lab techniques of one-to-one teaching and workshops, all based on her lab days. This article, then, shows Bishop at the beginning of a fine career, a career which helped the entire field of composition and reminds us that, like Bishop, we should try to extend the excellent values and techniques of writing lab work to other realms.

It must be acknowledged that Bishop's "Opening Lines: Starting the Tutoring Session" is not blemish-proof, for it is not able to capture completely the varied and variable writing lab consultation. But, then, no article could . . . because of the uniqueness of what we do. Just the same, I'm always proud to use it. In a synecdochic fashion, the article represents a part standing for the whole of the writing lab canon: like all *Writing Lab Newsletter* articles, it provokes discussion and contributions from consultants, and it fosters the writing lab spirit of sharing and giving so central to labs. I suspect Wendy Bishop would be pleased. ♦

CALENDAR FOR WRITING CENTER ASSOCIATIONS

August 5-10, 2007: IWCA Summer Institute, in Corvallis, OR

Contact: Lisa Ede at Lisa.Ede@oregonstate.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://cwl.oregonstate.edu/iwcasi2007>>.

Sept. 8, 2007: Northeast Ohio Writing Centers Association, in Burton, OH

Contact: Jay Sloan at jdsloan@kent.edu & Jeanne Smith at jrsmith3@kent.edu. Conference Web site: <http://fpdc.kent.edu/regionalcenter/lc_0607/w_matters/>.

Oct. 19-20, 2007: Michigan Tutoring Association/Michigan Writing Centers Association, in Muskegon, MI

Contact: Conference Web site: <http://www.michigan-tutors.org/mta_conferences.htm>

Oct. 25-27, 2007: Midwest Writing Centers Conference, in Kansas City, MO

Contact: Thomas Ferrel at ferrelt@umkc.edu. Conference Web site: <<http://www.usiouxfalls.edu/mwca/mwca07>>.

Oct. 26-27, 2007: Middle East and North Africa Writing Centers Association, in Doha, Qatar

Contact: Cecelia Hawkins: cecelia.hawkins@qatar.tamu.edu.

Nov. 7-8, 2007: Hellenic American University, in Athens, Greece

Contact: writing@hau.gr. Conference Web site: <<http://writing.hau.gr>>.

Feb. 7-9, 2008: Southeastern Writing Center Association, in Savannah, GA

March 21-22, 2008: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Columbus, OH

Contact: Doug Dangler: dangler.6@osu.edu.

June 19-22, 2008: European Writing Centers Conference, in Freiburg, Germany

Contact: Gerd Braeuer at braeuer@ph-freiburg.de. Conference Web site: <<http://www.ph-freiburg.de/ewca2008/>>.

Oct. 30-Nov.1, 2008: International Writing Centers Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing, in Las Vegas, NV

Contact: Conference Web site: <<http://departments.weber.edu/writingcenter/IWCA.htm>>.

TUTOR'S COLUMN

WRITING CENTER ETHICS: THE PROCESS

◆ Janna Pate (Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX)

Jordan had been sitting at one of the student computers in the writing center for the better part of an hour, working absently on a paper. Mostly, though, she was talking to Lindsey, one of my fellow peer tutors. I assumed the two girls were friends, that more than studying, Jordan was simply waiting for Lindsey to get off work. But at 4 p.m., Lindsey went home for the day while Jordan stayed at the computer. She would write a sentence or two, stop, spin around in her chair, talk to me for a moment, then spin back to face the computer.

“Can you take a look at my paper?” she asked at length, motioning to the screen. It was about 4:30.

“Sure, but why don’t you print it off first?” I responded.

“I don’t have my student ID with me.”

I drummed my fingers once on the desk. “You can print it off on my ID.” I handed her my card. “How long is the paper?” I asked, realizing that I probably should have inquired about this first.

“Five pages.” The sheets came off of the printer. I picked them up.

“You have Dr. Fontenot,” I said, looking at the heading—Honors Literature and Civilizations. It was the Patroklos paper. I had written the same one only a year before. Her paper began, “In Homers novel *The Iliad* by Homer . . .” and from there continued to commit some of the more egregious syntactical errors known to so-called honors writing.

“It’s due by 5:00,” she said.

I looked at the clock. It was now 4:34. I could feel my pupils dilating. In the moments that followed, I worked through Jordan’s paper frantically, marking things in her writing, mumbling through the text and pausing only briefly for comments. A myriad of thoughts were tumbling through my mind. What would Dr. Fontenot think if he knew that I had supposedly helped this student with her paper? Was she really going to turn it in like this? I was embarrassed—for her and for me. There were numerous unaddressed issues on the conceptual level that could and should have been discussed in the paper, but I kept those to myself. Instead, I dished out some garden-variety tips about organization and structure and wished her good luck. She thanked me and returned to the computer, seemingly unconcerned. I took the data entry form to the front desk. It was 4:46, leaving her exactly fourteen minutes to make revisions and e-mail the paper to Dr. Fontenot.

Now, I suppose there is a chance that Jordan actually had time to implement some of the suggestions I made about her paper before her 5:00 deadline, but I doubt it. And it is possible that some of the things I said will benefit her as a writer in the long run, but I doubt that also. It is more likely that she will never again think of that paper or her writing until the grade comes back and another assignment is due. Then, I suppose, she will repeat something of the same process. It was not until about 5:22 that evening (as I was depositing my first check from the writing center to the bank) that I began to think about all of the things that had gone so terribly wrong in Jordan’s tutorial.

Should I have accepted her request for help at such late notice? Should I have given her my ID to print her paper? Should I have rushed the tutorial for her to make the deadline with a little time to revise? Should I have even marked anything on her paper in this situation, or should I have simply made general comments? I have recently considered these questions and others in an attempt to magically resolve situations such as these, which present themselves to us all too often in writing centers. Unfortunately, I do not know that such solutions can be reached in any complete sense.

From our experiences, we build a framework for future actions with the hope that, eventually, we will be able to recognize our moral obligations, enabling us to act more consistently in an ethical manner. We learn how to become better tutors, as Steve Sherwood says, “by doing it, reflecting on our successes and failures (both practical and moral), and trying to do better next time” (4). Many times, extenuating circumstances generate difficulties for ethics, quickly turning clear-cut rules into muddled guidelines that are impossible to rationally uphold. Thus, while I find incantations of ethical relativism largely untenable, I recognize the fact that ethical studies often require us to make what seem like subjective judgments in order to deal with specific cases that fall outside the jurisdiction of the general principles we might establish.

We are, as tutors, often instructed to practice a minimalist approach to the teaching of writing. We are told that it is not our responsibility or even our place to expand the interpretation of a text by someone like Jordan. Yet I feel strongly that students like her need a more involved sort of help. Most peer tutors, I believe, have encountered similar situations. They have, at some moment in their work, felt that they had neither the time nor the authority to effectively enact real change in their students’ writing. In response to such a feeling, I approached Jordan’s paper haphazardly in a fruitless attempt to produce the most good in the least amount of time.

By considering my own investments in Jordan’s assignment, I can now see that I became ineffective as a tutor. I was worried about working through Jordan’s paper as quickly as possible, worried about what my professor would have thought had he known I helped her, worried that she had not included many of the points I remembered making in the same assignment, worried about her reflection on the honors program (and by extension on my own academic credibility), too worried, in short, to fulfill my duties as a tutor.

Naturally, we feel an obligation to assist our fellow students in whatever way possible. After all, we face essentially the same struggles in our own academic lives. We want to help students with their writing, just as we would like to receive aid in our own work. Because we are all students, it is almost impossible not to place ourselves in the situation of the person we are helping. This heightened sympathy response is at once the greatest advantage and the greatest pitfall of having peer tutors. Our desire to relieve our colleagues of their stresses (particularly those related to writing) stems, I believe, from two main factors: the nature of people and the nature of writing.

Human beings, according to Immanuel Kant, have “inner worth,” (235) a “dignity . . . above all price” (236). For this reason, they should always, in all circumstances, be treated as ends in themselves. I believe this notion should be the fundamental premise in writing center ethics. What this means for us as tutors is that we should focus not on the individual paper, on the grade, on the minutia, but on the needs of the student as a whole, namely, as a writer. This is readily accepted, so readily I believe, that we often forget to take the claim seriously. Each person we help should command our full attention. We must get into the activity of serving; we must embrace it. We must think of the student and of nothing else. If we do this, we not only shape better writers—we stand to become better writers and better tutors ourselves. But all of this is gratuitous. We need not intend these wonders. We merely intend to treat the needs of our fellow students. Our task is singular. Our task is simple, at least in theory.

As to the nature of writing, I believe that much of our personal identity is bound up in the way we communicate with one another—our language, our writing. According to Gloria Anzaldúa, writing “feels like I’m carving bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart” (1596). Writing is difficult. It can even be painful. And it is certainly personal. It is also, as Anne Lamott says, a “hat of belonging” (xvi). Writing is communal. It is a place we go in the hopes of encountering ourselves for the first time, a place of outward facing mirrors upheld by inexplicably beloved strangers. As tutors, we are these beloved strangers. Yes, tutoring does require a certain air of detachment, an objective perspective unavailable to the author. Nevertheless, being a writing tutor is about more than the objective facts—statistics, grades, or grammar—it is about a shared experience, a shared identity. Ultimately, tutoring has to be about camaraderie, about trust. When we treat our peers as ultimate ends, we foster that trust. That is the foundation.

Of course, we will continue to make mistakes—that is humanness; that is writing—and we experience it as writers and tutors alike. Becoming a valuable peer tutor is not something that happens all at once; it is not something that can be contained in any particular set

of instructions, no matter how fully developed. Writing (and the teaching of it) is messy, a skill we must refine and cultivate. As my late senior English teacher, Mrs. Joye Sanchez, told me, “It’s all about the process.”

Jordan’s tutorial and indeed most tutorials make it difficult if not impossible to predict the results of our efforts as tutors. In cases like Jordan’s, strict time limitations dramatically magnify the tutor’s already quixotic purpose—to mold better writers. Because we work with students on such a short-term basis, it is imperative that we direct our actions toward the best interest of the student, insofar as we can determine what exactly that means in application. We are not working toward better scores, better reputations. We are working toward better relationships, better identifications. Our goal, what we are trying to reach, is the students themselves. This approach means not allowing ourselves to get bogged down by policy, where what is ethical often becomes not what is right in actuality, but merely that which keeps us out of trouble on the surface. Most importantly, though, we have a moral obligation to continue to act—to instruct, to teach, and to assist in whatever way possible—despite our uncertainties, for ethics is rendered vacuous without action. Then, while we are busy, engrossed in our activity, sharing our experiences, our writing, we begin to progress, and when we finally look up, we may see for the first time just how far we have traversed and what we have become. ♦

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